

Merchant of Venice Act - 1 Scene - 1



Extract - 1

(i) Where are Antonio and his friends? What does Antonio say about his sadness?

(ii) Give meaning of:

(a) whereof it is born

(b) a want-wit sadness

(c) That I have much ado to know myself

(iii) What reason does Salarino give as the probable cause of Antonio 's melancholy?

(iv) State in your own words the scene on the ocean as described by Salarino, when Antonio 's ships were sailing .

(v) Why do you think Antonio is presented as melancholic character? What could be cause for his melancholy?

Answers:

(i) Antonio and his friends are sitting around talking on the streets of Venice. Antonio tells his friends that he doesn't himself understand his sadness (melancholy), but that it has nothing to do with business worries or being in love.

(ii) (a) how it originated

(b) a dull sadness

(c) That I have much difficulty in recognizing myself

- (iii) Salarino tells Antonio that he is sad because his mind is preoccupied with his ships filled with cargo, which are out at sea.
- (iv) Salarino compares Antonio's ships sailing on the waves with the great lords and wealthy citizens, who look down on lesser men as they walk along the street. He says that compared to smaller ships, Antonio's ships move swiftly on the sea with their canvas sails and look like grand spectacles or pageants of the sea.
- (v) Antonio is presented as a melancholic and passive character mainly for three reasons. Firstly, by portraying Antonio as a whimsical person, who is least bothered about the consequences of his actions, justifies his signing the bond agreement. Secondly, Antonio's melancholy creates a tragic atmosphere suitable for the play. Thirdly, Antonio's melancholy creates a sense of mystery for the audience.

Extract - 2

- (i) Where would Salanio's attention be if had business ventures abroad? Why would he be 'Plucking the grass'? what else would he be doing in that context?**
- (ii) What would make Salanio fear some danger to his ventures? Give examples from the opening scene to show some objects remind Salarino of the danger to the ships.**
- (iii) Give the meaning of: Plucking the grass to know where sits the wind.**
- (iv) In spite of the danger to his ships, why is Antonio not worried about his financial security?**
- (v) What light does the opening scene throw on the danger that the sea could pose to ships? How does the scene show that Antony is very confident about his business venture?**

Answers:

- (i) If Salanio had business ventures abroad, his thoughts would be fixed on the dangers to his ventures and methods of securing them. He would be plucking the blades of grass and casting them in the air to see which way the wind blew, to see if it was blowing in a direction favourable to the course of his ships or not. Further, he would look into maps for harbours, channels and open roadsteads near to the shore where his ships could anchor in case of need.
- (ii) Every thought of Salanio would make him fearful of danger to his business ventures. Two examples which reminded Salarino of the danger to his ships were:
 - (a) While cooling his soup by blowing on it, reminded him of the stormy winds at sea causing terrible damages to his ships.
 - (b) The sandy hour-glass reminded him of the richly laden vessels wrecked on the sandy shore.
- (iii) Plucking of grass and casting them in the air to see which way the wind blew.
- (iv) Despite danger to his ships, Antonio is not worried about his financial security because his business is neither dependent on any one ship nor on any single location or commercial transactions of the current year.
- (v) The opening scene describes the possible dangers that the sea could pose to ships such as strong winds, dangerous shallow waters, sandbanks and dangerous rocks.

Extract - 3

- (i) Where does this scene takes place? Name the people who are present there. In what mood is Salarino in this scene?**
- (ii) What would the wind cooling broth remind Salarino of?**
- (iii) Give the meaning of:**
And see my wealthy Andrew dock'd in sand,

(iv) What is the 'sandy hour-glass'? What would it remind Salarino of?

(v) When Salarino would go to church what would he see? What would the scene make him imagine?

Answers:

(i) This scene takes place in a street of Venice. Antonio, Salarino and Salanio are present in the scene. Salarino is in a talkative mood and wants to know the reason for Antonio's melancholy. He says that he too would be feeling melancholic if his ships were sailing on the sea.

(ii) It would remind Salarino of the stormy winds at sea and of the terrible damages they might cause to the ships.

