

PORTIONS FOR GRADE X-MERCHANT OF VENICE

ACT 3, Sc-3 to Act 5

1. Compare and contrast Portia and Jessica in The Merchant of Venice.

Jessica was not a good daughter. She broke her father's trust. She ran with a Christian (Lorenzo) knowing that his father, Shylock hated the Christians. She also stole her father's ducats and jewellery. On the contrary, Portia is a true daughter. Even though her father is dead, she does not break her father's will. She is ready to sacrifice her life by marrying to any person who chooses the right casket. She loved Bassanio but yet she did not tell Bassanio which was the right casket although she gave him some hints.

2. Discuss the conflict between justice and mercy in the trial scene.

The conflict is only partially resolved by the clever judgement of Portia. She allows Shylock to get his bond, his justice. But there is a catch. As there is only the mention of "a pound of flesh" in the bond, Portia allows him to cut one pound of flesh from Antonio's body without shedding a drop of blood. So Shylock cannot proceed further and gets bound by the complications of laws. While most of the audience in Shakespeare's time preferred to find themselves at Antonio's side and would like to think the conflict to be resolved, modern critics sympathize with Shylock and sees him more as a victim than a villain. They think he does not deserve the penalty he finally receives. But yes, Shylock had better accepted twice or thrice the money which Bassanio wished to pay him. Yet, it does not justify the non-Christian attitude of Antonio and his race to a Jew. That is why the play is now called anti-Semitic.

3. Who was Cato? Why is he mentioned in the play?

Cato is the father of Brutus' wife Portia. He is mentioned here to tell that Bassanio's Portia is no less beautiful than her namesake Brutus's wife Portia.

4. Why does Launcelot mention Ash Wednesday and Black Monday?

Launcelot's mention of Ash Wednesday and Black Monday indicates his little knowledge in the religious spheres. In his speech he said that both the occasions fell on the same time, which in reality is not true at all.

5. What is Portia's take on mercy?

Portia wants mercy from Shylock in her famous speech of mercy. She talks about the virtue of mercy in a 22 lines long quote. The most important part is the first four lines:

'The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:'

Here Portia, in disguise as a young lawyer Balthazar, earnestly requests Shylock to show his mercy for Antonio and forgive him, as mercy is good for both who shows it and who receives it. Mercy is indeed a heavenly quality of a man, as she opines. According to her, it is the strongest and the most powerful people in society who show mercy for others.

6. Why did Bassanio say, "If I could add a lie unto a fault, I would deny it"?

Bassanio says the above extract when Portia asks him whether he has given away the ring given by her to anyone. Here Bassanio means to say that there is no gain by stating a lie. That won't mend a fault. A lie may lead to another lie and finally an unhappy life. That is why he chooses to say the truth and confesses his guilt: "but you see my finger / Hath not the ring upon it. It is gone."

7. Compare and contrast Antonio's melancholy to that of Portia.

In scene 1 Antonio, the central character of the play, "The Merchant of Venice" is shown in a melancholic mood. Antonio himself reveals to his friends-Salanio and Salarino that he does not really know the reason of his sadness he also shares his state of confusion to them saying this feeling of sorrow is making him such a slow and dumb person that he feels like he has a lot more to know about himself in such a condition. somewhere deep down he does know that this sadness is due to the parting from his best friend, Bassanio. who was planning on trip to Belmont to woo his lady love Portia who was a richly left lady. whereas Portia expresses her sadness in form of weariness. she says she was tired and weary of this big world whereas her real reason for this feeling and fear was the casket test laid down by her dead father as a will to marry Portia and also her thoughts on this will. she thinks that her rights to choose a perfect life partner was taken away by her father. there was a fear that she would have to live her life with a man who she did not love. little did she know that her father would never make any decisions which would bring misery in her life when but Nerrisa, Portia's lady in waiting explained her father's decision to Portia, the wise lady did understand her father's strategy to choose a right partner to marry her off even in his absence. Portia's mood turned humorous as she and Nerrisa spoke of her suitors so far, whereas Antonio was still uncertain of his reasons for sadness.

8. What reasoning did Arragon use in choosing casket?

In Shakespeare's play 'The Merchant of Venice', the Prince of Arragon showed his lack of wisdom and self-contradictory nature by his reasoning in choosing the right casket to win Portia's hand. At first he took no time to dismiss the lead casket as it read "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." His reasoning was —

You shall look fairer ere I give or hazard.

