

## ***The Merchant of Venice***

### **Guiding Questions**

- In what ways is this a conventional Shakespearean comedy (what are the conventions of a conventional comedy)?
- In what ways does this challenge and extend the scope of comedy?
- Who is the play about? The merchant, Antonio? Bassanio? Shylock? Portia?
- Weigh the overall portrayal of Shylock and comment on the play's portrayal.
  - Is Shylock a full or flat character?
  - Is there room for interpretation or is the character set?
- Pay careful attention to the caskets (study!). What do the various comments, characters, their choices, the way they come to their conclusions, the responses in the caskets, Portia's overall attitude, etc. add to your understanding of the play and its various themes?
- What role does the affair between Jessica and Lorenzo play in the play?
- Look at the trial and Portia's involvement—judge her performance and her handling of the law.
  - Why, does the play suggest, is she so effective?
  - Would another have been able to do what she did?
- Considering that one of the purposes of the comedy is to break the conventions of society, critique the conventions and then reestablish society remade with a new understanding, is there justice at the end of the trial scene?
- What does the ring gambit teach the characters about themselves, each other, and teach you about society?