

Antonio would die for  
his friend – but  
bassanio hardly  
seems worth it essay  
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Antonio is a key character in the Merchant of Venice. He begins the play upset and with all of his friends surrounding him, attempting to lift his spirits and cheer him up. They are questioning his depression:

Salerio: “ Why then you are in love”

Antonio: “ Fie fie!”

Prior to this, Salerio was questioning whether Antonio, feared for his fleet of ships, which brought him all his wealth. Antonio had replied negatively and Salerio drew to his conclusion as above. His friends believe that Antonio is lonely and seeks some sort of life partner. Gratiano, another of Antonio’s friends, comments that Antonio does not look well:

Gratiano: “ You have too much respect upon the world, they lose it that do buy it with much care”

Antonio: “ I hold the world but as the world Gratiano, a stage where everyman must play a part, and mine a sad one”

This has given us an idea of how the play will progress; with Antonio remaining dejected and caring about his friends and companions far too much, with is illustrated in the above quote, using respect in the word care’s place. From this opening scene it is evident that Antonio is unhappy, and money simply cannot buy his happiness or love, if it is this that he so desires.

This is on the contrary to his best friend Bassanio’s believes, for he has requested a loan from Antonio with the intention, that this should make him appear more attractive to the lady whom he wants to marry, Portia. It could

almost be seen in a light whereby Bassanio is throwing out the old and bringing in the new, and to do so he is taking advantage of Antonio, the old, and his money.

Bassanio leaves his audience constantly wondering about his intentions. In his opening scene he has requested a loan of money from his best friend Antonio and it is in order to attract a woman “ richly left”, namely Portia. This leads us to wonder whether Bassanio is in love with money, or his friends and lovers around him. For he is a friend to Antonio, who has utmost trust in him as he shows in this instance:

“ My purse, my person, my extremest means, Lie all unlocked to your occasions.”

And Bassanio needs his best friend’s money, so as to acquire a wife, and all the money that comes with her, being “ richly left”. From what Antonio says to Bassanio above, it is evident that Bassanio is very important to Antonio as he makes him feel less lonely. He wants Bassanio to understand that he cares for him greatly, infact, if Trevor Nunn’s production is anything to go by then this statement is made with definite homosexual implications.

“ And out of doubt you do me now more wrong, in making question of my uttermost, Than if you had made waste of all I have”

When Antonio says this, he is saying that he would not mind if Bassanio did ruin him financially, as long as Bassanio understood that Antonio believed and loved him completely. Ahead of the trial, where Antonio faces death, he says the following:

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" Pray God Bassanio come to see me pay my debt, and then I care not"

This can be seen in a multitude of ways, for example, Antonio may have realised that Bassanio has used him, and taken advantage of his trust, and this statement was intended ironically. Alternatively Antonio genuinely would like to see his best friend, who has made him feel appreciated for the duration of the play. He simply would like to spend his last moments with the man, whom he cares greatly for. On the other hand Antonio would simply like Bassanio to understand and see how much Antonio cares for him, which results in the reader noticing a degree of homosexuality from Antonio towards Bassanio.

Finally, Antonio may want Bassanio to feel guilty for his dis-regard has cost Antonio his life. By making sure Bassanio is there to watch his death he would ensure Bassanio is left with the weight of his death to haunt him for life. This is almost in a way of testing their friendship. Personally I think that Antonio genuinely would like to see his best friend in his final hours, as before the court Antonio has always come across as a very honest man. He is never deceptive and if he has made fault, he admits readily, as shown when he admits to owing Shylock money in court.

Antonio, as is made clear at the beginning of this play, remains very upset, and unlucky throughout this play. However, his good friend, Bassanio is constantly there for him. It seems slightly convenient at times that things go wrong for Antonio and Bassanio is on the scene taking care of his friend. Possibly this is just Bassanio being a good friend to Antonio, like Antonio

would be for Bassanio. However there is also a more ominous view that can be taken in the light of Bassanio's actions towards Antonio.

It could be seen that Bassanio is simply using Antonio for his wealth; he evidently enjoys the high life, and wishes to marry rich for this reason. There is never a mention of Bassanio actually having a job, which would hint that he simply rides on the wings of Antonio. However, when Bassanio takes the money from Antonio, Antonio is perfectly aware of its purpose. This could be looked at, as though Antonio is simply respecting his friend's wishes, and is aiding him as best as he can. Then again it may be viewed with many homosexual connotations.

He is simply releasing his friend, and this is with the hope that his friend will realise how he misses his old partner, and return to Antonio once again. Through out the play it is apparent that Antonio's love for Bassanio outweighs Portia's love for Bassanio and even Bassanio's love for his wife. A final view is that Antonio does love Bassanio greatly, but his love is not with homosexual intent, but fatherly love. A father's love for his son is endless, and this would explain why Antonio is willing to lose all that he owns, and his own life for Bassanio.

Overall, it can be said that Bassanio is not worth all that Antonio gives him. There is an everlasting speculation that Bassanio may simply be taking advantage of Antonio for his wealth. As well as this, Bassanio is only there for his best friend when the chips are down, essentially making sure that his own golden parachute won't be burst by any misfortune that Antonio may suffer.

The final question left is the form of Antonio's love for Bassanio. In Trevor Nunn's production of the play Antonio performs with a hint of homosexuality through out. However otherwise, it must be said that Antonio's love is simply like that of a father for a son. When Bassanio requests a loan from Antonio so that he may pursue Portia, Antonio has no hesitation in accepting his proposal. If Antonio's love had gone any further than that of a father then I believe he would have had a personal problem with loaning this money to Bassanio.