***The Merchant of Venice***

***Act 2 Scene 1***

***Summary and Analysis:***

***Summary:***

Back in Belmont, the Moroccan prince arrives, a dark skinned man dressed in white and followed by four servants. The prince asks Portia not to judge his skin color, but to look more at his beauty. Portia explains that she does not believe beauty is the way to her heart, but then laments that her husband is not hers to choose, either.

The prince decides to take on the challenge of the caskets, despite Portia's warnings that he will not be able to discuss marriage with any other woman if he chooses the wrong box.

***Analysis:***

In this scene, we begin to understand more why men have not been willing so far to venture a guess toward the caskets, as they can never marry if they choose incorrectly. Portia's father has placed a great emphasis on character by laying out that stipulation. It is the first step toward determining who is worthy to marry his beloved daughter.

The audience also sees the differences in the types of men who come to choose versus Portia's character. The Moroccan prince believes her reserved manner is due to his dark skin color making him less attractive to her. While in fact, it is his boasting and ego that drives her away from him. Portia's desire to look beyond the outside appearance of her suitors says a great deal about her upstanding character.

***Detailed Summary:***

There is a flourish of trumpets, and the Prince of Morocco enters. Portia, along with her confidante, Nerissa, and several ladies-in-waiting are present, and the prince, knowing that he is only one of many suitors who seek Portia's hand in marriage, begins his courtship straightforwardly — that is, he initiates the subject of the color of his skin. Being from Morocco, he comes "in the shadowed livery of the burnished sun." He has a very dark complexion, and he begs Portia to "mislike [him] not for [his] complexion." Despite the color of his skin, however, his blood is as red as any of Portia's other suitors, and he is as brave as any of them.

Portia tells him that he is "as fair" as any of the men who have come to seek her "affection." Furthermore, were she not bound by the terms of her father's will, he would stand as good a chance as any other suitor. According to her father's will, however, if the prince wishes to try for her hand, he must take his chances like all the others. If he chooses wrongly, he must remain a bachelor forever; he is "never to speak to lady afterward / In way of marriage."

The prince is not easily deterred; he is ready for the test. All in good time, says Portia; first, they shall have dinner together. Then his "hazard shall be made." There is a flourish of trumpets, and the two exit.

***Detailed Analysis:***

In contrast to the businesslike mood of Act I, this act begins with much visual and verbal pomp. Visually, the Prince of Morocco and Portia enter from opposite sides of the stage to a "flourish of cornets," each followed by a train of attendants. Morocco then opens the dialogue with a proud reference to his dark skin, and the rich, regular, sonorous poetry which Shakespeare gives him to speak suggests that the prince possesses a large, imposing physical presence. Because we have already listened to Portia blithely dismiss the other suitors who have already appeared at Belmont so far, here, her greeting has both courtesy and respect — "Yourself, renowned Prince, then stood as fair / As any comer I have looked on yet / For my affection."

Since there are three caskets for Portia's suitors to choose from, there will therefore be three occasions in which suitors will attempt the test of the caskets to win Portia in marriage. Thus the three contestants are subtly contrasted. The first, Morocco, is intensely physical; he is a warrior. He speaks of his red blood, the power of his scimitar, and of the courage that can "mock the lion when 'a roars for prey." Morocco is a straightforward soldier-prince; he is rightly self-assured and is contrasted to the Prince of Arragon (in Scene 9 of this act), whose excessive pride is concerned with lineage and position. Both of these suitors will fail, and although the audience knows, or suspects this (since the play is a romantic comedy, it must end happily, with Bassanio making the right choice and winning Portia), this knowledge does not interfere with the thrill of dramatic anticipation as Morocco, first, and, later, Arragon make their choices. Rationally, we may know how a story ends, but this does not prevent our imaginative excitement in watching the unfolding of events.