(iii) In the above lines Salarino imagines that his rich cargo ship is grounded in sand and her mast dipped down lower than her sides as if trying to kiss the sands that surround her.

(iv) Sandy hour-glass is an apparatus used to indicate time. It would remind Salarino of the dangers from hidden banks of sand at sea, on which a ship may run aground.

(v) When Salarino would go to the church he would see the holy building made of stone. This scene would make him think of the perilous rocks of the sea and imagine that a collision of his ship with these rocks would be sufficient to break his vessel into pieces and scatter on the sea all her spices and silks.

Extract - 4

(i) Who has just said that Antonio was in love? What was the reaction of Antonio to that remark?

(ii) Antonio says that he is not sad because of love. What explanation does Salarino give in the extract for Antonio's sadness?

(iii) What is meant by 'two-headed Janus'? Why is he referred to in the extract?

(iv) Describe in your own words the two types of strange fellows who have been framed by the nature.

(v) Who comes at the end of Salarino's speech? Why does Salarino leave then?

Answers:

(i) Salarino has just said that Antonio was in love. Antonio calls the remark as nonsense and completely denies that he is in love.

(ii) Salarino concludes that Antonio is sad because he is not happy. He remarks that there are some curious creatures in the world. He swears by Janus, the two-headed Roman God that some people have merry natures and are continuously laughing whether the things they see are subject for mirth or not. Again there are others with the sourest countenance who will not laugh at any thing though the gravest old warrior Nestor himself confirms the joke as most amusing is a Roman god usually depicted with two heads looking.

(iii) Janus is Roman god usually depicted with two heads looking in opposite directions :- one frowning and the other smiling. He had received from god Saturn, the gift to see both the past and the future. He is referred to in the extract to show that there are two types of people :- one happy and other sad.

(iv) Nature has two types of people. The first type of people have happy natures and often laugh even if the subject of laughter is too trivial. The second type of people are those with serious and grave faces, who do not laugh even at the most amusing jokes.

(v) At the end of Salarino's speech, Bassanio, Gratiano and Lorenzo come. Salarino leaves Antonio then because Antonio's friends, Bassanio, Gratiano and Lorenzo have come to give him company.

Extract - 5

- (i) Why is young man compared to ' his grand's sire cut in alabaster ? Under what condition is he likely to be infected with jaundice?**
- (ii) Give the meaning of:**
 - (a) Do cream and mantle like a standing pond:**
- (iii) What is said in the extract about the people who try to earn a reputation for wisdom?**
- (iv) Give the significance of 'I am Oracle 'and 'Let no dog bark.'**
- (v) What advice does Gratiano give to Antonio at the end of the speech? What does Bassanio say about Gratiano's speech a little later in the scene?**

Answers:

- (i) Gratiano gives the example of a warm-blooded young man who represses his spirits and forces himself to stillness till he looks like the marble image of his grandfather. He does so to advise Antonio not to remain in melancholy. He is likely to be infected with jaundice due to his bad temper.
- (ii)
 - (a) Some men overcast their faces with a pale expression as unchanging as the cream that forms on the surface of milk and as the scum that forms on the surface of a stagnant pool. (b) Maintain an obstinate silence not to disturb the solemnity of their faces.
- (iii) In the extract, Gratiano speaks about people who try to obtain a reputation for wisdom, seriousness and deep thought by remaining silent. Such people mean to say that they speak with the authority of the Greek Oracle and they alone are infallible in their utterances. When they speak, other should keep quiet.
- (iv) 'I am Sir Oracle' means 'I speak with the authority of the Greek Oracle'. The Greek Oracles made known the will of Gods and were received by all without questions. 'Let no dog bark' means ' let no one speak'. It refers to the attitude of those wise men who consider themselves as the fountain of wisdom and wait that when they speak, others should remain silent.
- (v) At the end of his speech, Gratiano advises Antonio not to be one of those who try to gain a reputation for wisdom by being silent. He further tells Antonio not use melancholy as a bait to win the reputation of wisdom and cheap popularity, which is like a worthless cheap fish, a gudgeon.

