

Translation of Act 1, Scene 1

ORIGINAL TEXT

Venice. A street.

Enter ANTONIO, SALARINO, and SALANIO

ANTONIO

In sooth, I know not why I am so sad:
It wearies me; you say it wearies you;
But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn;
And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
That I have much ado to know myself.

SALARINO

Your mind is tossing on the ocean;
There, where your argosies with portly sail,
Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood,
Or, as it were, the pageants of the sea,
Do overpeer the petty traffickers,
That curtsy to them, do them reverence,
As they fly by them with their woven wings.

SALANIO

Believe me, sir, had I such venture forth,
The better part of my affections would
Be with my hopes abroad. I should be still
Plucking the grass, to know where sits the wind,
Peering in maps for ports and piers and roads;
And every object that might make me fear
Misfortune to my ventures, out of doubt
Would make me sad.

SALARINO

My wind cooling my broth
Would blow me to an ague, when I thought
What harm a wind too great at sea might do.
I should not see the sandy hour-glass run,
But I should think of shallows and of flats,
And see my wealthy Andrew dock'd in sand,
Vailing her high-top lower than her ribs
To kiss her burial. Should I go to church
And see the holy edifice of stone,
And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
Which touching but my gentle vessel's side,
Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks,
And, in a word, but even now worth this,
And now worth nothing? Shall I have the thought
To think on this, and shall I lack the thought
That such a thing bechanced would make me sad?

MODERN TRANSLATION

A street in Venice.

Enter ANTONIO, SALARINO, and SALANIO

ANTONIO

Truthfully, I don't know why I am so sad.
It drains me; you say it drains you;
But how I came to feel like this,
The cause or where it's come from,
I don't know;
And such a lack of insight regarding this sadness
Makes me feel as if I don't understand myself.

SALARINO

Your thoughts are focused on the ocean;
There where your ships with grand sails—
Like gentlemen and rich inhabitants of the ocean,
Like a spectacular sea borne procession—
Do look down on the little boats,
Which politely and respectfully move out of the way,
As they fly past, sails billowing.

SALANIO

Believe me, sir, if I had a business like yours,
Most of my attention would
Be focused on my ships at sea. I would be constantly
Throwing grass into the air to find out in which
direction the wind is blowing,
Scrutinising maps for ports, piers and roads;
And anything that caused me to worry
About my ships' safety, would definitely make me sad.

SALARINO

Blowing on my soup to cool it,
Would give me a fever when I thought about
The damage a storm at sea could do.
I wouldn't be able to look at the sand flowing through
an hourglass
Without thinking of shallow waters and sand-bars,
And imagine my valuable ship, Andrew, run aground,
Listing severely
As she's shipwrecked. If I went to church
And looked at the building's stonework,
I would think, straight away, of dangerous rocks,
Which, if they damaged my ship's hull,
Would cause the cargo of spices to be washed away,
My silks to be thrown about in the stormy seas,
And, in one moment having wealth,
And suddenly having nothing? If I think about this
And ponder the possibility, can I deny

But tell not me; I know, Antonio
Is sad to think upon his merchandise.

ANTONIO

Believe me, no: I thank my fortune for it,
My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,
Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate
Upon the fortune of this present year:
Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad.

SALARINO

Why, then you are in love.

ANTONIO

Fie, fie!

SALARINO

Not in love neither? Then let us say you are sad,
Because you are not merry: and 'twere as easy
For you to laugh and leap and say you are merry,
Because you are not sad. Now, by two-headed Janus,
Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time:
Some that will evermore peep through their eyes
And laugh like parrots at a bag-piper,
And other of such vinegar aspect
That they'll not show their teeth in way of smile,
Though Nestor swear the jest be laughable.

Enter BASSANIO, LORENZO, and GRATIANO

SALANIO

Here comes Bassanio, your most noble kinsman,
Gratiano and Lorenzo. Fare ye well:
We leave you now with better company.

SALARINO

I would have stay'd till I had made you merry,
If worthier friends had not prevented me.

