

Merchant of Venice

Act - 2

Scene - 2

Extract -1

(i) Who is Launcelot Gobbo? What inner struggle is going on in his conscience? What does his struggle show about the contemporary Christian practice?

(ii) Why does Launcelot want to run away from the Jew? What does his conscience advise him to do?

(iii) Launcelot's speech provides some comic relief in the play? Why was such a relief needed in the context of the play?

(iv) Enumerate the reasons given by Launcelot's conscience to stay on with the master.

(v) Finally, whom does Launcelot obey-the devil or his conscience? How is the theme of racial discrimination brought out in Launcelot's decision to run away?

Answers:

(i) Launcelot Gobbo is Shylock's servant. An inner struggle is going on in his mind between his conscience advising him to be a faithful servant and the devil tempting him to leave Shylock's service and take up service with Bassanio. Launcelot's inner struggle shows the contemporary Christian practice of struggling with the temptation to yield to it or not.

(ii) Launcelot wants to run away from the Jew because his master, Shylock, is the very devil in human form. According to Launcelot, Shylock is a miserly man under whose service he remains famished. Besides, he fears that he would become a Jew if he served Shylock any longer. Initially, his conscience tells him not to run away from Shylock's household and to be careful. However, when the devil persuades him to flee, his conscience tells him that as he is the child of a good father or at least a good mother and so, he should stay where he is and not move.

(iii) In this scene Launcelot provides some comic relief in the play. In the context of the play, such a relief was needed because the previous scene related to the bond story, depicted a serious mood where Antonio agrees to sign a treacherous bond that stipulates a pound of his flesh in case he forfeits the agreement.

(iv) Launcelot's conscience advises him not to run away as such an act of fleeing is a matter of contempt. It adds that he is the child of a good father or at least a good mother and hence he should stay on with the master.

(v) Finally, Launcelot obeys the devil. The theme of racial discrimination is brought out in Launcelot's decision to run away because he runs away from his master, Shylock, who was a Jew and takes up service with Bassanio, a Christian.

Extract - 2

(i) Where are Launcelot and old Gobbo? What is meant by 'true-begotten father'? Why cannot old Gobbo recognise his son?

(ii) Why is old Gobbo looking for the way to Master Jew's house? How does Launcelot confuse the old man while giving directions to him to reach the Jew's house?

(iii) What was Gobbo's reaction to the direction given to him by Launcelot?

(iv) What present has Gobbo brought to give to the Jew? What does Launcelot say to his father about it?

(v) Launcelot plays a comic role in this scene. Give two examples of comedy provided by him.

Answers:

(i) Launcelot and old Gobbo are in a street in Venice. 'True begotten father' means 'my father who begot me'. Old Gobbo cannot recognize his son as he is more than half-blind.

(ii) Old Gobbo is looking for the way to the Jew's house to go there to find out if his son Launcelot, who was working as a servant in Shylock's household is still there. Launcelot confuses Gobbo by giving him wrong directions to Shylock's house.

(iii) Gobbo says that by the saints, it was a difficult direction to follow.

(iv) Gobbo has brought a dish of cooked doves to give to the Jew. Launcelot tells his father to give Shylock a rope to hang himself with rather than any present because he has half-starved him.

(v) When Gobbo asks Launcelot the way to Shylock's house, the wrong directions which Launcelot gives him provide real comedy in the scene. The directions are too confusing for Old Gobbo to follow. The second example is Launcelot's asking his father's blessing. He kneels before his father. Being blind, his father touches Launcelot's face and says that Launcelot has more hair on his face than Dobbin, his cart horse.

Extract - 3

(i) Why does Launcelot use high-sounding words in his conversation with Gobbo? What does Shakespeare want to convey to the audience in this context about the habit of some people in his time?

(ii) Why does Launcelot call old Gobbo 'father' in the first line of the extract? Give the meaning of:

...according to Fates and Destinies, and such odd sayings, the Sisters Three and such branches of learning...

(iii) How does Gobbo react to the news of the apparent loss of his son?

(iv) How does Launcelot show dramatically that he is Gobbo's son? Why does Gobbo refer to his mother's name later in the scene?

(v) How does Gobbo show by words and actions that he is fond of his son? Give any two humorous situations from this scene.

Answers:

(i) Launcelot uses high-sounding words in his conversation with Gobbo to impress him that he possesses classical learning and is a gentleman. Shakespeare wants to convey to the audience that habit of some vain people of his time who pretended to be what were not.

(ii) According to Fates and Destinies, and such odd sayings, the Sisters Three and such branches of learning, Launcelot calls Old Gobbo 'father' in the first line of the extract as he plans to reveal his identity gradually to him. In the given lines Launcelot tells Gobbo that according to his Fate or Destiny or the Three Sisters of the ancient Greeks and such other branches of learning the young man is dead.

(iii) Old Gobbo is stunned on hearing that his son is dead. He states that his son was his only support in his old age.

(iv) When Gobbo asks Launcelot to tell him whether his son is really dead or not, Launcelot dramatically confess that he is Gobbo's son. But Gobbo does not believe him. Then Launcelot mentions the name of his mother, Margery, as a proof to show that he is really Gobbo's son.

(v) Gobbo is fond of his son. When Launcelot tells him that his son is dead, Gobbo is shocked to hear it and laments that his son was his only support in his old age. Further Gobbo does not believe Launcelot's confession till he mentions the name of his mother. When Launcelot tells him that he is his son, Gobbo, being blind, feels Launcelot's face to ascertain that he is actually his son.