(You should look more attractive before I give of risk anything.)

Arragon was quite arrogant and foolish here to think himself more deserving than a common lead box. He actually judged it by the outward appearance of the casket.

He then moved to the gold casket and read the inscription there. He thought that "what many men

desire” may indicate to the foolishness of most people to run after something judging by its outer appearance. And so he decided to go past it. Actually he showed some wisdom here not to fall prey of the trap of gold. But it shows a sharp contrast to his earlier logic regarding the lead box.

However he read the writing on the silver casket and was convinced by the words “as much as he deserves”. He always thought highly of himself and he felt that he deserved the best in the world. He then went on to think a bit longer about how this world would have been if everyone got only what one deserved. Then many noblemen would have been peasants and many poor people would be kings according to their merit and not by corruption. But as he thought, he deserved the very best, he went on to open the silver box and failed. Here again he showed his foolishness in thinking himself the best in the world.

9. Give any three negative qualities of the French lord, as described by Portia.

According to Portia, the French lord is more attached to and concerned about his horse than Neapolitan. He also has a bad habit of frowning, worse than the Count Palatine.

“he hath a horse better than the Neapolitan’s, a better bad habit of frowning than the Count Palatine. ”

Moreover the French Lord is so eager to show off his fencing that he’d fight with his own shadow and jump even when a bird sings.

‘If a throstle sing, he falls straight a- capering. He will fence with his own shadow’

10. Is The Merchant of Venice a plea for religious tolerance?

To answer the question “Is the play a plea for religious tolerance?” in short, I would say ‘No’.

In no way can I find Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice* promoting religious harmony. Rather, *modern critics call the play ‘Anti-Semitic’, i.e., against the Jews. Shylock, the Jew received insults and injustice all his life. His desperation to get the bond was only his protest against the age-old insults and hatred the Jews received from the Christians. But the way the Christians showed their unchristian social attitude in denying him the justice puts them to shame.*

Nowhere in the play the Christians characters like Antonio, Bassanio, Gratiano, Lorenzo and Portia showed the slightest weakness for Shylock. Rather, they did not miss any chance to insult him. On the other hand, Shylock wanted to befriend his Christian counterpart Antonio. But the Shakespearean audience, mostly Christians, have seen Antonio as a hero and Shylock a villain, just from their own prejudiced mind.

This is not to say that Shylock did everything right and the Christians did everything wrong, but Shylock was more of a victim of religious persecution than a villain. In the play there is no message of religious harmony, but everything is against the Jews. It has been a play depicting class distinction and racial hatred.

11. Social elements in The Merchant of Venice

“The Merchant of Venice” is one of Shakespeare’s greatest plays. It is remarkable not only for its depiction of some of the greatest characters in the history of English literature but also for the

revelation of some social elements like colour prejudice, class distinction, racial hatred and the position of women in the society.

Class distinction and racial hatred in The Merchant of Venice

The play is undoubtedly all about Shylock, the Jew. He is more of a victim of religious persecution than a villain. He has suffered greatly at the hands of the Christians, especially of Antonio. His intolerance and savagery had been the result of his wretched existence subjected to age-old insult, outrage and social injustice that left his tribe caught up in the morass of desperation. All he did was only a protest, though it ended in a whimper. But it did not give the Christian merchants an occasion for exultation. Rather, the sad end came as a rude shock for their unchristian social attitude, putting them to shame.

Then in case of the Prince of Morocco, he can't win Portia's love. Though it was his boasting nature that disgusts her more, his dark complexion had a negative impact on her mind.

Again, Launcelot, as a servant, is the victim of torture in the hand of Shylock, that leads to his disloyalty in the end. Shylock also could not accept Lorenzo as his son-in-law. He also instructed Jessica to lock the windows to prevent the Christian noise from entering his 'sacred' house. He just developed a strong feeling of disgust against the Christians.