ANTONIO

Your worth is very dear in my regard.
I take it, your own business calls on you
And you embrace the occasion to depart.

SALARINO

Good morrow, my good lords.

BASSANIO

Good signiors both, when shall we laugh? say, when?
You grow exceeding strange: must it be so?

SALARINO

We'll make our leisures to attend on yours.

That the possibility of such a disaster would make me
sad?

But don't answer me; I know that Antonio is concerned
for the safety of his cargo.

ANTONIO

Believe me, no; I am very fortunate that,
My business interests are not invested in just one ship,
Nor in one country; nor is my entire wealth
Dependent on doing well financially this year;
So it's not my business which is making me sad.

SALARINO

Well then, you must be in love.

ANTONIO

Oh, for goodness' sake!

SALARINO

You're not in love, either? Well, let's just say you're sad
Because you're not happy; and it's as easy
For you to laugh and dance and say you're happy,
Because you're not sad. Now, by two-headed Janus,
We are all so different:
Some, whose eyes are always crinkled with laughter,
And laugh at things which aren't even funny;
And others, so sour faced
That they never crack a smile
No matter how funny the joke is.

Enter BASSANIO, LORENZO, and GRATIANO

SALANIO

Here comes Bassanio, your most admirable relative,
Gratiano and Lorenzo. Goodbye;
We will leave you with good company.

SALARINO

I would have stayed until I had cheered you up,
If closer friends hadn't turned up.

ANTONIO

I really value your friendship.
I assume that you have to attend to your own business,
And you're taking the opportunity to leave.

SALARINO

Good day, gentlemen.

BASSANIO

Good sirs, when shall we get together for a good laugh?
You say when.
We haven't met up for ages; we mustn't leave it so
long, must we?

SALARINO

We'll fit in with your availability.

Exeunt Salarino and Salanio

LORENZO

My Lord Bassanio, since you have found Antonio,
We two will leave you: but at dinner-time,
I pray you, have in mind where we must meet.

BASSANIO

I will not fail you.

GRATIANO

You look not well, Signior Antonio;
You have too much respect upon the world:
They lose it that do buy it with much care:
Believe me, you are marvellously changed.

ANTONIO

I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano;
A stage where every man must play a part,
And mine a sad one.

GRATIANO

Let me play the fool:
With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come,
And let my liver rather heat with wine
Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.
Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,
Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
Sleep when he wakes and creep into the jaundice
By being peevish? I tell thee what, Antonio—
I love thee, and it is my love that speaks—
There are a sort of men whose visages
Do cream and mantle like a standing pond,
And do a wilful stillness entertain,
With purpose to be dress'd in an opinion
Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit,
As who should say 'I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips let no dog bark!'
O my Antonio, I do know of these
That therefore only are reputed wise
For saying nothing; when, I am very sure,
If they should speak, would almost damn those ears,
Which, hearing them, would call their brothers fools.
I'll tell thee more of this another time:
But fish not, with this melancholy bait,
For this fool gudgeon, this opinion.
Come, good Lorenzo. Fare ye well awhile:
I'll end my exhortation after dinner.

LORENZO

Well, we will leave you then till dinner-time:
I must be one of these same dumb wise men,
For Gratiano never lets me speak.

Exeunt Salarino and Salanio

LORENZO

My Lord Bassanio, since you have Antonio's company,
We two will leave you; but, at dinnertime,
Please don't forget where we're meeting up.

BASSANIO

I won't let you down.

GRATIANO

You don't look happy, Mr Antonio;
You're thinking about worldly things too much;
If you value worldly things too highly, you lose them. I
can see that you're really not yourself.

ANTONIO

To me the world is just the world, Gratiano –
A stage where every man has a part to play,
And my part is a sad one.

