

Merchant of venice act 1 scene 3

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Bassanio, a gentle nobleman with financial difficulties wishes to compete and woo a girl named Portia; a wealthy heiress from Belmont. Unfortunately, he does not have any money, so he seeks for help from his very good and trustworthy friend Antonio (the Merchant of Venice) to help him carry out such a task. Antonio agrees, but, because all his assets are tied up at sea, he will have to use his recognitions and praise from other businessmen in Venice to get the money for his friend. Antonio and Bassanio go to Shylock, a Jewish moneylender and an enemy of Antonio. Shylock agrees to lend them 3000 ducats, but only if Antonio will sign a bond. The bond will consist of Shylock taking a pound of Antonio's flesh; the flesh would be of Shylocks choice.

In a nut shell, Act 1 Scene 3 of the play, 'The Merchant of Venice' is focused on the relationship between the Merchant of Venice Antonio and a Jewish money-lender Shylock.

Before the meeting of Shylock and Antonio, the audience already have an idea of some of the conflicts going on between them. They expect Antonio and Shylock to have differences because of their religions. During the Elizabethan times Christians despised the Jews. This is because Christians believed that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, due to this reason Jews were not allowed to do anything, they were not allowed to get work and they were not allowed to mix socially with anyone. They were only allowed to be moneylenders.

During this period of time, England was a Christian populated country. The Jews were treated as second class citizens; they were not allowed to own

properties, have proper jobs and they had to wear unique clothing. Jews had to wear a skull cap, this was coloured red and it represented the blood of Jesus Christ.

Shakespeare presented Shylock and Antonio as extreme stereotypes of their respective religions. As a result of this the audience already expect Shylock to be the villain of the play. The audience also expect Shylock to be very cunning, smart, resourceful, and mean with money and a very proud Jew. These were the common stereotypes of a typical Jew. On the other hand the audience would also expect Antonio to be kind, generous, honest, and loyal to his friends. They would also expect him to be smart as he is a money lender. The audience would be cheering for Antonio even though they have not heard the plot of the play yet.

When Shylock is first introduced to the audience, the subject of his conversation is to do with money; 'three thousand ducats'. This already indicates to the audience that he is money driven. When Shylock was pondering on whether to lend Bassanio the money, he repeats himself a lot. He repeats the words 'well' at the end of each of his first couple of sentences. Shylock probably did this to evade giving a direct answer to Bassanio's pleas so he can weigh up his options. This might suggest to the audience that Shylock is a very thoughtful man and he is smart, he likes to take his time and assess what is going on around him before making any hasty decisions. Shylock also repeats the words 'three thousands ducats and three months' a couple of times. He was probably trying to get a message across to the audience that probably had something to do with the length of

the deal and the amount of money involved. This piece of information becomes more important as the play goes on. So far the audience are right about Shylock, he is smart, cunning and very shrewd with money and he will not do anything unless he gets a profit out of it.

Later on in the scene, Shylock says that 'Antonio is a good man', this implying that Antonio is good to gamble on. He then goes on to state, " he hath an argosy bound to Tripoli and another to the Indies'. This shows that he is very knowledgeable about Antonio and what his dealings are.

Shylock is very cautious about trading ventures with Antonio. He says " but ships are but boards, sailors but men". This proves that he measures every angle before making risky decisions. This is however completely opposite to Antonio. Antonio is supposed to be smart but he acts too quickly. He doesn't wait to think about the situation that he is in. An example to this was when Antonio was in discussions with Shylock. When Shylock says that if Antonio cannot pay back the money he borrowed, a pound of his flesh is to be taken off his skin. Instead of Antonio thinking that it might be a set up or something may happen on sea to his ships, he doesn't, he instead swiftly says yes to the deed.

Throughout Act 1 scene 3 of the 'Merchant of Venice', both Bassanio and Antonio often seem naive in contrast to Shylock. Antonio is more naive in relation to Shylock. Shylock has something both Antonio and Bassanio want and that is 'money'. Both Antonio and Bassanio think that they should get the loan of the money, but neither one of them really understand Shylock's nature and what he is capable of.