Extract - 6

- (i) Where are Bassanio and Antonio ?What has Antonio said earlier in reply to which Bassanio speak these words?**
- (ii) Explain the following:**
Or bring latter hazard back again, And
thankfully rest debtor for the first.
- (iii) Which experience of his school days Bassanio relate to justify his plan for repaying the loan?**
- (iv) How does Bassanio propose to pay back his previous loan as well as the present loan?**
- (v) What confession has Bassanio made to Antonio earlier about his financial position?How can you conclude that Bassanio is spendthrift?**

Answers:

- (i) Bassanio and Antonio are in a Street in Venice. Prior to this extract, Antonio asks Bassanio to tell him about his plans. He adds. that if Bassanio's plan is as honourable as he is, he

then promises him everything that he has :- money, influence, personal help and utmost resources.

(ii) The above lines mean that at any rate Bassanio could pay the second loan and remain his grateful debtor for the first.

(iii) Bassanio says that when he was a boy at school and he lost one of his arrows while shooting, he would shoot another arrow in the same direction. Thus, by risking the second, he often regained both the arrows.

(iv) Bassanio proposes to pay back his previous loan as well as the present loan by carefully managing the expenditure of his second loan amount.

(v) Earlier, Bassanio confesses to Antonio that he has spent his wealth by having a more lordly way of living than his moderate income allowed him. Therefore, he has incurred heavy debts because of his youth and extravagance. This proves that Bassanio is a spendthrift.

Extract - 7

(i) What is meant by, 'fair speechless messages 'and' nothing undervalued'?

(ii) Who are Cato and Brutus? Why are they referred to here?

(iii) What evidence is there in the passage to show that Portia's fame had spread throughout the world?

(iv) Explain in your own words the meaning and significance of the 'golden fleece' which Jason sought in Colchos.

Answers:

(i) 'Fair speechless messages' mean glances which are silent messages of love. Bassanio wants to say that sometimes he received from Portia's eyes lovely silent messages. The words 'nothing undervalued' mean not less precious. Bassanio says that his Portia is no less precious than Cato's daughter.

(ii) Cato, the father of Brutus' wife Portia, was the great-grandson of the famous Cato, the Censor. They are referred to show that Portia of Belmont is as precious and great as Cato's daughter, Portia.

(iii) The passage says that Portia's fame had spread throughout the world as suitors from every part of the world come to Belmont to win her hand in marriage.

(iv) Jason was a Greek hero, who was sent by Pelias, his uncle who had usurped the throne, to fetch the golden fleece from Colchos. In Greek mythology, golden fleece is referred to as the fleece of the winged ram Chrysomallos. It was kept at an oak tree in a grove sacred to god Ares and guarded by a dragon in Colchos. Bassanio compares Portia to the golden fleece and himself in his quest for Portia, to Jason on his voyage to fetch the golden fleece. He refers to other suitors as Jasons.

Extract - 8

(i) Why is Antonio unable to help Bassanio at once?

(ii) 'To raise a present sum'. How much was this sum? Why was it urgently?

(iii) What does Antonio instruct Bassanio to do to get a loan?

(iv) Give the meaning of: "That shall be rack'd , even to the uttermost ."

(v) Give any two character traits of Antonio in the scene. How are they different from the character trait of Bassanio?

Answers:

(i) Antonio is unable to help Bassanio at once since he has no money in hand as all his business ventures are at sea.

(ii) The sum was three thousand ducats. It was required urgently for Bassanio to go to Belmont and present himself before Portia as a worthy suitor.

(iii) Antonio instructs Bassanio to find out a merchant who is ready to give him money against his name.

(iv) The credit shall be stretched to the utmost limit. Antonio says that he is ready to stretch the credit as far as to equip Bassanio to go to Belmont to woo Portia.

(v) Antonio is introduced in the scene as a rich merchant having many shipping ventures at sea. He is in a state of melancholy and not interested in love. Loyalty and generosity towards Bassanio are the major traits of his character. Compared to Antonio, Bassanio is shown as a spendthrift young gallant, who lives a life of luxury beyond his means. He seems to take undue advantage of Antonio's generosity. Unlike Antonio, he is a romantic man, who wants to marry Portia, a rich and beautiful heiress from Belmont.