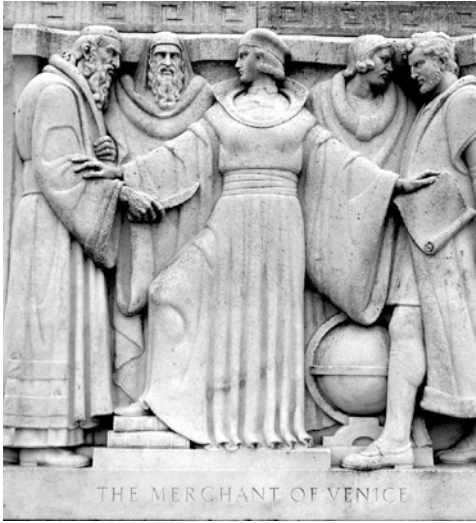


Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*: Portia's Speech



In Shakespeare's comedy *The Merchant of Venice*, the merchant Antonio has taken a loan from the money-lender Shylock who dislikes him very much. The terms of the loan say that if Antonio does not pay the loan back on time, Shylock may take a pound of Antonio's flesh which would certainly disable, if not kill, Antonio. Antonio loans the money in turn to his friend Bassanio so Bassanio may marry Portia. As the play progresses, Bassanio can't repay Antonio. Antonio does miss the loan deadline, and Shylock demands the pound of flesh.

Antonio appeals to the Duke of Venice, who refers the case to court. Portia disguises herself as a man and presents herself to the court as a lawyer in order to defend Antonio. Below is part of her speech to Shylock.

The Merchant of Venice

by William Shakespeare

Act IV, Scene 1

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself...

Answer the questions below

1. What is the simile in the speech?

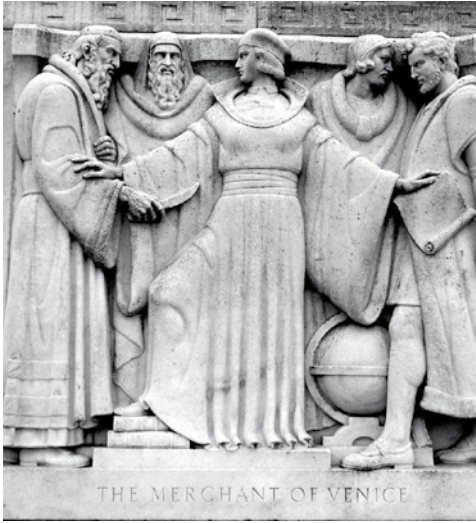
2. Why is mercy "twice blest"?

3. What does it mean mercy is not "strain'd"?

4. Where is mercy "enthroned"?

5. Which does Portia say is more important: the "sceptre" or mercy?

Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice: Portia's Speech



In Shakespeare's comedy *The Merchant of Venice*, the merchant Antonio has taken a loan from the money-lender Shylock who dislikes him very much. The terms of the loan say that if Antonio does not pay the loan back on time, Shylock may take a pound of Antonio's flesh which would certainly disable, if not kill, Antonio. Antonio loans the money in turn to his friend Bassanio so Bassanio may marry Portia. As the play progresses, Bassanio can't repay Antonio. Antonio does miss the loan deadline, and Shylock demands the pound of flesh.

Antonio appeals to the Duke of Venice, who refers the case to court. Portia disguises herself as a man and presents herself to the court as a lawyer in order to defend Antonio. Below is part of her speech to Shylock.

Student's choice; correct answers should reference the following:
Answer the questions below

The Merchant of Venice

by William Shakespeare

Act IV, Scene 1

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself...

1. What is the simile in the speech?

1. Mercy is like a gentle rain from heaven.

2. Why is mercy "twice blest"?

**It blesses two times: those who give
mercy, and those who receive mercy.**

3. What does it mean mercy is not "strain'd"?

**Mercy can't be forced or demanded; it
must be given freely.**

4. Where is mercy "enthroned"?

In the heart (alternately, in kings' hearts)

5. Which does Portia say is more important: the "sceptre" or mercy?

Mercy