

THE LITERARY CLUB

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Studying a Play

In studying a play it is important to remember that it was written to be played, that it was intended to be presented and acted upon the stage. The poet or the novelist may tell us his story while we sit around in an imaginary circle and listen; he may take us into his confidence and explain the peculiarities of his characters, but the dramatist must create his characters, set them before us, and let them act out the story while he remains invisible or even unthought of.

The events of the dramatic action must be the natural outcome of the innate character of the persons concerned in that action. The deed must be consistent with the personality of the actor.

What the student will find in a play will depend largely upon what he is looking for; a play may be considered:—

1. As a form of amusement; it may be read, studied or listened to with no further thought than the pleasure of the passing moment.

2. It may be considered as one of the forms of poetry, and the poetic qualities and devices carefully traced out.

3. It may be taken as an exposition of the philosophy of the dramatist; his views on the conduct of life, religion and politics may be traced.

4. The description and delineation of character is important. The persons of the play should be to us real and live and we should try to become acquainted with their motives of action.

5. The play may serve as a basis for the study of language and rhetoric.

6. It may be an exemplification of national characteristics or types.

7. It may be considered as a work of dramatic art, its structure and arrangement considered, the efficiency of character portrayal discussed.

All these points may be considered, but above everything the student should strive to get a thorough knowledge of the story and the relation of its various parts, a close acquaintance with the characters, and a complete understanding of every word and passage.

The Merchant of Venice

LESSON I—ACT I.

Before beginning a detailed study of the play read a synopsis of the story in your text-book, or in Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. Then read the first act carefully, making use of explanatory notes and dictionary to get the meaning of difficult words and passages.

The first act introduces the principal characters of the play, and the motive of the stories of the bond and the caskets; consequently, there is little "action." The sadness of Antonio is a presentiment of coming

misfortune and paves the way for the subsequent tragic developments. A few prominent points in the character of Antonio, Bassanio, Shylock and Portia, are brought out. We understand fully Shylock's plan of revenge.

Note the change to prose in Scene II, because of the minor importance, not of Portia, but of Portia's suitors. This scene introduces the story of the caskets. The use of prose in Scene III, may be accounted for by the feeling exhibited, the badgering spirit of Shylock. These two portions are in comic vein.

The introduction of the "Aside," Scene III, gives us the information from Shylock's own lips as to why he hated Antonio. The attempt of Shylock to justify his practice of usury, gives us a clearer insight into his standpoint and enables us to understand better his attitude toward Antonio. Note the feeling of the age toward the Jewish race, as exhibited in the spirit of Antonio's replies.

The passages in this Act which should be memorized are lines 79-104, 140-176, Scene 3; 92-115, Scene III. Do not fail to be able to quote perfectly Bassanio's description of Portia.

The following questions are intended to help you in your study of the play. With careful attention you should be able to answer them:—

1. What is the feeling of Antonio? (Scene I.)
2. Do you consider Salanio and Salanio good comforters? If not, why not?
3. What difference do you notice between Gratiano and Salanio?
4. Who are Janus, Nestor, Cato, Brutus?
5. What is the rhetorical figure in "bottom"?
6. Why Bassanio in difficulties?
7. What was the feeling between Antonio and Bassanio?
8. What was the proviso about the caskets?
9. Who were Portia's suitors, and what were the prominent traits of character of each?
10. What was Portia's feeling toward Bassanio? Why introduced here?
11. To what does Shylock refer in speaking of the Nazirite?
12. What is brought out about Shylock in the fact that he had to secure money from Tubal to make the loan?
13. How do you account for so kindly

a man as Antonio speaking so harshly to Shylock?

14. Bassanio says "You shall not read to such a bond," and again, "I like not fair terms," etc. What point of his character is brought out by this?
15. How many scenes in Act I.
16. Who are the characters (Act I.)
17. What is the purpose accomplished by each scene?
18. What were the reasons given by Shylock for his hatred of Antonio?
19. Why did Antonio dislike Shylock?
20. What are the peculiarities of language exhibited throughout this act?
21. What was the story of the "Golden Pile?"
22. Why is prose introduced?
23. What is the function of the "Aside"?
24. What is the substance of Gratiano's speech to Antonio?
25. What were the provisions of the bond?

EXERCISE ONE—MERCHANT OF VENICE.

1. Describe briefly the character of each of Portia's suitors?
2. State, in a few paragraphs, what this act contributes toward the development of the play.
3. Give in your own words Bassanio's speech, "Tis not unknown to you . . . to get clear of all the debts I owe."
4. Write explanatory notes on: Rialto, doit, galleons, wealthy Andrew, Nestor, msa.
5. What is the use of the "Aside" in drama?

Prize for best list of answers—a copy of "Life of Shakespeare."

Preparing an Argument

Preparation is the secret of success in debating. When your topic is chosen, set to work to find out all you possibly can about it. Get books, magazines, newspaper articles on it, and jot down the different points you find. Talk with anyone who knows anything about the subject and keep track of any ideas you get.

After collecting all possible material, arrange it carefully, under different points. Have plenty of examples, illustrations and facts to back up your statements. Study both sides of the question. Try to find out your opponent's arguments and be ready to answer them.

Don't depend on the spur of the moment. Practice your speeches beforehand. Divide up the points on your side among the different speakers, letting one speaker attend principally to certain points, another to others.

Arrange all your points in logical order, keeping the strongest point for



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