Position of women in the society in 'The Merchant of Venice'

And to talk about the position of women in the society, as depicted in "The Merchant of Venice", Portia was not allowed full freedom to choose her own soul-mate. This may indicate a male dominated society. And Jessica too was not expected to choose her own husband. So she had to flee with her lover in the night. Again, Portia, Nerissa and Jessica — all had to dress in men's apparel in order to safeguard themselves from curious eyes or to enable themselves perform some specific actions like arguing in the court room. This is indication enough that women were not allowed to do things that they actually could have done well. But at the same time, it is evident that every important woman character in the play, namely Portia, Nerissa and Jessica just outshines their male counterparts, when it comes to intellectual capacities. The male characters like Antonio, Bassanio, Gratiano and Lorenzo look rather static and faded.

A Conclusion

Though there have been many other instances to reveal the social elements, the most important is the oppression of the Jews by the Christians. And that's why modern critics sympathize with Shylock to have been denied of justice and they call the play anti-Semitic.

12. How is the bond story and the casket story interrelated?

The Casket story and the Bond story in Merchant of Venice are undoubtedly interlinked. Bassanio needed the money as he wanted to go for seeking Portia's hand. That was all about choosing the right casket and win Portia as his mistress. So Antonio, as a great friend, wanted to help him with the money but he had no money at hand. That is why they had to go to Shylock and lend the money signing the

bond. So, we see that without the casket story, Bassanio wouldn't need the money and the bond story would not have existed at all.

Again, the bond story has made it possible for Portia to show her wisdom and win the lawsuit for Antonio, while the casket story enables Bassanio win Portia's hand. So, it seems that in the absence of any one of these two plots, the perfect portrayal of these characters wouldn't have been possible. Hence, interconnection of these two story has been an inseparable part of the play *The Merchant of Venice*.

13. Give any five characteristics of Shylock's character in detail

Shylock, the Jew in William Shakespeare's play '*The Merchant of Venice*' is the most important figure in the play. But critics are divided on their opinion on how to interpret this character — Is he really that bad? Or, Is it the situation that has made him so dogged and cruel?

Anyway, if we were to look at Shylock's character rather straightforwardly, the first thing one must not miss is his miserly attitude. He has accumulated a lot of money. He still charges high interest by lending his money to make a profit. But still, he does not want to spend his money. He is so obsessed with it that he even dreams of money bags at night. And probably he loves his money more than his daughter. Even we see that Launcelot left his service because of lower pay.

I dreamed of money bags last night.

Another trait in Shylock's character has been the religious and racial hatred he maintains towards the Christians. I'm not saying that he is the only one to do that or it is only one-sided. Rather, it was the Christians who showed strong hatred and ill-treatment towards his race. But, that does not justify his case.

Nor thrust your head into the public street
To gaze on Christian fools with varnished faces.
But stop my house's ears—I mean my casements—
Let not the sound of shallow foppery enter
My sober house.

Next comes Shylock's discontented and angry nature. He is probably never seen happy or laughing in the entire play. Rather ill-treatment and foul words are so deeply associated with his character that he is often treated as a villainous man. He is seen abusing everyone from his daughter Jessica, his servant Launcelot to his Christian rivals Antonio and Bassanio. This is what he says about Lancelot:

...a huge feeder,
Snail-slow in profit, and he sleeps by day
More than the wildcat. Drones hive not with me.

Probably the most important and emphasized characteristic of Shylock is his vindictive and cruel nature — his desire to take revenge at any cost. Even when better solutions are suggested to him, he is not

ready to move from his point of revenge against Antonio. He will take his life at any cost as he gets the opportunity. Here are his own words:

To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge.

Shylock is also seen to be opportunistic and clever. He drafted the bond so cleverly and made Antonio sign it. Again, when he found that the tables were turned on him, he immediately decided to leave from there without much fuss:

Send the deed after me and I'll sign it

Finally, Shylock's lack of wisdom should not be looked over. He is a man rather obsessed with fewer things. He lacks an open mind and a broad heart to live a happy and peaceful life. If he was wise enough, he would have taken twice the bond offered to him. As we see, his obstinate nature made him pay. He lost everything in the end.

On the contrary, I would say, though Shylock has been portrayed as a negative character, he has actually been a sufferer, and victim of the circumstances. He has suffered much in the hands of the Christians just for being a Jew. That is what made him outwardly cruel. We cannot miss moments where the positive sides of his character are visible. May be he actually wanted to befriend Antonio and the likes, but persistent abuse made him so revengeful. His actions were mere reactions.