Just before Antonio and Shylock talk for the first time on stage, Shylock gets a very long 'aside', (This is when the character is on part of the stage by him or herself and tells the audience what their intentions are) in which he says, "How like a fawning publican he looks". What Shylock meant by that was, Antonio is a slimy idiot. During 'the aside' Shylock also tells the audience his top reasons for hating Antonio.

Shylock's number one reason for hating Antonio was that he is a 'Christian'. This confirms the fact that this conflict going on between both men had something to do with religion. The second reason why Shylock hated Antonio was that "He lends out money gratis". This implies that Antonio lends out money interest free. Shylock also says he "brings down the rate of usance here with us in Venice". This means that Antonio brings down the rate of interest. Shylock hates Antonio for this reason because that is the only way he is allowed to make money. The religious conflicts between both men have meant Shylock can only gain money by being a business man.

As Shylock's 'Aside' draws to a close, he indicates what he would like to do to Antonio; he says "if I catch him once upon the hip, I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him". What Shylock is trying to say is that, if he is able to catch Antonio out, he will take full advantage of the bitterness that he holds against him. He then closes his speech by referring to religion. He says that "curs'd be my tribe if I forgive him". Shylock means if he was to in anyway or form forgive Antonio about their past disagreements, then his religion should be cursed. This emphasizes how much Shylock hates Antonio because he is

willing his whole religion be cursed because of a stupid disagreement that he has with a rival.

An actor playing Shylock would probably deliver the lines when Shylock uses 'well' a lot by stroking his beard and scratching his head. This would suggest to the audience that, Shylock is thinking and is scheming something as he talks to Bassanio. He may also probably deliver his lines talking to himself a lot because as a Jew he does not relate himself very well to Christians.

Overall, I think that William Shakespeare has presented Shylock in the opening of the play to be a tactically astute man. This is littered all over the scene. An example of this was when Bassanio came to Shylock for help. He could easily have said yes or no to Bassanio but he waits and he ponders on how he can make the situation as much of an advantage as possible to him. During the play, Shylock can also be seen as a very proud Jew. He proves this by saying he will not do anything that his religion pursues him not to do. He also proves this by continually wearing his religious clothing like his gabardine and his skull cap even though it has been repeatedly spat at. The conflicts that happen later in the play are due to the fact that both Shylock and Antonio are proud of their respective religions.

When Shylock says " I hate him for he is a Christian", this would make the audience hate Shylock more as he is been disrespectful to Christians. The majority of the people in the crowd would be Christians. Shylock's declaration of his hatred for Antonio immediately intensifies the play; the audience now wait to see in what way he will be able to catch Antonio " upon the hip" and " feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him."

The meeting of Shylock and Antonio has tongue in cheek annoyance for the audience, who have just heard Shylock's opinion of Antonio. Putting Shylock's views of Antonio aside, he speaks to him with great respect during the negotiations. He says " Rest you fair, good signor! Your worship was the last man in our mouths." Shylock is treating him with great admiration but really insulting him. This is described as dramatic irony. When the audience knows what is going on but the character doesn't. The audience would find Shylock two faced because before he meets Antonio, he talks very harshly about Antonio and now he is acting differently before him.

Not very long after the beginning of their conversation, there is quickly a debate between Antonio and Shylock on the subject of usury, (or the taking of interest on a loan). This is a chance for Shylock to get an edge over Antonio. Shylock and Antonio both have different attitudes towards lending money. Antonio lends and borrows money without considering interest, this is proven when Antonio says " albeit I neither lend nor borrow by taking nor by giving of excess". Shylock on the other hand earns his living in the same way but he is much more careful with his money. He collects interest from his loans as that is the only way he can make money. Antonio does not agree with the use of interest because his religion (Christianity) doesn't pursue him to. Shylock in turn tries to persuade Antonio that taking interests is religiously right. He does this by telling a story from the Old Testament. Antonio thinks Shylock is using the bible in a wrong way.