GRATIANO

Then I'll play the part of a fool.
With merriment and fun get laughter lines;
And choose to cheer myself up with wine
Rather than to deny myself and be miserable.
Why should a hot-blooded male
Act like his cold, pale grandfather,
The walking dead and gradually become cynical,
Through being discontented? I'm saying this Antonio—
Because I love you and I'm speaking out of love for
you—
There are some men whose faces
Appear, on the surface, like a stagnant pond,
And they choose to keep a straight face,
In order to give the appearance
Of wisdom, seriousness, and great self-importance;
As if to say 'I am the fount of all knowledge
And when I speak, not even a dog should bark'.
Oh, my Antonio, I know that sort
That are only thought to be wise
Because they say nothing; when I am convinced,
That if they spoke, would shock the ears
Of their listeners, who would realise that they are fools.
I'll talk about this with you some other time.
But don't go around with this appearance of sadness
And get this reputation.
Come on, dear Lorenzo. Bye for now;
I'll finish my inspiring speech after dinner.

LORENZO

Well, we'll leave you now until dinner time:
I must be one of those dumb, founts of all knowledge,
Because Gratiano never lets me get a word in
edgeways.

GRATIANO

Well, keep me company but two years more,
Thou shalt not know the sound of thine own tongue.

ANTONIO

Farewell: I'll grow a talker for this gear.

GRATIANO

Thanks, i' faith, for silence is only commendable
In a neat's tongue dried and a maid not vendible.

Exeunt GRATIANO and LORENZO

ANTONIO

Is that any thing now?

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,
That you to-day promised to tell me of?

BASSANIO

'Tis not unknown to you, Antonio,
How much I have disabled mine estate,
By something showing a more swelling port
Than my faint means would grant continuance:
Nor do I now make moan to be abridged
From such a noble rate; but my chief care
Is to come fairly off from the great debts
Wherein my time something too prodigal
Hath left me gaged. To you, Antonio,
I owe the most, in money and in love,
And from your love I have a warranty
To unburden all my plots and purposes
How to get clear of all the debts I owe.

ANTONIO

I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it;
And if it stand, as you yourself still do,
Within the eye of honour, be assured,
My purse, my person, my extremest means,
Lie all unlock'd to your occasions.

BASSANIO

In my school-days, when I had lost one shaft,
I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
The self-same way with more advised watch,

GRATIANO

Well, stick with me for another couple of years,
And you'll forget the sound of your own voice.

ANTONIO

Goodbye; this has motivated me to become talkative.

GRATIANO

Thanks, I hope so, because silence is only appreciated
From dried ox tongue and old maids.

Exeunt GRATIANO and LORENZO

ANTONIO

Is he right?

BASSANIO

Gratiano speaks a load of nonsense,
More than anyone in the whole of Venice.
Trying to understand him is like looking for a needle in
a haystack:
you look all day until you find it and when you do, you
realise that it wasn't worth the effort.

ANTONIO

Well, who is this lady
Whom you're determined to make a secret journey to
visit,
That you promised to tell me about today?

BASSANIO

You know, Antonio,
How much I have mismanaged my finances
By owing more interest
Than I can manage to keep paying;
I'm not giving you a sob story to get out of
This interest rate; but my main concern
Is to get out of the debt
Which my extravagant living,
Has led to, leaving me trapped. To you Antonio,
I owe the most, in money and in love;
And because of your love I have assurance
That I can confide in you all my plans
On how to get out of debt.

ANTONIO

Please, dear Bassanio, tell me about it;
And if it appears to me, as you do,
To have integrity, then rest assured
That my money, myself and all that I have
Are at your disposal.

BASSANIO

When I was a schoolboy, when I lost an arrow,
I would shoot another similar arrow
In the same direction, but I'd watch more carefully
Where it landed; and by shooting both of them

To find the other forth, and by adventuring both
I oft found both: I urge this childhood proof,
Because what follows is pure innocence.
I owe you much, and, like a wilful youth,
That which I owe is lost; but if you please
To shoot another arrow that self way
Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
As I will watch the aim, or to find both
Or bring your latter hazard back again
And thankfully rest debtor for the first.

ANTONIO

You know me well, and herein spend but time
To wind about my love with circumstance;
And out of doubt you do me now more wrong
In making question of my uttermost
Than if you had made waste of all I have:
Then do but say to me what I should do
That in your knowledge may by me be done,
And I am prest unto it: therefore, speak.