One humorous situation is when Launcelot give Gobbo directions to go to Shylock's

house. The directions are so confusing that Gobbo does not follow it. Another humorous situation is the scene of Launcelot asking his father's blessing. He kneels in front of his father. His father feels his beard and says that Launcelot has more hair on his face than their cart-horse has on his tail.

Extract - 4

(i) What has just happened that makes Gobbo say that Launcelot has changed? What present did Gobbo bring? To whom does he want to give it?

(ii) Give the meaning of:

(a) My master's a very Jew

(b) give him a halter

(iii) How can you conclude from the extract that Launcelot has been suffering in the Jew's service?

(iv) What kind of attitude against the Jews is shown in this scene?

(v) What special privilege would Launcelot have if he served Bassanio? What would happen if Launcelot were to serve the Jew 'any longer'?

Answers:

(i) When Gobbo remarked that Launcelot has more hair on his face than Dobbin, their shaft-horse has on his tail, Launcelot responded that Dobbin's tail is growing less because when he last saw him, he had more hair on his tail than he had on his face. At this Gobbo remarked that Launcelot has changed. Gobbo has brought a dish of cooked doves to be given to Shylock.

(ii)(a) My master is a typical Jew, i.e., he is a miserly man.
(b) give him a rope to hang himself with.

(iii) In the extract Launcelot tells his father that under Shylock's service he has grown so thin for want of proper food that his ribs and bones are standing out prominently and can be counted with the finger. This shows that Launcelot has been suffering in the Jew's service.

(iv) The miserly nature of the Jews is shown in this scene. Launcelot says that he is half famished under Shylock's service and adds that he has grown so thin for want of food that his bones and ribs are standing out prominently and can be counted with a finger.

(v) If Launcelot serves Bassanio, he will have the privilege of having new uniforms. According to Launcelot if he works any longer for the Jew, he may become a Jew himself. He means that it is impossible for him to remain in Shylock's service any further.

Extract - 5

(i) How has Launcelot shown that he could speak for himself to be employed by Bassanio?

(ii) What impact is the palm-reading by Launcelot likely to make on the audience?

(iii) What does Launcelot predict about his wives and his escape from dangers to his life?

(iv) What instructions did Bassanio give to his servants after employing Launcelot?

(v) Before this extract Launcelot referred to a proverb which is applicable both to Shylock and to Bassanio. What was the proverb? How is it applicable to both of them?

Answers:

(i) When old Gobbo delays in asking Bassanio to accept his son, Launcelot in his service, Launcelot cuts him short and tells Bassanio that he wants to serve him.

(ii) The palm-reading by Launcelot provides the audience a comic relief and foretells the good fortune that may happen in the life of Launcelot.

(iii) After reading his palm, Launcelot foretells that he will have a long life. He will marry a large number of wives (eleven widows and nine maids in all). He will escape thrice from drowning and will have a hair-breadth escape once from falling out from a feather bed.

(iv) After employing Launcelot, Bassanio tells the Gobbos to go to Shylock and bid him farewell and then reach his house. He tells his servants to get a uniform for Launcelot with more decorations or ornamental stripes than those of his other servants.

(v) The old proverb that Launcelot mentions is : 'The grace of God is wealth enough.' He says that this proverb is equally applicable to Shylock and Bassanio. Bassanio is a good man and has the grace of God. Shylock does not have grace of God. But he has 'wealth enough.'

Extract - 6

(i) Give the context in which Bassanio speaks these words.

(ii) Give the meaning of:

To allay with some cold drops of modesty

Thy skipping spirit,

(iii) Briefly summarise the advice given by Bassanio to Gratiano in the extract.

(iv) Why does Bassanio ask Gratiano to behave properly in Belmont?

(v) What assurance does Gratiano give to Bassanio about the latter's advice? What exception to Gratiano's behaviour is accepted for the particular night? Why?

Answers:

(i) Bassanio speaks these words to Gratiano when the latter makes a request to him to permit to accompany him on his trip to Belmont.

(ii) To tone down your lively spirits by exercising a little moderation.

(iii) Bassanio tells Gratiano that he is uncontrollable, blunt and rough. These faults of his are acceptable to Bassanio and his friends as qualities of his nature. But his wild behaviour may be misunderstood at Belmont. Hence, Bassanio advises him to control his wild behaviour and tone down his lively spirit by exercising moderation.

(iv) Bassanio asks Gratiano to behave properly in Belmont because he fears that for people who don't know Gratiano, his behaviour will appear as faulty. His wild behaviour will be misunderstood at Belmont and Bassanio may lose all chances of marrying Portia.

(v) Gratiano promises to behave in a proper manner. He says that he will converse gravely and will seldom use an oath. He will carry prayer books in his pockets and look most sedate. During the grace before meals, he will veil his eyes with his hat and solemnly say 'Amen'. He will do everything that politeness demands and follow all the customs of good manners, as though he trying to please his grandmother by showing a quiet and serious behaviour.

Bassanio tells Gratiano that his rude behaviour will be tolerated for the night because of the party. This is because Bassanio wants that night to be one of fun and mirth. He will be sorry to see Gratiano in a sad mood. Bassanio would prefer to see him in his wildest spirits.