

# The merchant of venice report analysis



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Anti-Semitism and the cruel treatment of the Jewish people has been a reality for thousands of years.

In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, one of the characters is the symbol of anti-Semitic feelings that was prevalent in Elizabethan society. Shylock the Jew, one of Shakespeare's more ambiguous and debatable antiheroes, is an isolated character because he is a Jew. Shylock is portrayed as "cheap" and interested only in money and possessions. Jews were seen to have no Christian values like mercy and forgiveness and that is portrayed by Shylock's relentless pursuit of revenge through the blood of a Christian, Antonio.

Even though anti-Semitism in the play seems harsh, there is some sympathy for the Jews. Shylock seems like a heartless creature because of his relentless pursuit of flesh from Antonio. However, Shylock frequently mentions the cruelty he has faced by the Christians, so it is difficult to label just as a natural born monster. Throughout *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is referred to by his name only three times: in the trial scene, Portia identifies Shylock by name once, and the Duke does twice.

During the rest of the play, Shylock is most often called simply "the Jew." In other cases, even the title "Jew" is not used, and Shylock is no longer a man, but a beast. Gratiano belittles Shylock with "O, be thou damned, inexorable dog!" (IV, i, 128) and whose "currish spirit govern'd a wolf" (IV, i, 133-34). These characterizations of Shylock by the Christian characters in the play take away his humanity, religious identity, and lessen him into a being that is sub-human.

Not only is Shylock seen as an animalistic figure by the other characters, but he is also referred to as a demonic creature. In act two, scene two, lines twenty-four through twenty-eight, LauncelotGobbo describes Shylock as “ a kind of devil,” “ the devil himself,” and “ the very devil incarnation.” Even Shylock’s own daughter, Jessica, speaks of his house as “ hell.” Solanio calls Shylock “ the devil . .

. in the likeness of a Jew” (III, i, 19-21) and Bassanio reverberates this belief by describing Shylock as a “ cruel devil” (IV, i, 217). Additionally, Antonio correlates Shylock and the devil by pointing out how Shylock’s arguments emphasize how “ The devil can cite scripture for his purpose” (I, iii, 97-100). Shakespeare has given Shylock so much character and authenticity that it establishes Shylock as one the great dynamic villains of the theatre; a villain who much more than some kind of monster like in earlier dramas. However, it seems comprehensible why Shakespeare contrives Shylock against a social and historical environment that was fiercely malicious towards Jews. Given this tradition of hatred for Jews, it should not be a shock that some of this subject matter would make its way into Shakespeare’s work.

Shakespeare created Shylock within an anti-Semitic culture and therefore bequeathed Shylock with biased anti-Semitic qualities, but that does not discredit the brilliance of the play. Furthermore, it neither implicates that Shakespeare was a barbaric anti-Semite. Shakespeare, like the majority of people in the Elizabethan era, was belligerent toward Jews for cultural and religious reasons, and that animosity comes out most distinctly in Shylock.