BASSANIO

In Belmont is a lady richly left;
And she is fair, and, fairer than that word,
Of wondrous virtues: sometimes from her eyes
I did receive fair speechless messages:
Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued
To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia:
Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
For the four winds blow in from every coast
Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece;
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand,
And many Jasons come in quest of her.
O my Antonio, had I but the means
To hold a rival place with one of them,
I have a mind presages me such thrift,
That I should questionless be fortunate!

ANTONIO

Thou know'st that all my fortunes are at sea;
Neither have I money nor commodity
To raise a present sum: therefore go forth;
Try what my credit can in Venice do:
That shall be rack'd, even to the uttermost,
To furnish thee to Belmont, to fair Portia.
Go, presently inquire, and so will I,
Where money is, and I no question make
To have it of my trust or for my sake.

Exeunt

I often found both of the arrows. I'm giving you this
example from my childhood,
Because what I'm about to tell you, was not done
deliberately.

I owe you a lot; and like a strong willed child,
I lost the money I owe you; but if you're willing
To shoot another arrow the same way
You shot the first one, I will definitely,
As I will be more careful with this investment,
I will pay back your second loan
And will, with great gratitude, pay off the first loan.

ANTONIO

You know me well, and you're wasting your time
Thinking that your circumstances could possibly change
my love for you;
And by doubting that, you let me down more
By being unsure of my uttermost commitment to you
Than if you had bankrupted me.
So just tell me what you want me to do
What you think I can do to help you,
And I am ready to help; so just tell me.

BASSANIO

In Belmont there's a lady who has inherited a lot of
money,
And she is a beauty and more importantly,
Has a wonderful character. Sometimes from the way
she looks at me
I can tell that she likes me.
Her name is Portia—just as rich
As Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia.
The whole world knows that she's a great catch;
Because sailing in, from every direction
Are distinguished suitors, and her beautiful hair
Hangs around her face like a golden fleece,
Which makes her Belmont estate like Colchos' Strand,
And her many suitors, pursuing her, like Jasons.
Oh, my Antonio, if I had enough money
To compete with these suitors,
I have a strong feeling that
I would definitely win her.

ANTONIO

You know that all my finance is tied up in my ships'
cargo at sea;
And I don't have cash or anything to sell
To raise the money you need at the moment; so go
ahead,
See what credit you can raise in my name throughout
Venice;
Even if it's at the greatest cost,
To enable you to go to Belmont, to beautiful Portia.
So you go and so will I, to find out,
Wherever the money is, I will, without question
Guarantee the loan for you.

Exeunt

Analysis of Act 1, Scene 1

Let's remind ourselves of Freytag's Pyramid, which Freytag developed to analyse the structure of a five-act play.

The first part of the play is what Freytag calls the **exposition**, in which we learn about the setting, characters and their relationships. In Act 1, Scene 1, the audience learns that:

- Antonio is a successful Christian merchant, whose wealth is invested in trade. His ships are currently all at sea.
- His friend Bassanio is in love with a rich lady called Portia. Bassanio wants to marry Portia, but first wishes to borrow money to make his lifestyle appropriately lavish in order to impress her.
- Antonio wants to lend Bassanio the money but has no ready cash because it is all invested in his trading-ships. He tells Bassanio that he can borrow money and use Antonio as a guarantor for the debt.

a. Language

From the moment that the characters enter, the audience knows that they are of a high social status. This is because they speak in blank verse. Blank verse is iambic pentameter that does not rhyme. Iambic pentameter has lines of ten syllables, with alternating unstressed and stressed syllables. In your copy of the play, blank verse looks like poetry on the page.

Blank verse is typically used by upper-class characters and the nobility. For example, Antonio's first two lines in the play are:

In sooth, I know not why I am so sad:
It wearies me; you say it wearies you;

Shakespeare often put important words at the end of a line, so here, we have the emphasis on the word 'sad', which sets the tone of the beginning of the play.

