

mechanism, by interweaving them closely and intricately, and by throwing the four chief personages into physical, mental, and moral relief.

The unity of action is accentuated by the coherence of place and time. The place is either in Venice or at Belmont, twenty miles apart (III, iv, 550). The three months slip imperceptibly away. As soon as Bassanio chooses the casket, we are reminded that the time has flown. We look backward and find pleasure in tracing its actual flight.

In I, i, 70, 71, Lorenzo says to Bassanio—

At dinner-time,
I pray you, have in mind where we must meet.

Again, in line 105 of the same scene—

“Well, we will leave you then till dinner-time.”

At the close of the scene, Antonio says—

“Go, presently inquire, and so will I,
Where money is.”

Since Bassanio goes at once, and his efforts are recorded in the third scene of the first act, it follows that the first act concludes before dinner on the same day. Dinner was served at 11 a.m. in Elizabethan England.

Since I, ii, is dovetailed between the first and the third, it is dramatic economy to suppose that the second scene takes place at Belmont while the first scene is taking place in Venice. Moreover, by a kind of telepathy, Bassanio and Portia are thinking fondly of each other. At the close of the second scene, we learn that Morocco is expected that night.

The first scene of the second act takes place before dinner (line 44) on the following day. In II, vii, Morocco chooses; *i.e.*, after dinner on that day, the second day of the play. The scenes between the first and the seventh are all after dinner. See II, 234, III, 239, IV, 254, 261, V, 303, VI, 411.

The eighth scene of the second act is the third day of the play, the day after Jessica's elopement.

Before the ninth scene of the second act, three months all but two weeks transpire. Those ten weeks are necessary to have Antonio's ships miscarry, to give time for Tubal's search for Jessica, and to allow Bassanio to purchase “gifts of rich value”—gifts that surpass those of all princely rivals.