

### Themes in the Merchant of Venice

- **Appearance vs. Reality** – Found in the casket scene, as one is made out of gold, the other of silver, and the last of lead. The least valuable of the three is the one which contains the picture of Portia. Also found in the scene in which Shylock loans money to Antonio. He jokingly tells him that if he does not pay it back, he will receive a pound of Antonio's flesh. He, of course is completely serious, and thus deceives Antonio. This theme reoccurs a lot throughout the play.
- **Friendship and Love** - There are different types of love in the play. The first is sensual love, which the Prince of Morocco felt for Portia. The second is the true love Bassanio has for Portia, which she reciprocates to him. The last is love in friendship, in which Antonio loves Bassanio.
- **Mercy** – While the characters acknowledge that the law is on Shylock's side, they expect him to show mercy towards Antonio. During the trial, he asks Portia why he should be merciful. Portia promotes the Christian view of mercy and tries to explain this to Shylock. She then turns the law against him, and in the end he is the one who is punished. She backs him into a corner in which he must give up everything he owns, as well as being forced to convert. Antonio decides not to seize Shylock's goods, which is an act of mercy.
- **Gender** – The males in the play are the dominant characters, however Portia is the heroine of the play.
- **Hatred** – Shylock displays hatred towards Antonio, and states that he is simply applying the lessons taught to him by his Christian neighbors. He is implying that he is merely applying what years of abuse towards him due to his religion have taught him. It seems Christians of this time period hated Jews, not because of them personally, but due to their creed.