

To what extent would
an audience have
sympathy for shylock
essay



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'The Merchant Of Venice' is a Shakespeare play about a Jewish money-lender called Shylock who gives a Christian called Antonio a bond, but only intends to murder him. The play is also focused on the issue of racism in Venice. A modern audience may be more accepting of other cultures because more have become known and we are more aware with education about them taught more in schools. However, a Shakespearean audience would be less accepting because they weren't really taught about them so they didn't recognise them. I am going to look at the play in detail and analyse whether an audience would have sympathy for Shylock or not and why, Then, I will come to a conclusion about the question and be able to give different opinions on why, or why not, people would feel sympathetic towards Shylock.

In act 1, scene 3, Shylock and Bassanio are discussing the bond that he wants to take for Antonio. Shylock says, 'You spurned me such a day another time you called me dog'. This suggests that Shylock has been subjected to some sort of racism in Venice and the audience would have sympathy for him in this way. Shakespeare uses this to try to put the point across that Shylock isn't shown any sympathy by others so why should he show any if he isn't receiving any in return.

Also, he is very aware that Antonio's ship, carrying his money, may never come back so an audience would think he's plotting against him so they would be unsympathetic. In act 2, scene 2, Lancelot says, 'The Jew is the very devil incarnation' and 'I will run, fiend, my heels are at your commandment. I will run'. This suggests that Lancelot doesn't particularly like Shylock and describes him as the devil incarnate.

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This shows that he is expressing his dislike of him quite harshly. The audience would feel sympathetic for Shylock here because Lancelot works for him and he is calling him names behind his back. Also, Lancelot says that he will run which suggests that he wants to stop working for Shylock and go elsewhere. An audience would feel quite sympathetic here because all of this is happening behind his back without him even knowing. Shakespeare uses such quotes from Lancelot as another way of making the audience feel sympathetic towards Shylock.

In act 2, scene 3, Jessica and Lancelot are having a discussion about Shylock. Jessica (Shylock's daughter) says 'What heinous sin is it in me to be ashamed to be my father's child'. An audience would feel very sympathetic towards Shylock here because his own daughter would rather she were no part of his family and wishes she wasn't his daughter. Also, Jessica says, 'If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife, become a Christian and thy loving wife'. This shows that Jessica is planning to run away with a Christian and convert from a Jew to a Christian.

An audience would feel sympathetic towards Shylock here because he thinks a lot of his daughter and she is planning to run away with a man whose religion has been prejudice towards Shylock. Shakespeare uses this as a significant way of making the audience feel sympathetic towards Shylock. In act 2, scene 5, Shylock and Lancelot are talking with Jessica. Shylock says, 'Nor thrust your head into the public street to gaze on Christian fools with varnished faces'. This suggests that Shylock seems to be equally as prejudice as the Christians by showing his dislike for the Christians. An

audience would be unsympathetic towards Shylock here because he is trying to force his daughter to hate Christians.

At the end of the scene, Jessica says to Lancelot, '... if my fortune be not crossed, I have a father, you a daughter lost'. This suggests that she wants to be free from Shylock. Also, the fact that she only says this after her father has left the scene would make the audience feel more sympathetic towards Shylock because all of her hatred for her father is said behind his back.

Shakespeare uses phrases like these to portray Shylock as a character who the audience can feel sorry for and feel hatred for at different intervals.

These quotes portray the issue of prejudice on both sides and the fact that his daughter hates him and is planning to run away from him. In act 2, scene 8, Salarino and Solanio are talking in a street in Venice. Salarino and Solanio are friends to Antonio and Bassanio.

Solanio says, ' As the dog Jew did utter in the streets'. This phrase gives the audience the impression that these people have a strong dislike for Shylock by using ' dog' as a word to describe him. Solanio also says, ' stol'n by my daughter! Justice! Find the girl! She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats! '. In this quote, he is describing what Shylock shouted in the streets after Jessica had stolen her father's possessions.

An audience may feel sorry for Shylock here as Solanio is making fun of him but an audience would also feel unsympathetic for Shylock because he is more concerned about getting his ducats back than his daughter.

Shakespeare uses these quotes to show, possibly, why Antonio's friends

might feel hatred towards Shylock and why some people might feel hatred
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towards the two Christians. In act 3, scene 1, Solanio and Salarino are, again, talking but Shylock is present. Shylock says, ' I am very glad of it. I'll plague him. I'll torture him.

I am glad of it'. He is talking about the news that one of Antonio's ships has sunk. This phrase would make an audience feel unsympathetic towards Shylock because he wants to hurt, and possibly kill, Antonio. At the start of the play, he told Antonio that he would take a pound of flesh as a joke, but in this scene, he is very serious and seems very murderous. Also, in this scene, Tubal says, ' One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey'.

