***Act III Scene V***

***Analysis:***

***Synopsis:***

Launcelot expresses his concern to Jessica that she is going to hell for the sins of her father. Launcelot tells her that she may only be saved by the small possibility that her father is not her real father. However, Jessica tells him that she will be saved, because her husband has made her a Christian. Launcelot tells her that all these conversions will do nothing but raise the price of bacon. Lorenzo scolds Launcelot for getting Portia's Moor servant pregnant. Launcelot makes a number of jokes and leaves to prepare the table for dinner. Lorenzo asks Jessica what she thinks of Portia, and she tells him that she thinks Portia's virtues cannot be matched by any other woman in the world. Lorenzo jokes that he hopes he can be as good a husband to her as Portia is a wife to Bassanio.

This scene does little to advance the plot of the play, yet it does allow for some comic relief in a serious part of the play. The audience gets some insight into Jessica's views of the people around her. Jessica understands what is considered virtuous in the society she is entering and strives for it, even though she was dismissed by many of those around her.

***Summary:***

* At Portia's garden in Belmont, Lancelot (Shylock's deserting clown) talks with Jessica (Shylock's deserting daughter). Always a riot, Lancelot says that Jessica is damned to hell because she's the daughter of a Jew. There's hope for her in the possibility that she's not actually her father's daughter, but Jessica points out that if that's true, she'd be punished for her mother's sins instead.
* Lancelot agrees that Jessica is damned either way. But she points out that she'll be saved by her husband, who will make her Christian when he marries her. The trouble with this, says Lancelot, is that there are enough Christians already, and more Christians will mean more pork-eaters, which will raise the price of pork, regardless of who has come around to a different view of God.
* Lorenzo then enters and fakes concern over Lancelot getting cozy with Jessica, his wife. He jokes that Lancelot has already gotten too comfortable with a Moorish woman, who now carries the clown's child. Lancelot, unfazed, says the girl is so promiscuous that anybody could be the father.
* Then we get lots of quipping about Lancelot calling the house to prepare dinner, and some talk about how the clown never speaks straight. Lancelot leaves and Lorenzo asks Jessica what she thinks of Portia.
* Jessica is full of praise for the girl, whom she claims has no equal on earth. Lorenzo is a little taken aback by Jessica's warm words and teases that Jessica has in him a husband as worthy as Portia is a wife. They have a crude back-and-forth about Jessica's willingness to praise Lorenzo before dinner, as she won't be able to stomach praising him after. Finally they exit together to go eat dinner.

***Critical Study:***

Quoting the adage that the sins of the father shall be delivered upon the children, Launcelot says he fears for Jessica’s soul. When Jessica claims that she will be saved by her marriage to Lorenzo, Launcelot complains that the conversion of the Jews, who do not eat pork, will have disastrous consequences on the price of bacon. Lorenzo enters and chastises Launcelot for impregnating a Moorish servant. Launcelot delivers a dazzling series of puns in reply and departs to prepare for dinner. When Lorenzo asks Jessica what she thinks of Portia, she responds that the woman is without match, nearly perfect in all respects. Lorenzo jokes that he is as good a spouse as Portia, and leads them off to dinner.

***Critical Analysis:***

Once the play reaches Act III, scene iii, it is difficult to sympathize with Shylock. Whatever humiliations he has suffered at Antonio’s hands are repaid when he sees the Christian merchant in shackles. Antonio may have treated the moneylender badly, but Shylock’s pursuit of the pound of flesh is an exercise in naked cruelty. In this scene, Shylock’s narrowly focused rhetoric becomes monomaniacal in its obsession with the bond. “I’ll have my bond. Speak not against my bond,” (III.iii.4) he insists, and denies attempts at reason when he says, “I’ll have no speaking. I will have my bond” (III.iii.17). When Antonio tells Solanio that Shylock is getting revenge for his practice of lending money without interest, he seems to miss the bigger picture. Shylock’s mind has been warped into obsession not by Antonio alone, but by the persecutions visited on him by all of Christian Venice. He has taken Antonio as the embodiment of all his persecutors so that, in his pound of flesh, he can avenge himself against everyone.

The institution of law comes to the forefront of the play in these scenes, and we may be tempted to view the law as a sort of necessary evil, a dogmatic set of rules that can be forced to serve the most absurd requests. In the thirty-six lines that make up Act III, scene iii, Shylock alludes to revenge in only the vaguest of terms, but repeats the word “bond” no less than six times. He also frequently invokes the concept of justice. Law is cast as the very backbone of the Venetian economy, as Antonio expresses when he makes the grim statement that “[t]he duke cannot deny the course of law. . . . / . . . / Since that the trade and profit of the city / Consisteth of all nations” (III.iii.26–31). Trade is the city’s lifeblood, and an integral part of trade is ensuring that merchants of all religions and nationalities are extended the same protections as full-blooded Venetian citizens. In principle, the duke’s inability to bend the law is sound, as the law upholds the economy that has allowed Antonio and his friends to thrive. However, Shylock’s furious rants about justice and his bond make it seem as if his very law-abiding nature has perverted a bastion of Christian uprightness.

Shylock remains in control of events in Venice, but Portia, his antagonist, is now moving against him. Her cross-dressing is a device typical of women in Shakespeare’s comedies. Indeed, the play has already shown Jessica dressed as a boy in her escape from Shylock’s house. Dressing as a man is necessary since Portia is about to play a man’s part, appearing as member of a male profession. The demands placed upon her by her father’s will are gone, and she feels free to act and to prove herself more intelligent and capable than the men around her.

