

Act III, scene ii – lines 114 - 165

Bassanio:

What find I here?

115 Fair Portia's counterfeit! What demi-god
Hath come so near creation? Move these eyes?
Or whether riding on the balls of mine
Seem they in motion? Here are severed lips
Parted with sugar breath; so sweet a bar
120 Should sunder such sweet friends. Here in her hairs
The painter plays the spider, and hath woven
A golden mesh t'entrap the hearts of men
Faster than gnats in cobwebs. But her eyes-
How could he see to do them? Having made one,
125 Methinks it should have power to steal both his
And leave itself unfurnished. Yet look how far
The substance of my praise doth wrong this shadow
In underprizing it, so far this shadow
Doth limp behind the substance. Here's the scroll,
130 The continent and summary of my fortune.

[He reads]

'You that choose not by the view
Chance as fair, and choose as true.
Since this fortune falls to you,
Be content and seek no new.
135 If you be well pleased with this,
And hold your fortune for you bliss,
Turn you where your lady is,
And claim her with a loving kiss.'

140 A gentle scroll! Fair lady, by your leave,
I come by note to give, and to receive.
Like one of two contending in a prize
That thinks he hath done well in people's eye,
Hearing applause and universal shout,
Giddy in spirit, still gazing in a doubt,
145 Whether those peals of praise be his or no-
So, thrice-fair lady, stand I even so,
As doubtful whether what I see be true,
Until confirmed, signed, ratified by you.

Portia:

150 You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
Such as I am. Though for myself alone
I would not ambitious in my wish
To wish myself much better, yet for you
I would be trebled twenty times myself,
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
155 More rich, that only to stand high in your account
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
Exceed account. But the full sum of me
Is sum of something: which to term in gross
Is an unlesioned girl, unschooled, unpractised;
160 Happy in this she is not yet so old
But she may learn; happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn
Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed
165 As from her lord, her governor, her king.

Comment [KH1]: Preponderance of ? suggests overwhelming emotion

Comment [KH2]: Hyperbole – exaggerates her beauty and his joy – combines with repetition of sweet and other positive phrases to flatter Portia and create a sense of romance and love. Also picks out theme of gods / mythology from elsewhere – e.g. Morocco which earlier we viewed as arrogant

Comment [KH3]: Separation words – definite negative connotations. Perhaps related to the fact they will shortly be separated, or A. and B. are separated. Such sweet friends may refer to A. and B.

Comment [KH4]: Positive images – her eyes stealing the painter's eyes, entrapped hearts suggest her beauty – however negative undertone relating to theme of bondage, and relations of control within love, also connotations of ownership and crime. Reinforcing power relations theme and foreshadowing later announcement of Shylock's successful entrapment of Antonio

Comment [KH5]: Related to appearance / true worth theme – praising the painting more than the thing itself – although Bassanio does choose value over looks he will later be fooled by the appearance of Portia dressed as a boy.

Comment [KH6]: Motif – representing bonds, ownership, control – this is the 'deed' that signs Portia over to Bassanio.

Comment [KH7]: Words to do with money and wealth are found interspersed throughout this scene – suggesting an interaction between love and wealth. Prize and claim are key words showing women as commodities. Fortune is obviously ambiguous and links once again to the theme of fate

Comment [KH8]: Fair – again ambiguous – beautiful, white skinned and equal or just. Positive and negative connotations – women must be beautiful to succeed in society, we have already seen some sense of white superiority in scenes with Morocco – it also foreshadows attempt to be just and fair as the lawyer defending Antonio. However, how fair is she to Shylock? The law she uses against him is in itself racist – no 'alien' may seek the life of a Venetian. Portia is indeed thrice fair – beautiful, pale and just.

Comment [KH9]: Chance / fortune / fate vs choice and free will and men in charge of their own destiny. Contradictory ideas so close together suggests the uneasy balance in Shakespeare's time between concepts of fate and free will.

Comment [KH10]: Many possessive pronouns – imply that there is a definite relationship of ownership in this scene, especially your lady and your fortune!

Comment [KH11]: Imperative phrase – underlining the power that bonds have

Comment [KH12]: He is still asking permission here – Portia still has strength

Comment [KH13]: Again reinforcing the power of paper documents as symbols of deeds / laws / agreements and their power over people

Comment [KH14]: Again sense of getting / ownership

Comment [KH15]: Sound and disorientation words – combined with the presence of generally positive words to create sense of romance, love, shock, happy moment, etc

Comment [KH16]: Language of bonds and contracts

Comment [KH17]: Portia sees herself as being unworthy – having to better herself

Comment [KH18]: Notice how we have moved from a sense of bewilderment, wonder and romance indicated by the yellow at the beginning of the scene to one where issues of monetary value are beginning to dominate.

Comment [KH19]: Repetition of three negations undermining Portia, a character we know has personal strength, now that she has a husband

Comment [KH20]: Words to do with rank and power underline the power structures in society which are reflected here and 'her lord' the theme of ownership. It is significant that she is 'happiest of all' about this