

## Portia

### CHARACTER PORTIA

Among the heroines created by Shakespeare Portia occupies a high position.

Quick-witted, wealthy, and beautiful, Portia embodies the virtues that are typical of Shakespeare's heroines—it is no surprise that she emerges as the antidote to Shylock's malice. We see Portia as a virtuous, honest, young woman, somewhat playful and with a sense of humour.

At the beginning of the play however, we do not see Portia's potential for initiative and resourcefulness, as she is a near prisoner, feeling herself absolutely bound to follow her father's dying wishes. She says "By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aware of this great world". This opening appearance, however, proves to be a revealing introduction to Portia, who emerges as that rarest of combinations—a free spirit who abides rigidly by rules. Rather than ignoring the stipulations of her father's will, she watches a stream of suitors pass her by, happy to see these particular suitors go, but sad that she has no choice in the matter. When Bassanio arrives, however, Portia proves herself to be highly resourceful, begging the man she loves to stay a while before picking a chest.

Portia is a lady with a cheerful and optimistic disposition. She has a strong sense of humour which continues throughout the play. The ring episode and the way she speaks about every suitor brings out her humorous aspect. Portia also shows her wisdom at various points in the play. For instance, she says "It is a good divine that follows his own instructions" She also says nothing is good if not seen in right perspective. At one time in the play she says "How far that little candle throws his beams / so shines a good deed in this world." But her wisdom comes out in a most striking manner in the trial scene where she defeats Shylock.

She has a compassionate nature. Her famous 'quality of mercy' speech is its example. "The quality of mercy is not strained" "It droppeth as a gentle rain from heaven". But we should not forget that she herself forgets her own plea of mercy when she allows the conversion of Shylock to Christianity. But she shows a great deal of knowledge, creativity and intelligence in the court scene.

Thus we see Portia as a virtuous, honest young woman, somewhat playful and with a sense of humour. These all qualities make her a memorable character.