The conversation between Jessica and Launcelot in Act III, scene v, does little to advance the plot. It acts as comic relief and conveys the impression of time passing while the various characters converge on the Venetian courtroom. Jessica’s subsequent description of Portia’s perfection to her husband is odd, given how little attention Portia paid to her, but Jessica recognizes that Portia is the center of the social world that she hopes to join.

***Significance:***

In a garden at Belmont, the jester Launcelot is teasing Jessica that he fears that she is damned because she is a Jew ("the sins of the father are to be laid on the children"), but she reminds Launcelot that her husband Lorenzo has made her a Christian by marrying her. "The more to blame he," Launcelot jokes: "This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs."

Lorenzo joins them then and pretends jealousy on finding his wife alone with Launcelot. He orders Launcelot to go inside and "bid them prepare for dinner." He suddenly turns to Jessica then and asks her, "How dost thou like the Lord Bassanio's wife?" Jessica praises Portia as being without equal on earth. Lorenzo jokingly responds, "Even such a husband / Hast thou of me as she is for a wife." Jessica is ready to comment to his teasing when he urges her to save her comments "for table-talk." So with loving jests, they go in to dinner.

As in the previous scene, the light comic and romantic relief in this scene is dramatically in order, since it will be immediately followed by the courtroom scene, which is the longest scene in the play and certainly the most emotional scene in the play.

Much of this scene focuses on Launcelot Gobbo's clowning and punning. For example, Launcelot uses "bastard" in a sense that can be both figurative and literal; in addition, he plays elaborately on the two senses of the word "cover" — laying a table and putting on one's hat.

The tender, affectionate exchange between Lorenzo and Jessica at the end of the scene serves to establish their new happiness. They will reappear in Act V in the same roles. In both scenes, we see a Jessica who has changed and blossomed in the environment of Belmont, and this has its significance. Portia and Nerissa are, for example, "to the manner born," but Jessica is an outsider. She was reared by a miser and a man who keenly felt his alienation in the Venetian community. Jessica's character and personality were molded by these attitudes. Now we see her maturing, and her new happiness suggests that Belmont (symbolically, a beautiful mountain) is not so much a place as a state of mind. Jessica's journey from Shylock's dour household to the sunlight and freedom of Belmont is, in its way, a symbolic journey — one from hatred to love and, especially in Jessica's case, a journey from sterility to fruition.

***Notes:***

Launcelot and [Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica) talk in the gardens at Belmont, and Launcelot tells Jessica she should hope [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock) isn't really her father, lest she someday suffer for his sins. Jessica counters by saying if her mother cheated on Shylock she would have to suffer for her mother's sins. Launcelot agrees Jessica is doomed either way, and Jessica declares "I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian." Lorenzo appears and teases Launcelot for trying to steal his wife, and Jessica tells him why Launcelot has declared them both unfit for heaven: Jessica was born a Jew, and Lorenzo has raised the price of pork by converting Jessica. Lorenzo then tells Launcelot he has impregnated a Moor, and Launcelot jokes "if she be less than an honest woman, she is indeed more than I took her for." Lorenzo sends Launcelot to ask the household to prepare for dinner. Then he and Jessica share a quiet moment in which they speak of [Bassanio](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Bassanio)'s good fortune at finding a wife as good as [Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia). Lorenzo talks of his own good fortune.

Even though Launcelot is joking with [Jessica](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Jessica), his prejudice against Jews is on full display. His jokes about Jessica still being unworthy of heaven because of her father and her birth as a Jew raise questions about how fully she will be accepted into Christian society. Lorenzo clearly loves his wife unreservedly, and [Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia)'s household has made her welcome. However, Launcelot's joke gives voice to the possibility of small elements of prejudice lingering in Jessica's future interactions. Despite the hospitality she has been shown, she will never really be one of *them* in the same way as if she had been born into their society.

Jessica's rejection of her father is understandable given his treatment of her in [Act 2, Scene 5](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/act-2-scene-5-summary/) and her subsequent isolation. This exchange provides hints of Jessica's relationship with her mother. [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock)'s lament in [Act 3, Scene 1](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/act-3-scene-1-summary/) when he hears Jessica traded for a monkey the ring his wife gave him before they married indicates Jessica's mother is dead. The absence of a monkey in Belmont indicates Jessica did not take part in such an exchange, but her attitude about her dead mother *is* disturbingly lighthearted. It is possible she does not understand the sentimental value of the ring she took, and she may have traded it for *something*. She jokes with Launcelot about her mother's loyalty to her father, which implies Jessica's mother is an abstract concept to her. It is possible, based on this scene, that Jessica never knew her mother, which also explains why Shylock has been so overprotective of his daughter. She has lacked a second parent to reign in her father's strict influence and to make her feel comfortable in her own home.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

At Belmont, [Launcelot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) quotes the old saying that the sins of fathers are visited on their children, and teases that he is worried that [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) is damned unless it turns out that [Shylock](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/shylock) is not actually her father. Jessica retorts that her marriage to Lorenzo will save her. [Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) enters, and scolds Launcelot for having gotten a Moorish servant pregnant. Launcelot responds with a series of puns, then exits to prepare dinner.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Launcelot again brings up the question of Jewishness, and implies that being a Jew is a matter of "blood," and can't be escaped. Jessica counters that Jewishness is a matter of "manners," and says she can be "saved" from Jewishness by marriage and conversion.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Lorenzo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) asks [Jessica](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) what she thinks of [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia). Jessica replies that she finds Portia more perfect than she can express, and compares her to a god or angel. In reply, Lorenzo jokes that he is just as good a husband as Portia is a wife. Then they head to dinner.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The Venetian Christians compare Jews to animals and the devil. Jessica, a former Jew, compares the Christian Portia to an angel or god. Given this exchange, it seems hard to defend the play from the charge that it displays some anti-Semitism of its own.