Please think about and choose ONE of the following as your final analytic essay of the year.

This play is often called a problem play because it does not neatly fit the characteristics of either a comedy or a tragedy. Review your notes on Shakespearean Comedy and Tragedy. British actor Peter Ustinov said once in an interview, “A comedy is just a tragedy gone wrong, and a tragedy is just a comedy gone wrong.” Using evidence and quotes from the play, answer the question: Is *The Merchant of Venice* a comedy or a tragedy?

Throughout the play, Christians de-personalize and alienate Shylock by refusing to use his given name. Instead, they call him “the Jew,” “the villain Jew,” “this currish Jew,” “impenetrable cur,” “harsh Jew,” “infidel,” “cruel devil,” and the devil “in the likeness of the Jew.” To the Christian characters, Shylock is the embodiment of the devil. Is Shylock a villain or a victim? Use support from the play as evidence.

Consider the various types of love featured in *The Merchant of Venice*: friendship, love between father and child, romantic love, as well as love of possessions/money. Which type of love is shown to be the strongest in the play? What about the tensions in some of the relationships? What does Shakespeare tell us about the nature of love? Use support/quotes from the play as evidence.

Using an online concordance, such as “Shakespeare Searched,” research an image or repeated word (money/ducat/gold/fortune?) To see how it is used in the play. Write an essay explaining how that one word or image, both literally and figuratively, is used. Draw conclusions about the role of that image in the world of the play. Use evidence and quotes from the play to support thesis.

Trevor Nunn, director of the Masterpiece Theatre production of *The Merchant of Venice*, said, “My intention is to show that the play is as much anti-Christian as it is anti-Semitic. It is a masterpiece about human behavior in extremis.” To what extent do you agree? Use support from the text to support your thesis.

*Is The Merchant of Venice* an anti-Semitic play? This question has plagued this play since its opening in 1596. Was this play written to fuel the fire of hatred that was engulfing the Jews of Shakespeare’s day, thereby casting the Jew as the villain who gets what he deserved because of his villainous actions? Or, is he a victim for whom the audience feels sympathy? Is this an anti-Semitic play that promotes hatred toward Jews? Or, does the text offer a different message? If so, what is that message?