Here, he is describing Lorenzo, who has run away with Jessica and sold the ring she had for a monkey. The audience would feel sympathetic for Shylock here because the man who has run away with Jessica has sold her ring for a monkey. This gives the audience the impression that maybe Lorenzo has only run away with Jessica out of spite towards Shylock or to gain money from her. Shakespeare possibly uses these quotes to express Shylock's sudden hatred for his own daughter and why an audience would feel sympathetic for him because his own daughter has betrayed him.

In act 3, scene 2, towards the end, Bassanio reads a letter from Antonio. He reads, ' my creditors grow cruel' and ' but see you at my death'. These quotes from the letter being read suggest that Antonio is clearly feeling incredible pressure from Shylock and knows that his bond has failed to have been paid on time and is now forfeit. Also, it shows that he feels that Shylock may end his life as a cruel act of revenge. An audience would feel

sympathetic for Antonio and hatred towards Shylock because he fears for his life at this point and this has all been caused by Shylock. Shakespeare uses these quotes as yet another way of emphasising Shylock as an evil man, which the audience should feel unsympathetic towards.

In act 3, scene 3, Shylock, Solanio, Salarino and a jailor are talking in a street in Venice. At this point of the play, Shylock is adamant that he wants his pound of flesh from Antonio and wants to get revenge upon him. Antonio has failed to re-pay the bond and all of his ships have sunk in the seas. Shylock says, 'Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause' and 'I'll not be made a soft and dull-eyed fool'.

These quotes would make an audience feel sorry for Shylock because he has been called a dog by Antonio so why should he have pity on him? Also in the scene, Antonio says, 'He seeks my life, his reason well I know'. This shows that Antonio seems to regret what he's done and knows that Shylock is intending to kill him. An audience may feel unsympathetic for Shylock at this point because he won't accept even twice the bond – he's just interested in getting revenge and getting his pound of flesh. Shakespeare uses these quotes to express contrast between feeling sympathetic for Shylock and feeling hatred for him quickly after.

In act 4, scene 1, Antonio, Bassanio, Gratiano and Solanio are all in a court of justice. Shylock enters at the start of the scene. Shylock says, 'More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing I bear Antonio' and 'hates any man the thing he would not kill?'. These quotes show that Shylock is expressing his

dislike for Antonio by refusing to listen to any pleas for mercy and refusing to accept twice the bond being offered to him.

By refusing to accept twice the bond, he is showing why he is being portrayed as the villain and a man whom the audience should feel unsympathetic towards. Further on in the scene, Shylock says, 'if every ducat in six thousand ducats were in six parts and every part a ducat, I would not draw them'. This almost proves that Shylock will not listen to anything that anyone says. He is determined to get his pound of flesh and exact a cruel act of revenge upon Antonio. An audience would feel unsympathetic towards Shylock here because he bears such a deep hatred for Antonio that he would murder him as revenge. When Portia (dressed as a lawyer) tells Shylock that there is a loophole in the bond, he says, 'give me my principal and let me go'.

This shows that he is prepared to take what he refused if he cannot get what he initially wanted. It also shows that he is a greedy man and is prepared to settle for second best. This would make an audience feel, again, unsympathetic towards Shylock and want justice to be set upon him, not Antonio, and see the villain be brought to justice. At the end of this scene, Shylock fails to get his pound of flesh and loses his faith and ends up being forced to convert religions to Christianity. A Shakespearean audience wouldn't feel sorry for Shylock here because he is being portrayed as the villain and so they would feel glad about this. However, a modern audience would be more sympathetic for Shylock because to lose his faith is very harsh and a modern audience would feel quite sympathetic for him.

Also at the end of this scene, Shylock has to lose half of his wealth to Antonio or he is tried for intention to kill. An audience would feel quite sympathetic for him here because to lose his faith is bad enough but to lose half his wealth on top of this is adding to his loss. A Shakespearean audience would be happy at this outcome because Shylock is getting what he deserves and is feeling what he did to Antonio. Shakespeare uses this outcome possibly for a number of reasons. A Shakespearean audience would've felt that Shylock was going to win the court battle.

He used the outcome to give a surprising element on the audience and make them want to read more about what will happen to him next. Also, to make the audience happy that the villain (Shylock), didn't win and got his comeuppance. In my essay, I have summarised the key points regarding why or why not an audience would feel sympathetic towards Shylock. Many different people would have different opinions on whether they would agree or disagree with Shylock's views. In my opinion, I think that what Shylock was doing was wrong but his reasons for wanting to get revenge were, to a certain degree, justified. He was merely giving Antonio a taste of what it felt to be the subject of hatred and misery.

However, the way that he channelled all this hatred for the Christians onto one man was wrong and he shouldn't have done it. There were other ways he could've sought justice, but not in the way he planned to. In conclusion, I feel that I have concluded the main areas of the play that were crucial to this essay and drawn up a good conclusion about whether and audience may or may not feel sympathetic for Shylock and why they would feel like this.