**The Merchant of Venice**

**Seoul Shakespeare Company**

**Questions for Students**

*These are meant to facilitate thoughtful discussion and/or writing about this particular production. There is no one right answer to any of these questions.*

What do you think will happen to each of these characters after the play’s endpoint?:

-Shylock

-Antonio

-Portia and Bassanio

-Gratiano and Nerissa

-Lorenzo and Jessica

Do you think Bassanio loves Portia and/or Antonio as much as they love him? Is he using them for his own benefit? If he is, does he realize it, or does he see himself as a sincere, genuine person? Do you see him as a sincere, genuine person, or as someone who manipulates people? Can he be both at the same time?

We are using the quote “Thou shalt have justice more than thou desirest,” as our tagline for the play. Why do you think we chose this quote? Who does it refer to directly in the play? Do other characters receive undesired justice for their behavior?

What might the scales in our poster image represent? Are specific things or people being weighed against each other in this play?

Do you think this play is a comedy or a tragedy?

Do you think Portia’s father’s test is a good one?

Are the caskets just a test of the suitors, or are they a warning to Portia? Would she have chosen the correct casket? When she chooses Bassanio as the man she wants to marry, is he similar to one of the caskets?

In your opinion, did Portia keep her oath to her father, or did she break it? When she sings her song, is that cheating, or is it a way to help Bassanio without breaking her oath? (Or is it in a moral grey area?) Do you think Bassanio would have chosen the correct casket on his own, without the hints in the song? Do you think Bassanio is the right choice of husband for Portia? When Portia helps Bassanio with her song, does she gain her freedom, or doom herself to the wrong husband?

How are Jessica and Portia similar to each other in their choices and relationships to their fathers?

Do you think Shylock would have demanded the pound of flesh from Antonio if Jessica hadn’t run away and stolen from him?

Do you think Tubal intentionally goads Shylock in the direction of revenge toward Antonio?

Which characters in this play intentionally cause harm to others, and which characters unintentionally hurt the people around them?

Almost every character in this play behaves badly in one way or another. In what ways does each character behave poorly, and what is the consequence for them and the people around them?

Several characters in this play take out their anger and frustrations in misdirected ways. Who are they, what are their frustrations, and whom do they take these frustrations out on?

One of the most metaphorically dense speeches in the play is Portia’s sorrowful speech about birds in the last scene, about how our perception of a birdsong’s beauty depends on the environment in which we hear it.

How might this idea relate to how she perceived Bassanio when she saw him in Belmont versus in Venice?

In what way is Portia like an undervalued nightingale singing in the daytime, whose song is drowned out by the cackling of geese?

*The crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark*

*When neither is attended, and I think*

*The nightingale, if she should sing by day*

*When every goose is cackling, would be thought*

*No better a musician than the wren.*

*How many things by season seasoned are*

*To their right praise and true perfection.*

What did you know about this play before seeing this production? Were you surprised by anything in this production? Was it what you expected, or did you have a different idea of what the play was about?

If you Google 베니스의 상인 and click on “Videos,” you can see some short versions of this play for children (some live performances on EBS and some animated versions). What do these depictions of the play focus on? Why might these aspects of the play be popular in Korea? How do you feel about these representations of the play after seeing our production?

Higher level classes could research historical topics such as:

1. The performance history of this play

 a. Famous past productions

 b. Past depictions of Shylock

 c. Why has this play been controversial? Do you agree with either side of the controversy?

2. The history of Venice, Jewish people in Venice, and Jewish people in Elizabethan England and other parts of Europe when this play was written

3. Differences between what we know now about Jewish life in Venice at this time and what Shakespeare knew. (For example, Shakespeare doesn’t seem to have been aware that there was a Jewish ghetto in Venice; characters in this play move freely on the streets at night.)