***Critical Study:***

The Prince of Morocco greets [Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Portia) upon his arrival at Belmont, saying "Mislike me not for my complexion" and telling her his blood is the same as the most fair-skinned man. He goes on to tell her how much the women of his own land desire him, but Portia assures him that she is not driven to choose a suitor by his appearance. She is not driven to choose her own husband at all because of her father's "lottery," so the Prince of Morocco has as much chance as any other man who seeks her hand. The prince agrees to the terms of the challenge, even though he must swear "never to speak to lady afterward in way of marriage" if he loses. They agree he will undertake the challenge after dinner. The Prince of Morocco's choice of introductory words hints at a fear of rejection based on his obvious difference from [Portia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/" \l "Portia)and his separation from European society. He talks of his people living close to the sun, so his skin is dark. Hailing from Morocco, a Muslim country, he is probably not a Christian, so he has been subject to prejudice in his interactions with European society just as [Shylock](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/character-analysis/#Shylock) has. His boasts about his desirability in his home country make him appear confident on the surface, but it is the kind of confidence that seeks to compensate for insecurity. When the audience sees Portia in Act 1, she laments her father's arrangement, but she now uses the same arrangement to create distance between herself and the Prince of Morocco, which indicates she does in fact "mislike" his complexion—a sentiment she will confirm when he loses the challenge in [Act 2, Scene 7](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Merchant-of-Venice/act-2-scene-7-summary/).

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

***Summary Part 1:***

At Belmont, the [Prince of Morocco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) has arrived to seek [Portia's](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) hand in marriage. He begs her not to dislike him just because of his dark skin, and points out that his blood is just as red as that of the "fairest" European. He adds that he has proven himself brave and won the love of many of the most desirable virgins in his native country, and would only ever wish to change his appearance in order to please Portia.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Anticipating the prejudices that Portia and the other Christian Venetians hold, Morocco's talk of skin color and red blood reduces human beings to meat, recalling the pound of flesh Shylock wants from Antonio. At the same time, Morocco's words establish a basis for equality among all people.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) reminds [Morocco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) that what she wants is irrelevant. The riddle of the caskets, devised by her father, has deprived her of the right to choose her husband. Besides, she adds, if she did have any say in things, she would hold Morocco in just as high esteem as any other suitor who has come for her thus far.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Based on Portia's mocking of all of Nerissa's other suitors in 1.2, her seeming compliment to Morocco is actually a sarcastic quip. Yet Morocco can't know this, showing that interpretation is a matter of context.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Morocco](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters) rejoices, and asks [Portia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-merchant-of-venice/characters/portia) to bring him to the caskets so he might try his fortune. Portia reminds him that he must abide by even the harshest rule governing the riddle: if he chooses incorrectly, he must "never speak to lady afterward/ in way of marriage" (2.2.41-2). Morocco assures her that he understands and will obey this harsh rule. The two proceed to dinner.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Portia's explanation of the terms of her father's riddle shows the strict legal structure of the riddle. By cutting off the scene here, before Morocco chooses a casket, Shakespeare makes Morocco's eventual reading and interpretation of the riddle much more dramatic and suspenseful. Morocco, unlike the other suitors, proves his valiance in his willingness to risk so much for Portia's love.

***Important Quotations:***

***Quotation1:***

PORTIA  
You must take your chance,  
And either not attempt to choose at all  
Or swear before you choose, if you choose wrong  
Never to speak to lady afterward  
In way of marriage. Therefore be advised. (2.1.40-44)

***Explanation 1:***

It seems rather arbitrary and harsh that the condition to try for Portia's hand is that losers can never seek marriage... ever again. Still, it holds up marriage as a really serious affair and helps separate the men from the boys in terms of who's really willing to sacrifice for the chance to marry Portia.

***Quotation 2:***

PRINCE OF MOROCCO  
Mislike me not for my complexion,  
The shadowed livery of the burnished sun,  
To whom I am a neighbor, and near bred.  
Bring me the fairest creature northward born,  
Where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles,  
And let us make incision for your love  
To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.  
I tell thee, lady, this aspect of mine  
Hath fear'd the valiant; by my love, I swear  
The best regarded virgins of our clime  
Have loved it too. I would not change this hue  
Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen. (2.1.1-12)

***Explanation 2:***

It's interesting that an African Prince should have to apologize for his complexion to a woman who is lower in stature than he is. Even though Portia is disdainful of the prince, his graciousness is impressive. At the same time, however, the prince's speech stands out as being more formal and eloquent than the speech of other characters in the play, which makes him even more of an outsider.

In fact, this reminds us of how Shylock's repetitious style of speech also differentiates him from the Christian characters.