

Merchant of Venice

Act - 2

Scene – 9

Extract - 1

- (i) What proper honour is given to Arragon to indicate that he is a prince?**
- (ii) Enumerate the conditions in the oath which Arragon was supposed to take.**
- (iii) How wise is it to arrange marriages through a lottery system where chance plays a significant role? How does Nerissa justify the system in Portia's case?**
- (iv) It is said that Arragon is too proud and self-opinionated. Do you agree with this statement? Give two reasons to justify your answer.**

Answers:

(i) To honour Arragon as a prince, trumpets were sounded as he entered the room and Portia addressed him as 'noble prince'.

(ii) Arragon is bound by the oath to observe three conditions. First, he must never reveal to any other person which caskets he has selected. Second, if he does not win Portia, he should not woo any other lady. Third, if he chooses wrongly he must depart at once without further words. He explicitly kept the last condition of the scene.

(iii) It is not wise to arrange marriages through lottery system where chance plays a significant role. Portia initially feels that her fate is sealed by the lottery of caskets designed by her father. However, later she accepts her father's will and asserts that she will abide by it and would remain a virgin like Diana if no suitor wins her in marriage. Nerissa justifies the lottery of caskets saying that her father was a virtuous man, who must have had her well-being at heart. So, according to her father's will she will be chosen by someone who will truly love her.

(iv) Prince Arragon is too proud and self opinionated. While making his selection, he calls the common people as 'fool multitude' and again as 'barbarous multitudes'. He says that he will not act according to what common men choose and put himself on the level of the ignorant and the foolish. Secondly, Arragon thinks himself to most deserving because of inherited nobility.

Extract - 2

(i) What does the inscription on the gold casket say? Which casket does the speaker choose?

(ii) How does Arragon interpret the meaning of 'many men' given on the gold casket?

(iii) How does Arragon compare the martlet to the foolish multitude?

(iv) Give the meaning of:

(a) in the force and road of casualty.

(b) rank me with the barbarous multitudes.

(v) How is the theme of appearance and reality brought out in the choice of caskets? Why did Portia's father devise such a choice of caskets for Portia?

Answers:

(i) The inscription on the gold casket says 'who chooses me shall gain what many men desire'. The speaker chooses the silver casket.

(ii) Arragon says that the words 'many men' probably refer to the foolish majority, who are so slow witted and who have so little wisdom that they judge only by appearances and outward glitter. Their untaught eyes never see the inner meaning of things, but is content to remain on the outside like the swallow.

(iii) Arragon compares the multitude to the marlet. The marlet, instead of seeking a sheltered place for its nest, constructs it in the most exposed places like the outer wall, unprotected from, any stormy weather or any accident which may occur. Similarly, the foolish common people who judge by the outside of the things, fall into error and calamities.

(iv)(a) open to disaster and in the very path of danger.

(b) I don't put myself at the level of the ignorant and foolish common people.

(v) The theme of appearance and reality is brought out in the choice of caskets. Arragon rejects the lead casket calling it base lead because of its dull and plain appearance. He says lead must present a more attractive appearance than it does before he gives or risks anything for it. He rejects the gold casket saying he will not choose what many people desire. He will not put himself at the level of ignorant common people. The word 'deserves' meaning 'merit' on the silver casket attracts Arragon and he selects it.

Extract - 3

(i) What does the inscription on the silver casket say?

(ii) Why did the words of the inscription on the silver casket appeal to Arragon?

(iii) Give the meaning of :

To cozen fortune and be honourable

Without the stamp of merit?

(iv) How does Arragon explain further the importance of deserving before getting an honoured position?

(v) Which casket did Arragon finally choose? What did he feel after making the choice?

Answers:

(i) The inscription on the silver casket says, 'who chooses me shall get as much as he deserves'.

(ii) Words on the inscription on the silver casket appeal to Arragon because the word 'deserves' meaning 'merit' in the inscription appeals to him. He thinks himself to be the most deserving. He feels that there are many who succeed without having any inner merit. But he 'deserves' because of his inherited nobility.

(iii) To try to cheat fortune and win something without merit. It means no one ought to be allowed to deceive and trick fortune by asking her for what he does not deserve.

