

Portia urges Bassanio to delay before choosing. She could tell him how to choose correctly, but she must not break her oath of secrecy.

1 Portia: the first sign of nerves? (in pairs)

After a scene of hate, a scene of love, one which is also exceptionally rich in imagery. (You will find more activities and information on imagery on pp. 180–2.)

This third casket scene reveals how very differently Portia treats Bassanio from her other suitors. Until this scene, Portia has appeared as a composed, confident, even arrogant young woman, but what she says to Bassanio in lines 1–24 lacks her usual assurance and self-control.

- a Read the lines aloud, taking turns to share them between you in any way you feel appropriate. Afterwards, talk together about how an actor in this speech might bring out Portia’s feelings for Bassanio. Is Portia’s hesitant and ambiguous style how someone in love speaks?
- b List the differences between the way she thinks about and treats Bassanio and her attitude towards her earlier suitors.

2 Should women keep quiet? (in small groups)

In line 8 Portia seems to be saying that a woman should keep her feelings of love to herself: she can think of them, but not express them, perhaps leaving the man to take the initiative. Talk about what this remark adds to your understanding of how women are expected to behave in Venice and Belmont. In your discussion, also consider whether opinions like this are still expressed today, and how you feel about such views.

trains attendants
tarry wait
forbear be patient
but it . . . love I’m not saying I love you
Hate . . . quality hate doesn’t make you feel like that
And yet . . . thought girls must keep their feelings to themselves

I am forsworn I’ve broken a promise
Beshrew curse (playfully)
naughty bad (naughty had a much stronger meaning in Shakespeare’s time)
peize slow down
eche add to
election choosing

Act 3 Scene 2

Belmont The great hall of Portia’s house

Enter BASSANIO, PORTIA, GRATIANO, NERISSA, and all their trains

PORTIA I pray you tarry, pause a day or two
 Before you hazard, for in choosing wrong
 I lose your company; therefore forbear a while.
 There’s something tells me, but it is not love,
 I would not lose you; and you know yourself 5
 Hate counsels not in such a quality.
 But lest you should not understand me well –
 And yet a maiden hath no tongue but thought –
 I would detain you here some month or two 10
 Before you venture for me. I could teach you
 How to choose right, but then I am forsworn.
 So will I never be. So may you miss me;
 But if you do, you’ll make me wish a sin,
 That I had been forsworn. Beshrew your eyes!
 They have o’erlooked me and divided me: 15
 One half of me is yours, the other half yours –
 Mine own, I would say: but if mine then yours,
 And so all yours. O these naughty times
 Puts bars between the owners and their rights!
 And so though yours, not yours. Prove it so, 20
 Let Fortune go to hell for it, not I.
 I speak too long, but ’tis to peize the time,
 To eche it, and to draw it out in length,
 To stay you from election.

Act 3 Scene 2 - Portia's Love