

The affects of money and religion on antonio and shylock

[Economics](#), [Money](#)



The Affects of Money and Religion on Antonio and Shylock In The Merchant of Venice money plays a huge role in the lives many of its characters, especially the main protagonists Antonio and Shylock. Antonio is shown as the stereotypical generous Christian and Shylock as a stereotypical moneylending Jew, being greedy and living in isolation. In the play money is used as a means of exploring the characters of Antonio and Shylock's religion and inclusion within society. Shylock as a Jewish moneylender, is excluded from Venetian society both because of his religion and his career choice. He is often called "dog" (1. 3. 138) by people who are his equals in terms of wealth and property, like the wealthy merchant Antonio. He internalizes his resentment of his treatment by the Christian Venetians. For example, when we first see Shylock encountering Antonio he says, "I hate him for he is a Christian" (1. 3. 42). Throughout the play Shylock typically begins monologues with an anti-Christian reference or Jewish statement, which shows how aware he is of his different religion and of his isolation from Venetian Society. Shylock is desperate to transcend Venice's anti-Semitic stereotypes by focusing his attentions on acquiring his "pound of Antonio's flesh" (2. 4. 141). In the court scene this reaches a breaking point, as Shylock repeatedly demands for the payment, even when offered sums of money triple the original amount due. Instead the "unlawful" (4. 1. 72) Jew declares, "My deed upon my head! I crave the law, the penalty and forfeit of my bond" (4. 1. 212-213) and his 'craving' of a ruling shows the extent of his desperation. As a Christian gentleman Antonio is the pillar of Venetian Society. He displays generosity by lending out money "gratis" (1. 1. 145) and even gets called "a good man" (1. 3. 11) by his enemy Shylock.

However, Antonio subtly uses his high position to manipulate Shylock. In the court, he manipulates Shylock's love of money to make him agree to "presently become a Christian" (4. 1. 404) instead of losing half his estate. This shows Antonio's intelligence and slyness, turning the Jewish "devil" (1. 3. 19) 'good' appears kind and "merciful" (4. 1. 224) to the Christian onlookers. However, Shylock's Jewish faith allows him to make his living and becoming Christian would leave him without an income. Antonio also insists that Shylock "render it (half his estate) upon his death unto the gentleman that lately stole his daughter" (4. 1. 399-401). This is a huge humiliation to Shylock because his two greatest sources of pride are his money and religion, his daughter leaving him for a Christian and he being forced to give his money to that man it becomes Shylock's greatest punishment. In *The Merchant of Venice* no justice is given to the excluded. Shylock, the excluded Jew becomes an even greater victim as the play progresses. He loses his hope of rising above Venice's anti-Semitic expectations by acquiring his "pound of flesh" (2. 4. 141) and in the process also loses his faith and control of his own money. The included in the play maintain their positions; Antonio is not forced to pay his "bond" and even though the "bond" (4. 1. 307) was legally binding the outcome seemed to be inevitably in his favor. Shakespeare reinforces the power of the included and the powerlessness of excluded using money and religion as his metaphors.