The rhythm (meter) of these two lines is a perfect example of five sets of an unstressed and stressed syllable. In fact, the rhythm is so predictable that it is almost monotonous: Shakespeare deliberately does this to mirror Antonio's mood. He's trapped in a depressed mood, and the rhythm of these two lines is tightly controlled, implying that he is finding it a challenge to break free of his sadness.

If Shakespeare were to use perfect iambic pentameter for every line, however, it would become too much, so he sometimes added syllables, took away syllables and changed the rhythm (meter) to focus the attention of the audience on particular words. For example, when he talks about where all his sadness comes from, he says:

I am to learn

As you can see, this is a very short line indeed, and it emphasises Antonio's apparent bewilderment about why he is sad. The lack of beats also mirrors empty spaces and gaps in his knowledge.

Sometimes, lines are shared. This is when a character starts a thought and the second character finishes it. A shared line reveals information about the closeness of the relationship between the speakers—for example, they might be in love, plotting or sharing a secret. For example:

ANTONIO

I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano;
A stage where every man must play a part,
And mine a sad one.

BASSANIO

Let me play the fool:

The line 'And mine a sad one' contains five syllables while Bassanio's response 'Let me play the fool' also contains five syllables. $5 + 5 = 10$, so we have a shared line of iambic pentameter. Shakespeare doesn't use perfect iambic pentameter here. The pace quickens when Bassanio uses two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one (an anapaest) when he says 'let me play'. The change of pace reveals his passion and determination to cheer up Antonio.

At the end of the scene, we see a rhyming couplet (literally, a couple of lines that rhyme) when Antonio says:

Where money is, and I no question **make**
To have it of my trust or for my **sake**.

Remember that in the Elizabethan times, there was no curtain to drop at the end of an act or scene. For this reason, Shakespeare used a rhyming couplet at the end of every scene to signal to the audience that the scene was ending.

The above rhyming couplet loosely translates as *Wherever the money is, I will, without question / Guarantee the loan for you*. We can see that it also sums up the scene and foreshadows what will happen next.

b. Antonio's Wealth: Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing—giving a hint or sign of something that will happen in the future—is a structural technique that Shakespeare uses in this scene. Here, the playwright establishes important information about Antonio's wealth and the dangers of losing it.

Shakespeare introduces this information through the minor characters of Salarino and Salanio, who are also wealthy Christian merchants. The two men take the role of a Greek chorus, actors who describe and comment on the main action of the play.

Commenting on Antonio's depressed state of mind, Salarino says 'Your mind is tossing on the ocean...where your argosies...overpeer the petty traffickers'. (Your thoughts are focused on the ocean...where your ships...look down on the little boats.) Salarino is trying to encourage his friend Antonio to remember that his huge merchant ships are far superior to other sea vessels. Salanio, however, reinforces the vulnerability of trade ships at sea by saying that if he were in Antonio's place, he would fear 'Misfortune'. Through Salarino and Salanio, Shakespeare reveals a vital plot point: Antonio is currently risking his entire wealth on his trading ships. If he loses his ships, he will lose all his wealth.

Shakespeare continues to reinforce this point by reminding the audience how dangerous it can be to have all your wealth in ships. Salarino mentions 'dangerous rocks' that can wreck ships—of course, later in the play, it is believed that Antonio's ships are lost at sea.

In this opening scene, Shakespeare therefore uses the minor characters of Salarino and Salanio to establish Antonio's situation and to foreshadow the loss of the ships—this will lead to Antonio's trial.

c. Bassanio and Portia

In this scene, we meet Bassanio, and we learn about his character and motivations. Antonio asks him for an update on the 'lady' and Bassanio's intended 'pilgrimage' to her. The word 'pilgrimage' is a religious word, referring to a journey to a sacred destination. This language suggests that Bassanio is truly in love. However, Bassanio's reply focuses solely on money:

