

# Merchant of Venice: stereotypes, shakespeare, and you



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Merchant of Venice: Stereotypes, Shakespeare, and You In the play The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare uses a variety of examples to show stereotypes. These examples are both shown for and against the specific stereotype, whatever it may be. This can range from how women were treated, how Jews were treated, and how Christians were treated. These were humorous at the time, but now our society has grown out of that and "matured" itself. Shakespeare reinforces and also critiques the stereotypes of the time in the play, which is one of the reasons it had become so popular. The Jewish community was not treated well in the time of The Merchant of Venice. They were never considered to be citizens of a town, in this case Florence, they were never respected by Christians, and they were forced to wear red hats that showed them that they were separate from the citizens. They are forced to live in the Ghetto, which is just a group of buildings where only Jews live. Solanio and Salerio, both Christians, refer to Shylock as "the dog Jew" which is just Shakespeare saying that they are treated like mutts, which in turn supports the stereotype that Jews were animals (2. 8. 14). Another stereotype was that Jews were greedy. When Jessica, Shylock's daughter, runs away with all of Shylock's money, he is reported to have been running down the street shouting "O my ducats! O my daughter!" (2. 8. 15). This means that he cares about his money equally as he loves his daughter. Then when you look at Jessica, she too is exemplifying stereotypes of thievery, deceit, and of not being sincere. She changes her religion as though she's changing a flat tire, she steals the ring and the money of her father, and she lies to her dad as well! Now, although Shakespeare does put quite a bit of negative content into his writing, he also antagonizes it by challenging those stereotypes. For example, when Shylock found out that <https://assignbuster.com/merchant-of-venice-stereotypes-shakespeare-and-you/>

Jessica had stolen his ring and heard news that she may have had sold it, he was not so worried of the value of the ring, but instead the sentimental meaning behind it. He loves the ring so much for "[he] had it of Leah when [he] was a bachelor. " From this we learn here that he had gotten the ring from his late wife, and that "[he] would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys. " (3. 2. 114-116) Which means that he cares for the ring so much more than its economic value because monkeys were rare pets to have of the time and they were very costly. Additionally, even though Shylock was sad that Jessica ran off with his money, he was still sad that Jessica left. Jessica is also referred as " fair Jessica" by Gratiano, which is also the same term that Portia is described with, which sort of brings them at equal levels. (2. 4. 28) Shakespeare humanizes Shylock and flip-flops the way Jessica is referred to, this brings a new perspective on the Stereotypes and allows for more room for us to decide how we wish to intake the writing and allows us whether we are for or against the stereotypes that are laid out to us. A big stereotype of the time, and even up to times today, are the stereotypes against woman. Shakespeare puts a lot of references to the stereotype that both promotes it and weakens it, most of which have to do with Portia. An example that furthers the stereotype of women being irresponsible to choose for themselves, is that Portia is not allowed to pick her own husband. " the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. "(1. 2. 24-25) Referring to how " it is not in fashion to choose [her] a husband. " (1. 2. 21-22). Even after her father is dead she is still being controlled by him, another stereotype that the woman is always controlled by the man. This could be considered true today but most relationships are equal, and possible that the woman is on top. Shakespeare then, being the great play writer that he is, <https://assignbuster.com/merchant-of-venice-stereotypes-shakespeare-and-you/>

counters that by getting Portia to manipulate the casket test when Bassanio attempts it. She hints to Bassanio that the correct casket is the lead one by saying stuff such as "before you hazard". (3. 2. 2) We know this is a big hint because the lead casket specifically says "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath". (2. 9. 20) This shows that women are at least witty and smart enough to cheat a game with even the strictest rules. In the play *The Merchant of Venice*, written by the great writer Shakespeare, a lot of questionable stereotypes are brought up, like how Christians should be both kind and equal, and they are in this play, to an extent. After they meet that extent they become the exact opposite, cruel and unjust. Shakespeare criticizes and supports these claims as though he is having a debate against himself. This allows us to be able to choose what stereotypes are okay, which are wrong?