

Merchant of Venice

Act - 3

Scene – 5

Extract – 1

Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow:

1. Where is Launcelot? What is he discussing and with whom?

Answers: Launcelot is in the garden of Portia at Belmont. Launcelot is discussing with Jessica the question of her salvation. He says that being the daughter of a Jew, she will be damned, that is there is no salvation for her soul because children are punished for the sins of their fathers. This is because Christians of those days believed that for the souls of Jews and non-Christians, there is no salvation.

2. Who is to be blamed more and for what reason?

Answers: According to Launcelot, Lorenzo is to be blamed for the conversion of Jessica because by converting her, he has added one more member to the community of Christians, who are already many. Besides, it will raise the price of pork as one more pork-eater will be added to the group of pork-eaters.

3. How would Jessica's becoming a Christian affect the price of hogs?

Answers: Jessica's becoming a Christian will increase the number of pork-eaters and thus, will affect the price of the pork.

4. What did Launcelot say earlier about damnation of Jessica? How did he justify his opinion of damnation? How does Jessica hope to escape damnation?

Answers: Earlier, Launcelot had said that Jessica will be damned due to the sins of her father. He justifies this by referring to a passage in the Bible (Exodus 20/5) which says that even children and children's children will be punished for the sins of their fathers. Jessica hopes to escape damnation through her husband. That is being converted to Christianity by her husband she will be saved. This has also a reference to Bible where St. Paul says that the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband. (1 Corinthians 7:14).

5. Explain the conflict of religions referred to in this scene.

Answers: Conflict of religions is highlighted in this scene. Christians of those days believed that non-Christians and Jews will be damned. Since Jessica is the daughter of Shylock, she will be damned. However, Jessica asserts her position referring to St. Paul, who said that the unbelieving wife is sanctified by her husband who is a Christian.

Extract - 2

1. What is 'Past all expressing'? Why does Jessica suggest that Bassanio should lead an upright life?

Answers: Jessica uses these words - 'Past all expressing' which mean words are not enough to express her admiration for Portia. Jessica suggests that Bassanio should lead an upright life because he has such a blessing in his wife, Portia. He has the joys of heaven here on earth. If he does not value the joy while on earth, he does not deserve to expect happiness in heaven

2. What does Jessica say immediately after this extract praising Portia?

Answers: Immediately after this extract praising Portia, Jessica says that if two gods should enter into a contest and stake two earthly women as prizes in the game, then if Portia were to be one of them, the other woman would need some addition to her worth so as to make the stake equal. Thus, Jessica states that there is no another woman like Portia in this world. She is peerless.

3. What has Lorenzo said earlier about Launcelot's skill in using words?

Answers: Lorenzo tells Launcelot that he is trying to show his wisdom by using words at every opportunity. He tells him to try to understand a simple man, who speaks plain language.

4. What mix up of words has Launcelot done earlier in the context of serving dinner?

Answers: Bring out the humour arising from his speech. In the context of serving dinner, Launcelot behaves like a refined jester. Lorenzo asks Launcelot to go indoors and tell the servants to get dinner ready and serve it. Launcelot misunderstands 'prepare for dinner' as 'prepare themselves for dinner' and says that they are ready and have good appetite. Further he takes 'prepare dinner' for 'get dinner cooked'. Launcelot inverts the words take, 'meat and bid. He tells Lorenzo that the table shall be 'served' meaning 'laid' and the meat shall be covered' meaning served'. He says as for their coming to dinner, it depends on their mood and fancy and he cannot 'bid' them to do anything

5. Give a brief character sketch of Launcelot in this scene.

Answers: In this scene, the character of Launcelot changes from that of an ignorant practical joker to that of a more refined jester. He resembles, a court fool here. He theorises on the consequences of Jessica's turning a Christian. He further reveals his skills in punning words so that even Lorenzo admits that the fool has filled his mind with quite a stock of fine words ready for use.