ORIGINAL TEXT	MODERN TRANSLATION
<p>'Tis not unknown to you, Antonio, How much I have disabled mine estate, By something showing a more swelling port Than my faint means would grant continuance: Nor do I now make moan to be abridged From such a noble rate; but my chief care is to come fairly off from the great debts Wherein my time something too prodigal Hath left me gaged. To you, Antonio, I owe the most, in money and in love, And from your love I have a warranty To unburden all my plots and purposes How to get clear of all the debts I owe.</p>	<p>You know, Antonio, How much I have mismanaged my finances By owing more interest Than I can manage to keep paying; I'm not giving you a sob story to get out of This interest rate; but my main concern is to get out of the debt Which my extravagant living, Has led to, leaving me trapped. To you Antonio, I owe the most, in money and in love; And because of your love I have assurance That I can confide in you all my plans On how to get out of debt.</p>

So, what do we learn about Bassanio?

1. He's in debt and can't afford to pay the interest on his loans.
2. He wants to get out of debt.
3. He admits that his extravagant lifestyle has led to his current situation.
4. He feels trapped in debt.
5. He owes Antonio the most.
6. He has a plan for how to get out of debt.

Instead of answering Antonio's question about Portia (the 'lady') Bassanio focuses solely on money. Indeed, when Antonio asks him to describe Portia, the structure of Bassanio's reply is equally startling:

ORIGINAL TEXT	MODERN TRANSLATION
<p>In Belmont is a lady richly left; And she is fair, and, fairer than that word, Of wondrous virtues: sometimes from her eyes I did receive fair speechless messages: Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia: Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth, For the four winds blow in from every coast Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks Hang on her temples like a golden fleece; Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand, And many Jasons come in quest of her. O my Antonio, had I but the means To hold a rival place with one of them, I have a mind presages me such thrift, That I should questionless be fortunate!</p>	<p>In Belmont there's a lady who has inherited a lot of money, And she is a beauty and more importantly, Has a wonderful character. Sometimes from the way she looks at me I can tell that she likes me. Her name is Portia—just as rich As Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia. The whole world knows that she's a great catch; Because sailing in, from every direction Are distinguished suitors, and her beautiful hair Hangs around her face like a golden fleece, Which makes her Belmont estate like Colchos' Strand, And her many suitors, pursuing her, like Jasons. Oh, my Antonio, if I had enough money</p>

	To compete with these suitors, I have a strong feeling that I would definitely win her.
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Bassanio focuses first on her wealth ('a lady richly left'); secondly, he describes her 'fair' appearance; and finally, he vaguely describes her character ('wondrous virtues'). This does not paint a positive picture of Bassanio, who seems only to be interested in money and sex with a beautiful woman. We learn very little of Portia's personality in this speech.

Even the references to her looks are intertextual references to wealth. He compares her 'sunny locks' of hair to a 'golden fleece'. This simile is a reference to the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts. In this tale, Jason wanted to take his place as king. In order to do so, he had to find a magical ram and take its golden fleece. The reference portrays Portia as the golden fleece and Bassanio on a journey to claim her. At the time, married women were the legal property of their husbands; everything they owned also became their husbands' property. When he is married to Portia, Bassanio will be, like Jason, king of his domain. This 'golden fleece' simile clearly portrays the idea that Portia is an object to be possessed.

d. Antonio and Bassanio

We never discover why Antonio is so sad: even he claims not to know ('I know not why I am so sad'). It could be that he is melancholy by nature. Alternatively, considering his conversation with Salarino and Salanio, perhaps he is sad because he is worried about all his ships being at sea. He denies this ('my merchandise makes me not sad'), but how much can we believe him? Salarino and Salanio are fellow merchants, and Antonio might not want to admit his worries to them despite their efforts to cheer him up. Antonio argues rational business reasons: his business interests are not tied to one ship ('not in one bottom trusted'); nor to one country ('Nor to one place'); and his entire wealth is not dependent on doing well financially this year ('nor is my whole estate / Upon the fortune of this present year'). However, as we will later learn when none of his ships arrive before the repayment of Shylock's loan is due, there is cause to be suspicious of his apparent confidence.