Shylock then goes on to say how Antonio has treated him badly in the 'Rialto'. Shylock says that Antonio " rated him in the rialtos about my monies

and my usances" but " have I borne it with a patient shrug". This implying that Antonio has insulted Shylock about the way he deals in business and that, he Shylock took all the insults without a reply. Shylock also says that Antonio called him a " misbeliever" and " spat" at his " gabardine" and now it appears that Antonio " needs my help", " what shall I say to you". Shylock is basically questioning Antonio and making a mockery of him.

In Shylock's earlier aside (" I'll hate him [Antonio] for he is a Christian"), the audience was inclined to consider Shylock as the " villain" of the play; anyone who hates a man simply because he is a Christian must logically be a villain. Yet now, in this speech, there is much more depth and complications; we are given a most revealing sight of a man who has been a victim, whose obligation of suffering on others is directly related to his own suffering. William Shakespeare is controlling us emotionally; the audience are now reconsidering Shylock's character.

When the audiences first heard what Antonio has been doing and saying to Shylock, they probably would have been very shocked and surprised. The audience are also now beginning to understand Shylock; most of them will probably side with him now that they have heard Shylock's part of the story. The resultant reaction from the audience would be for them to start feeling sympathetic to Shylock. It will also give an understanding as to why Shylock is so much against Antonio.

Antonio does not recognise that he has done anything wrong. He proves this by saying " To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too", this meaning I he had

the chance again he would still spit on Shylock. The audience recognises that he hasn't learnt anything from his past experiences.

When Antonio says " If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not", he is trying to taunt Shylock to see what his reaction would be, but Shylock is too smart, he reverts away from Antonio's remarks by joking offering Antonio a contract to sign. The contract will consist of 'a pound of Antonio's flesh,' this would be of Shylock's choice. This will only happen if Antonio is unable to repay the '3000 ducats within three months'. Antonio stupidly agrees very quickly, he does not consider the risks at all; this tells the audience that he is very confident and very much focused in helping his friend. He is willing to give away a pound of his flesh so he can lend money to a friend.

After Shylock regains control of Antonio, he says that he " would like to be friends" with Antonio. In order for Shylock to make light of the bond, he says " seal me there your single bond" and " in merry sport". However a bond where a pound of a flesh can " be cut off and taken in what part of your body pleaseth me" is not something to be made fun of. Dramatic Irony is continued because clearly, to the audience, Shylock's interest is not only in money, but his revenge of Antonio but Antonio does not realize this, nor does he realize or fully understand the depth of Shylock's hatred of him. He is therefore unable to be persuaded that this bond is dangerous. To him, the bond is merely a " merry bond".

Antonio's comment that " there is much kindness in the Jew" must have infuriated the crowd as they know what Shylock is trying to do but Antonio can't tell what is going on. At this point Antonio might be losing some of the

audiences respect. The audience expect Antonio to be smart and be able to assess and understand what is going on round him, but he isn't able to.

However Bassanio quickly realises the risks involved in the bond and tries to advise Antonio to back off. He says " I'll rather dwell in my necessity". Yet, Antonio in buoyant mood and as confident as ever, insists to Bassanio not to worry. He states " why, fear not, man, I will not forfeit it." Shylock gladly accepts as this is to his advantage. Either way this goes he does not loose. If Antonio's ships arrive he gets his money and if it doesn't he gets a pound of Antonio's flesh.

Overall the audience may respond to Antonio's comments by saying that he is foolhardy. Bassanio as a cautious and a well thought gentleman and Shylock as just plain evil but with good reasons for plotting such evil twisted things against another human.

As the scene ends Antonio uses a rhyiming couplet, " come on, in this there can be no dismay, my ships come home a month before the day." This leaves the audience wanting to know more because they think that Antonio's ships might sink and he thinks that he just got an edge over Shylock. The ending of this scene is like a cliff hanger, it has been put in a way to leave the audience guessing whether everything will turn out alright for Antonio or whether Antonio will be able to pay Shylock back with no problems. The audience would also want to know whether the ships actually get sank or something happens to it on sea and they would want to know what Antonio's reactions are.