

Shylock and Antonio: the first meeting

Read through the extract from Act 1, Scene 3 below in which Shylock and Antonio meet for the first time in the play.

Whilst reading, remember: this is a play and is supposed to be acted on stage in front of an audience; Shakespeare was a playwright who made decisions about his characters for particular reasons – they are not real people; Shylock and Antonio, we see from their conversation, already know each other; you need to consider the time in which the play was written – things that were acceptable then are not now.

Do not worry if you do not understand every word in the extract: just try to get an idea of the issues of the scene; the mood; and the tone of the relationship between the two men. Choose a different colour for each of the words down the right hand side of the page and then whenever you find a reference to that word or idea in the extract colour in the text in the colour you've chosen. The first one has been done as an example for you. The two blanks are for you to fill in with words of your own if you find some other issues.

Enter Antonio

Bassanio: This is Signior Antonio. Insults

Shylock: *[Aside]* How like a fawning publican he looks!
I hate him for he is a Christian, Friendship

But more for that in low simplicity
He lends out money gratis and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice. Eating / Feeding / Fattening up

If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him. A religious group / religion

He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,
Even there where merchants most do congregate,
On me, my bargains and my well-won thrift, Flesh / Meat

Which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe,
If I forgive him! Questions

Bassanio: Shylock, do you hear? Money / gold / silver

Shylock: I am debating of my present store,
And, by the near guess of my memory,
I cannot instantly raise up the gross Borrowing / lending

Of full three thousand ducats. What of that?
Tubal, a wealthy Hebrew of my tribe,
Will furnish me. But soft! how many months Hatred

Do you desire? Physical abuse

To Antonio

Rest you fair, good signior;

Your worship was the last man in our mouths.

- Antonio:** Shylock, although I neither lend nor borrow
By taking nor by giving of excess,
Yet, to supply the ripe wants of my friend,
I'll break a custom. Is he yet possess'd
How much ye would?
- Shylock:** Ay, ay, three thousand ducats.
- Antonio:** And for three months.
- Shylock:** I had forgot; three months; you told me so.
Well then, your bond; and let me see; but hear you;
Methought you said you neither lend nor borrow
Upon advantage.
- Antonio:** I do never use it.
- Shylock:** When Jacob grazed his uncle Laban's sheep—
This Jacob from our holy Abram was,
As his wise mother wrought in his behalf,
The third possessor; ay, he was the third—
- Antonio:** And what of him? did he take interest?
- Shylock:** No, not take interest, not, as you would say,
Directly interest: mark what Jacob did.
When Laban and himself were compromised
That all the earlings which were streak'd and pied
Should fall as Jacob's hire, the ewes, being rank,
In the end of autumn turned to the rams,
And, when the work of generation was
Between these woolly breeders in the act,
The skilful shepherd peel'd me certain wands,
And, in the doing of the deed of kind,
He stuck them up before the fulsome ewes,
Who then conceiving did in eaning time
Fall parti-colour'd lambs, and those were Jacob's.
This was a way to thrive, and he was blest:
And thrift is blessing, if men steal it not.
- Antonio:** This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for;
A thing not in his power to bring to pass,
But sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven.
Was this inserted to make interest good?
Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?
- Shylock:** I cannot tell; I make it breed as fast:
But note me, signior.

The Merchant of Venice

- Antonio:** Mark you this, Bassanio,
The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
An evil soul producing holy witness
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart:
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!
- Shylock:** Three thousand ducats; 'tis a good round sum.
Three months from twelve; then, let me see; the rate—
- Antonio:** Well, Shylock, shall we be beholding to you?
- Shylock:** Signior Antonio, many a time and oft
In the Rialto you have rated me
About my moneys and my usances:
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,
And all for use of that which is mine own.
Well then, it now appears you need my help:
Go to, then; you come to me, and you say
'shylock, we would have moneys:' you say so;
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur
Over your threshold: moneys is your suit
What should I say to you? Should I not say
'Hath a dog money? is it possible
A cur can lend three thousand ducats?' Or
Shall I bend low and in a bondman's key,
With bated breath and whispering humbleness, Say this;
'Fair sir, you spit on me on Wednesday last;
You spurn'd me such a day; another time
You call'd me dog; and for these courtesies
I'll lend you thus much moneys'?
- Antonio:** I am as like to call thee so again,
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
As to thy friends; for when did friendship take
A breed for barren metal of his friend?
But lend it rather to thine enemy,
Who, if he break, thou mayst with better face
Exact the penalty.

Now look back through the extract and decide which of the ideas have the most highlighting – this is a good indication of the over-riding mood of the scene and the relationship between the men. Now write a paragraph about this first meeting between Shylock and Antonio beginning, 'When the two men meet for the first time in the play the audience can see that ...'