

Can shylock be
described as a victim
or villain essay
sample



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In the play Shylock seems that he only cares about himself. He speaks as though his riches are all he needs and loves. Most of the characters in the play seem to look at Shylock like they are better than him because in a sense he is different because of his religion. He is treated like this because in Elizabethan times there were very few Jews or no Jews so people didn't take them seriously because they didn't 'understand' them so they were viewed as figures of fun. When it was written and the first people to watch the play would have seen Shylock as more of a villain because they didn't accept him.

More recent audiences would look at both points because racism and Ethnic minorities are more common nowadays and there are more of different races and religions. The law also favoured Christians over Jews so it must have been a very difficult life to live there and be an ethnic minority. Shakespeare seeks to challenge the view of the Elizabethans who believed that Christians were always right and the Jews were always wrong. Shylock shows both villainous and victimised actions, he shows this throughout many parts in the play. The play is set in Venice and it is known for its strong naval control.

The Jews were hated so much because they were known for their money lending and charging interest, which the Christians were not allowed to do, Jews were not allowed to own land or participate in most trade in England so money lending was the only option and they exploited it to the full. In Venice the Jews were excluded from the city centre so they lived round the outside of the city. In the play Venice is depicted as a wealthy and desirable place to be because of the trade routes crossing through carrying wonders from the east by land and from the west by sea.

In Venice Jews were made to wear special clothes to make them stand out so if someone was so against Jews they could stay clear of them. I believe that Shakespeare shows Shylock in the right perspective, I feel that he is more of a Villain in the very first part of the play as the first line he says is " Three thousand ducats" this shows that all he thinks about is his money. Usually you get a sense of the characters family or background before you find out their part in the play, in a way this prepares us for what is to come.

At the beginning of the play we see Antonio as a kind and loyal man, as we do Shylock, but as the play carries on we see him, as we do Shylock, show his more villainous side. When Antonio and Shylock meet it is slightly awkward, in a way they are fairly civilized but also make some vicious remarks and actions. Antonio's perception of Shylock is that he is a " devil, an evil soul. " Both Shylock and Antonio make how they feel about each other known to the audience and other characters. Shylock says " I hate him for he is a Christian. "

We start to feel sorry for Shylock when in Act 1, scene 3 line 103. He tells Antonio what names he has been called " misbeliever" " Cut-throat dog" and has been spat upon. Bassanio and Antonio see Shylock as a fool because his ships come in a month before the day the money needs to be paid. We now see Shylock, as a villain because he has asked for a pound of Antonio's flesh if the money isn't paid. The flesh is no good to Shylock but he has done it out of hatred for Antonio as he would much rather see Antonio die than to have his money back.

Jessica goes away with Lorenzo and Shylock loses a daughter and a servant. In Act 2, scene 5 the audience feel for Shylock when he says ' My daughter is my flesh and blood' when he says this he means that now his daughter has gone he feels like a part of him as gone to. He then overshadows this when Solanio reveals that in the streets he utters " my daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! Only Christian ducats! " Once again he brings in the matter of riches and loses the audience's pity because he is saying his properties have more value than his daughter's life.

Shylock's losses make the audience feel sorry for Shylock because they don't know that he said the above caption until later in the play. These losses make Shylock hate Antonio even more and make him bitter. When Shylock makes his speech once he has found out about the ships in act 3 scene 1, we see him as a villain as in the first 3 lines as he talks about how he wants revenge over Antonio, the speech then carries on to show why he wants revenge on Antonio because he explains his true feelings.

What's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons" It is as though Shylock has been keeping this all locked up and then let it out all in one go, he is trying to say that we all eat the same food and all have the same emotions and just because they are of different religions it doesn't mean they are different.

In lines 83-85 the audience feel a great hatred towards Shylock as he says " I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear" he would be portrayed by this as a very selfish man because the way it is said

he would rather have his jewels back than his daughter. Each event makes us grow in hatred for him. In Act 3 scene 3, before the trial Shylock's speeches are fairly long, poetic and he keeps repeating " My bond. " This scene shows that Shylock doesn't like to break a promise and he is desperate to get revenge on Antonio as he dominates most of the scene.

On line 7 " But since I am a dog, beware my fangs" this is saying I have been victimized but I can bite back. In this scene Antonio is more civilized towards Shylock " Hear me yet, good Shylock. " Shylock doesn't want to be taken for a fool so he tells it how it is and tries to tell Antonio that he is not a fool. Antonio suspects that Shylock wants him dead because he has paid the debts of many of Shylock's clients. He feels that the duke must uphold the law of Venice, and so is resigned to death.

Act 4 scene 1 is Shylock's only chance for revenge of how he has been treated all his life, even before the trial starts the court were bias against Jews and Shylock, he is being judged in a Christian court not in a court of law. When Portia reveals the twist in the bond Shylock realises he has no chance, Antonio could have had him killed but lets Shylock keep half his wealth and Antonio will invest the rest. Antonio also says that Shylock will have to turn into a Christian and leave all his possessions in a will to Lorenzo and Jessica.

I find in the whole of this scene that Shylock has been turned into the victim. When Shylock leaves the stage I don't think that the audience will believe he got what he deserved but still has his life to live, because he has been turned into the very person that he hates, a Christian. In the first part of the

play we are lead to believe that Shylock is only human, he can be villainous and he can be a victim. As the play went on I changed my mind, I felt that Shylock was mistreated by the Christians in the courtroom.

He was humiliated in court and had been driven to insanity from the torment and prejudice throughout his whole life; this has led him to misfortune and bitterness. The one thing that he feared the most was being turned into a Christian and it happened; now I think his life will be ruined by all the other Christians. When reading the play I felt gripped by the array of emotions and the way Shakespeare lets you make up your own mind whether Shylock is a victim or villain. Overall, I think that Shylock is more of a victim than a villain, although he can be portrayed as being both throughout the play.