

Merchant of Venice

Act - 2

Scene - 1

Extract - 1

(i) Where does this scene take place? Who are present in the scene? What explanation does Morocco give for his dark complexion?

(ii) What qualities does a creature born in north have? Why?

(iii) Who is Phoebus and what is meant by Phoebus' fire? What test does the speaker propose, to prove 'whose blood is reddest'?

(iv) What effect does the physical appearance of Morocco have on the brave men and the prettiest women of his country?

(v) On what condition is the speaker prepared to change his dark complexion? What idea do you get about the character of the Prince of Morocco from the extract?

Answers:

(i) This scene takes place in a room in Portia's house at Belmont. People present are: Prince of Morocco and his attendants, Portia, Nerissa and her attendants. Morocco says that he got his dark colour because of the fierce sun. He was born and brought up in a country where the sun is very close to the earth.

(ii) People born in north are fair-skinned. This is because the sun's rays are so faint in the north that they are hardly able to melt the frost, snow and icicles.

(iii) Phoebus in Greek mythology is one of the names of the Sun God, Appollo. "Phoebus' fire" means the rays of the sun. Morocco proposes that he should be matched with any fair-skinned man born in the north. They should open their veins to see whose blood is redder. Red blood was considered to be sign of courage.

(iv) Morocco's physical appearance frightened the brave men whereas the prettiest women admired and loved it.

(v) The speaker is prepared to change his dark complexion only to win over Portia's favour. From the extract we know that the prince of Morocco is a warrior and self-assured man. He has a large imposing physical appearance and is proud of his dark complexion. He is an

egoist who thinks that he is better than other people. He boasts of his red blood and the admiration and affection he enjoys in his land from the nobles and the best maidens.

Extract - 2

(i) What is the lottery of Portia's destiny? How does it prevent her from the right of voluntary choosing?

(ii) Give the meaning of: "But if my father had not scanted me, / And hedged me by his wit,..."

(iii) How prudent was Portia's father to have arranged her marriage through a lottery? Give a reason for your answer.

(iv) Give the brief character sketch of the Prince of Morocco in this scene.

(v) Do you agree with Portia's statement that the Prince of Morocco stands as fair a chance as the other suitors? Give the reason to justify your opinion.

Answers:

(i) Lottery of Portia's destiny refers to the lottery devised according to her deceased father's will. According to the lottery, each suitor has to choose from amongst the three caskets of gold, silver and lead the one containing Portia's portrait. The suitor who will choose the correct casket will win Portia's hand in marriage. The lottery of caskets designed by her father, thus prevents Portia from exercising her freedom of choice. The suitor, who will make the right choice will win her as wife.

(ii) These lines mean: "If I had not been limited and restricted by my father's wisdom and obliged to accept for a husband the one who will succeed in winning me by the means I have told you."

(iii) Portia's father was prudent to have arranged for her marriage through a lottery. We see that at the end the wisdom of her father prevails and she is won as wife by Bassanio whom she loves and admires.

(iv) From the extract we know that the Prince of Morocco is a warrior and self-assured man. He has a large imposing physical appearance and is proud of his dark complexion. He is an egoist who thinks that he is better than other people. He boasts of his red blood and the admiration and affection he enjoys in his land from the nobles and the best of maidens. He admits that the lottery of the caskets has no consideration for heroism and can be won by anyone, even an undeserving candidate. He harps on the idea of chance-choice, lottery, destiny, choosing, fortune and hazards.

(v) Portia does not really mean that Morocco had a good chance of winning her love, because in Act I, Scene 2 she holds her former suitors in contempt. She thinks the same of

Morocco because he is boastful. Portia treats him with perfect courtesy and tact and speaks as if she holds him in high esteem.

Extract - 3

(i) What is meant by a 'scimitar'? What conquests did Morocco make by using his scimitar?

(ii) State two of the brave deeds Morocco is prepared to carry out in order to win Portia.

(iii) Who are Hercules and Lichas? What could happen if they were to play a game of dice? In what way is this example applicable to Morocco?

(iv) What final instruction does Portia give to Morocco before he is led to make the choice?

(v) Why is the fortune said to be blind? What does Morocco fear since the blind fortune is leading him to choose the casket?

Answers:

(i) 'Scimitar' means sword. By using his sword, Morocco had slain the Emperor of Persia and a Persian Prince, who had defeated Sultan Solyman of Turkey thrice.

(ii) The brave deeds Morocco is prepared to perform in order to win Portia are:
a. To challenge the most brave warrior on earth
b. Snatch away the young sucking cubs from the mother bear and dare her wrath

(iii) In Greek Mythology, Hercules was renowned for his manliness, strength and exploits. Lichas was his servant. According to the legend, once Hercules and Lichas were playing a game of dice. By chance, the winning throw came from Lichas. This example is applicable to Morocco since his fame, wealth and achievements are of no help to him to win Portia. He is forced to take his chance against any inferior rival.

(iv) Before he is led to make the choice, Portia tells Morocco that he must take a chance. He must either leave the matter altogether and not make the attempt or swear in the Chapel before choosing, that if he makes the wrong choice, he will never again speak to any lady on the subject of marriage.

(v) The goddess fortune is usually represented blindfolded. Fortune is said to be blind due to the unaccountable variations in her dispensation of favours to mankind. He fears that as the blind fortune is leading him to choose the right casket, the outcome depends only on chance as in a game of dice.