

Analyze the the merchant of venice essay

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The Merchant of Venice is a comedy by William Shakespeare, but it is the serious themes within the play that are most striking for readers and audiences alike. Among all the other themes in The Merchant of Venice, Anti-Semitism is the most notable and controversial.

In the play, William Shakespeare illustrated Anti-Semitism through the character of Shylock, the Jewish moneylender. He was portrayed as greedy, vengeful, and full of hatred. These characteristics made Shylock the most unforgettable character, even overshadowing the play's protagonist Antonio. It was Shakespeare's depiction of Shylock that established the Anti-Semitic perception of the play, as it clearly painted a negative picture of Jewish people.

Within the first three acts of the play, Anti-Semitism is conveyed through Shylock's interaction with the other characters, and his response toward them. One example of this is found in Act 1 Scene 3:

[Aside] How like a fawning publican he looks!

I hate him for he is a Christian,

But more for that in low simplicity (Shakespeare 15)

This is Shylock's reaction upon the arrival of Antonio, who comes to borrow “three thousand ducats” from him (Shakespeare 16). First, Shylock comments on Antonio's appearance. He then directly states his hatred, which is based on Antonio's religion. Through his use of Shylock as example, Shakespeare had shown the aversion of Jews to Christians.

In Act 3 Scene 1, Shylock begins by explaining how Jews and Christians are alike. However, he ends his statement with the justification of his wrongdoings toward Christians: If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction (Shakespeare 51).

Shylock explains that his actions are merely responses to the cruelty of Christians towards him. Thus, he will repay them with revenge more cruel than the way they have treated him. In this way, Shakespeare portrays Jews as vengeful.

Another display of anti-semitism is expressed through Shylock's love of money over the love for his daughter. When his daughter Jessica eloped with her Christian lover Lorenzo, she took some of his jewels and gold. Shylock was enraged, not because of his daughter's departure, but because of his gold and jewels:

Two thousand ducats in that; and other precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear; would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin! (Shakespeare 52)

In this statement, Shylock's concern for his jewels and ducats are obvious. On the other hand, he expresses anger towards his daughter, whom he wished was dead. Hence, Shakespeare depicts Jews as those who value material wealth over family.

In conclusion, the play *The Merchant of Venice* carries the theme of Anti-Semitism. It is considered as Anti-Semitic because of William Shakespeare's depiction of Jews as despicable. He casts a negative light on Jews through his character Shylock. He is depicted as vengeful, greedy, full of hatred towards Christians, and one who values material wealth over family. These are the characteristics by which Jews are identified. In the end, it is the theme of Anti-Semitism that best identifies the play.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. "The Merchant of Venice." Campus Bookstore. 31 Jan 2008