

The Merchant of Venice abbreviated

Act 1, Scene 1

Insight

Situation: Gratiano offers his friend Antonio some advice, Antonio having said “In sooth I know not why I am so sad.” Antonio, the wealthy Venetian merchant, is despondent, having learned that his friend Bassanio has a girlfriend.

GRATIANO: You look not well, Signior Antonio.

ANTONIO: I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano, a stage where every man must play part, and mine a sad one.

Gratiano to Antonio.

Let me play the fool. With mirth and laughter
Let old wrinkles come, and let your liver
Rather heat with wine than let your heart cool
With mortifying groans. Why should you, so
With life's hope, sit like your grandsire and duel
With sleep? I tell thee what, Antonio:
There are men who do a willful stillness
Entertain, wishing their stillness doth dress
As wisdom, as who should say, “I am Sir
Oracle, and when I open my lips,
Let no dog bark.” I know these mute men were
Reported wise, but then if a word slips
Off their tongues, they'd be called fools. Tempt not fate,
And fish not with this melancholy bait.

GRATIANO: Come good Lorenzo. Fare you well a while. I'll end my exhortation after dinner.

LORENZO: I must be one of these dumb wise men, for Gratiano never lets me speak.

Gratiano and Lorenzo exit.

BASSANIO: Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice. His reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff; you shall seek all day ere you find them, and when you have them, they are not worth the search.

ANTONIO: Well, tell me now what lady is the same to whom you swore a secret pilgrimage.