



THE PLAY HAS THREE PLOTS

LINKED BY THE THEME OF RISK



1. The Bond Plot



“Merry sport.” “I will feed the ancient grudge I bear him.”

1. This plot begins the play and it shows the love that Antonio feels for Bassanio in that he is prepared to sign a blood bond for him. He will risk his life for his friend. The bond is an evil one and is thought up by Shylock as vengeance for his treatment at the hands of Antonio and his friends. While Antonio and Bassanio are prepared to take risks with money, Shylock will take none – he always seeks int

2. Antonio and Bassanio really don't care about money whereas Shylock cares too much about it. Bassanio and Antonio lend money without taking interest.

The Bond plot builds up to a climax as we hear that each of Antonio's argosies are in danger and so his life is in danger. The news of his final disaster crashes in upon the joy between Portia and Bassanio as the caskets plot is ending. But they do not think of celebrating the joys of marriage before Antonio is saved. Shylock is even stooping to a pound of the debtor's flesh if necessary.

3. The bond plot ends with the near destruction of Shylock in a scene of drama and high tension.



2. The Caskets Plot



Must give and hazard all he hath....”

1. The Caskets plot introduces one of the main characters of the play, Portia. She is subject to her dead father’s wishes. A sign of her goodness is her very obedience to her father’s will. This is not meant to portray her as a wimp but to show how noble she is in keeping her promise and taking a risk on her future happiness.

2. The Caskets plot also helps to change our initial view of Bassanio as greedy and obsessed with money and spending. Unlike Morocco and Arragon, who go by appearances and material values, he immediately dismisses Gold and Silver and chooses base lead. He is a worthy husband for Portia and proves her father right in his plan for her. Bassanio is prepared to "hazard" all he has i.e. risk all for the love of Portia.

3. Note that just as the caskets’ plot is ending, the rings plot begins as Portia makes Bassanio promise never to part with the ring she gives him. If he does he will never have her as a wife. The ending of The Caskets plot also frees Portia from Belmont so she can effect major good in saving Antonio’s life.



3. The Rings Plot



“... this ring, which when you part from, lose, or give away, let it presage the ruin of your love.....”

1. Like the bond plot and the casket plot, the ring plot is also about taking a risk. Portia, in disguise, asks Bassanio for the ring. He refuses. After all he is a man of trust, faithful to his new wife. But Antonio feels guilty that the young lawyer who has done so much for both of them should be offended. He persuades Bassanio to part with the ring.

2. Bassanio takes the risk. In a sense he is giving and hazarding all his future happiness. Ironically, it is to Portia that he gives the ring. But what if he had given it as a reward to someone else. Would Portia forgive him? The answer is yes. Remember her speech on Mercy.

3. In this play the act of giving is the best action of all. “Must Give and Hazard all he hath” All the main characters give freely, except Shylock who because of his grasping nature loses all.