

The Merchant of Venice

Read the following extract from Act 3 Scene 4 of *The Merchant of Venice* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Portia is talking about the disguise she is going to wear.

PORTIA

They shall, Nerissa, but in such a habit
That they shall think we are accomplished
With that we lack. I'll hold thee any wager,
When we are both accoutred like young men
I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
And wear my dagger with the braver grace,
And speak between the change of man and boy
With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps
Into a manly stride; and speak of 'frays
Like a fine bragging youth; and tell quaint lies
How honourable ladies sought my love,
Which I denying, they fell sick and died –
I could not do withal. Then I'll repent,
And wish for all that, that I had not killed them;
And twenty of these puny lies I'll tell,
That men shall swear I have discontinued school
Above a twelvemonth. I have within my mind
A thousand raw tricks of these bragging jacks,
Which I will practise.

Starting with this speech, explore how far Shakespeare presents Portia as a strong female character in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Portia in this speech
- how far Shakespeare presents Portia as a strong female character in the play as a whole.

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Read the following extract from Act 2 Scene 8 of *The Merchant of Venice* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play, Salanio and Salarino are discussing Shylock's reaction to Jessica's elopement.

SALANIO

I never heard a passion so confused,
So strange, outrageous, and so variable,
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets:
'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter!
A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
Of double ducats, stolen from me by my daughter!
And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones,
Stolen by my daughter! Justice! find the girl;
She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats.'

SALARINO

Why, all the boys in Venice follow him,
Crying, his stones, his daughter, and his ducats.

SALANIO

Let good Antonio look he keep his day,
Or he shall pay for this.

Starting with this conversation, explore how Shakespeare presents attitudes towards Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare demonstrates Salanio and Salarino's attitudes towards Shylock in this conversation
- how Shakespeare presents attitudes towards Shylock in the play as a whole.

The Merchant of Venice

Read the following extract from Act 3 Scene 1 of *The Merchant of Venice* and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Shylock has heard that Antonio's ship has sunk. He intends to have his 'bond' from Antonio.

SALARINO

Why, I am sure if he forfeit thou wilt not take his flesh.

What's that good for?

SHYLOCK

To bait fish withal; if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies – and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

Starting with this speech, explore how Shakespeare presents ideas about revenge in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents ideas about revenge in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents ideas about revenge in the play as a whole.