

How does Shakespeare utilise clever female characters in *The Merchant of Venice*?

S — Statement: Shakespeare utilises female characters to challenge the belief that women are less intelligent and powerful than men.

T — Textual Grounding: In William Shakespeare's comedy *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia disguises herself as a male lawyer and enters the courtroom to prevent Shylock from taking a pound of Antonio's flesh.

A — Analysis: Portia declares, "This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood." Shakespeare's **legal diction** in "bond" and the precise phrase "no jot" show Portia carefully examining the exact wording of the agreement. She discovers that Shylock may take Antonio's flesh but cannot spill his blood. Portia's ability to understand and control the law presents her as more intelligent than the men in the courtroom. However, her male disguise shows that a woman must appear to be a man before society will respect her knowledge and authority. Shakespeare therefore exposes the unfair limits placed on women while celebrating their intelligence and courage.

R — Relate: Through Portia, Shakespeare utilises female characters to challenge male authority and present women as intelligent and powerful problem-solvers.

Complete paragraph

Shakespeare utilises female characters to challenge the belief that women are less intelligent and powerful than men. In William Shakespeare's comedy *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia disguises herself as a male lawyer and enters the courtroom to prevent Shylock from taking a pound of Antonio's flesh. Portia declares, "This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood." Shakespeare's **legal diction** in "bond" and the precise phrase "no jot" show Portia carefully examining the exact wording of the agreement. She discovers that Shylock may take Antonio's flesh but cannot spill his blood. Portia's ability to understand and control the law presents her as more intelligent than the men in the courtroom. However, her male disguise shows that a woman must appear to be a man before society will respect her knowledge and authority. Shakespeare therefore exposes the unfair limits placed on women while celebrating their intelligence and courage. Through Portia, Shakespeare utilises female characters to challenge male authority and present women as intelligent and powerful problem-solvers.