Salarino might be more accurate about the cause of Antonio's sadness when he suggests that Antonio is 'in love'. Antonio strenuously denies this, but it is worth exploring further.

There is a theory to suggest that Antonio is in love with Bassanio; of course, he is unable to admit this. A contemporary English audience would know that male homosexuality was punishable by death. Over in Venice, male homosexuality was punished by the Catholic Church, as same-sex relations were regarded as a sin. In 15th-century Venice, the punishment was to be burnt at the stake.

So, if Antonio is sad because he loves Bassanio, he's not going to admit it, is he?

Let's examine some possible evidence for Antonio being in love with Bassanio. Firstly, melancholy was traditionally regarded as a symptom of lovesickness in Shakespeare's time. In Shakespeare's day, physician Timothy Bright's 'Treatise of Melancholie' (1586) stated that 'sadde and fearful' humour, was a common illness in Elizabethan England—so common, in fact, that it verged on being fashionable. Although melancholy linked to sadness, Bright claimed that it was also associated with refinement and male intellect. Shakespeare for example, parodies (makes fun of) the languishing lover Romeo at the beginning of 'Romeo and Juliet'.

So, at the beginning of 'The Merchant of Venice', we have a fashionably melancholic Antonio but, if he is in love, no woman is mentioned. We see, however, a close relationship with Bassanio in Act 1, Scene 1 when Antonio says:

My purse, my person, my extremest means,
Lie all unlock'd to your occasions.

This is an ambiguous offer. Literally, he is saying *my money, myself and all that I have / Are at your disposal*. This could be interpreted as sexual innuendo because it could also mean that his body ('my person') is available for Bassanio's pleasure.

Does Bassanio feel the same? He tells Antonio:

To you, Antonio,
I owe the most, in money **and in love**,
And **from your love** I have a warranty
To unburden all my plots

It might therefore appear that Antonio's love is reciprocated. Also, a little later in the scene, Bassanio exclaims 'O my Antonio'—the possessive 'my' might reveal more than friendship.

However, in Elizabethan times, there were often shows of affection such as confessions of love between friends of the same sex. At the time, this was not necessarily an indication of a homoerotic relationship. So, Antonio and Bassanio, as two upper-class men, might simply be friends expressing their love in a socially acceptable context of the time.

Perhaps it's worth exploring their relationship more by asking the question, *Why?* Why is Antonio prepared to risk his life to help Bassanio? A reminder that Antonio is a good man of business: he has more than one ship in more than one country, so he is spreading his risks. He has already lent money to Bassanio, who has not paid him back. Why would he do this again and put himself in debt by agreeing to guarantee the loan? Remember that there is no financial profit in lending money to Bassanio: only Jews were allowed to charge interest on loans. If Antonio is in love with Bassanio, this would explain his willingness to help. Not only does Antonio put himself into debt, but he also later risks his life when he agrees to the pound of flesh, to help Bassanio. This is an act of love.

Let's examine Bassanio's behaviour. We have already looked at his protestations of love for Antonio. Bassanio, when introducing the idea of marriage, also makes it very clear that the reason he wants to marry 'richly left' Portia is to pay off his debts: it's a business transaction, nothing to do with love. Remember that Bassanio, upon his own admission, is heavily in debt and has squandered his own fortune to fund his extravagant lifestyle. Moreover, Bassanio hasn't repaid Antonio's first loan or the loans of his other creditors. In short, Bassanio is a bad business investment. It therefore seems likely that Antonio's love for Bassanio is the only credible reason for putting himself into debt and risking his own life to lend money.

Finally, let's revisit the source material for the play, Fiorentino's 'Il Pecorone'. In the novella, the lady's maid marries Ansaldo at the end of the play. Shakespeare could have married Nerissa to Antonio instead of Gratiano—marrying Antonio would fit the conventions of the genre. So why did Shakespeare change the end of Fiorentino's novella? Why is Antonio still single?

Perhaps this is Shakespeare's way of developing consistency with Antonio's character by showing the audience that the merchant of Venice is not sexually attracted to women.