(iv) Arragon further tells that no man should aspire to be honoured unless he deserves it. Arragon wishes that all the positions of rank, dignity and offices were bestowed on the deserving, instead of being obtained dishonestly. If this happens, many low ranking people would be separated out from the ranks of the truly honourable.

(v) Arragon finally chooses the silver casket. After making the choice, Arragon is dumb-founded and very disappointed with what he finds in the casket. He pauses silently for a longtime before speaking. He says that there is such a difference between that creature and the picture he hoped to see. He asks Portia whether he deserves no more than the head of a fool. He wants to know whether that is his prize and whether he deserves nothing more than that.

Extract - 4

(i) After which incident does Arragon speak these words? In what mood is he? With which fool's head did he come to woo?

(ii) Which second head did he get? Briefly state what was written on the schedule attached to the second head.

(iii) Which casket does the speaker choose? Why did he choose that casket?

(iv) After the departure of the prince, what did Portia say about him?

(v) State the old saying uttered by Nerissa after the prince's departure. How does the servant describe the young suitor who comes after the departure of the prince?

Answers:

(i) Arragon speaks these words after opening the silver casket. He is in a mood of disappointment. He came to woo Portia with one foolish head of his own.

(ii) The second head he got was from the silver casket. The scroll attached to the second head says that silver metal of the Casket was tested seven times by fire. A mind which never makes an error of judgment must be similarly tested seven times. Some people find their happiness in shadows and unreality. Their happiness is therefore only shadowy and unreal. There are many living fools whose foolishness is hidden by theory silvery hair because they have the appearance of being venerable and wise. One of these is the fool's head concealed in the silver casket. Arragon will always have a foolish head. He should now leave as his chance is over.

(iii) The speaker chooses the silver casket. The motto of the silver casket appeals to the speaker. It says 'who chooses me shall get as much as he deserves'. He feels that he deserves Portia because of his inherited nobility.

(iv) After the departure of the prince, Portia says that there is another moth which has burnt itself in the flame of the candle. These people, when they choose, the wisdom of their superficial knowledge makes them look utterly foolish and lead them to make the wrong choice.

(v) After the Prince's departure, Nerissa utters an old saying "Hanging and winning goes by destiny"; It means that it is fate that decides what happens to one, whether one is to be hanged or to be wedded. It Implies that it is destiny that has saved Portia from two unsuitable suitors and it is destiny that may give her a worthy suitor.

Extract - 5

(i) Where does this scene take place? Who has alighted at the gate?

(ii) The visitor brought gifts of rich value. What does this indicate in the context of the scene?

(iii) Give the meaning of the last three lines of the extract.

(iv) What were the reactions of Portia and Nerissa to the announcement of a new suitor?

(v) Why does Portia say to the servant to be silent and not to praise the young Venetian further? Explain how the plot makes progress in this scene.

Answers:

(i) This scene takes place in a room in Portia's house at Belmont. Gratiano has alighted at the gate.

(ii) Gifts of rich value indicate the great regard and love Bassanio has for Portia.

(iii) In the last three lines of extract, the servant says that he has not seen so generous an ambassador of love. Even a day in April, the sweetest spring day, coming to give people a foretaste of bright and bountiful summer, is not comparable to this gorgeous messenger, who rides in advance of his master.

(iv) Portia asks the servant to stop speaking because he is so generous in his praise that she is dreading to hear him say that he is some relative of his. Then Portia tells Nerissa to come quickly along with her to meet this messenger of Cupid, who has arrived in such a courteous manner. Nerissa prays to Cupid, the god of love, that the lord announced be Bassanio if such is his will.

(v) Portia tells the servant to be silent because he is too extravagant in his praises that she is dreading to hear him say that he is some relative of his.

The plot of the play makes further progress in the scene. This scene, the second of the casket scenes, is important because it fills up the interval of the three months between the signing up of the bond and the forfeiture. It also seems to reveal the wisdom of the device caskets because it shows that the results are not a mere lottery. It proves that only the person, who rightly loves, will choose rightly. This scene also, reveals to the audience which is the right casket. It will heighten the suspense during Bassanio's selection later. This scene also keeps up the theme of appearance and reality.