

Shylock's never seen
the play performed,
but



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Shylock's first scene in *The Merchant of Venice* is important because it sets the tone for the audience's view of him throughout the play. I have never seen the play performed, but it has been my experience that an audience will form an opinion of a character upon first seeing them. There are many different ways of portraying Shylock in his first scene. I will be focussing on portraying Shylock as a villain. I understand that his role is villainous, but various actors and directors have actually portrayed him differently.

I like to think of my way, as the way Shakespeare himself would have done it. During a production of *Merchant* the audience will see Shylock before they hear him, so I will start with his appearance. Shylock first appears in Act 1, Scene 3. He needs to be an old man stricken in years, but only in the face. It should be a little wrinkled, and his hair ought to be gray.

It is important that in his first scene Shylock stands up straight and appears strong and confident. Shylock shall lose this confidence and posture by the end of my production, but for this scene he must be on the verge of arrogance. He should be outfitted in a Jewish garbadine, a garment of rich material but a dull shade and it must fit him well. This will give the appearance that he is rich, but not trying to brag about it. It is important to note here that Bassanio must appear in mild dress.

He should not depict a commoner, but at the same time not be wearing anything flashy, this will add to the grandeur of Shylock's clothing. I would also have Shylock and Bassanio walk about the rear of the stage and appear to be speaking to each other. That way the audience will be able to begin forming their opinion before hearing Shylock speak. As the pair comes

forward on the stage, the audience will then be able to hear what it is they are talking about. Shylock's first line is as equally important as his appearance is. " Three thousand ducats, well?" (The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, ed.

Bevington, 1. 3. 1) should be said in a manner that portrays a love of money. The audience must believe that Shylock is greedy from the very beginning. If they believe he is greedy, and after they hear the conditions of the loan, then they will anticipate an ending of their own. If the audience is trying to follow a mystery throughout the play it will be more enjoyable for them.

If there is no mystery in the play, an audience's mind can wander. As Shylock goes on in the scene there is one word that emanates throughout his lines, and that is ducats. The mentioning of the ducats must be made in a lingering, caressing tone that also puts across Shylock's love of money. Shylock's actions during his conversation with Bassanio should also imply greed. He may put his hand over his billfold area while questioning the amount or rub his thumb and forefingers as if he was sorting money. His first line will also note the sum to the audience with a hint of inquiry.

The second line, " For three months, well?" should determine a negative answer is forthcoming, but leave Bassanio to keep enticing him. The third line for Shylock, " Antonio shall become bound, well" should be performed in a manner that the audience will come away thinking there is something between Antonio and Shylock. The actor portraying Shylock should emit a momentary flash of hate by using piercing eyes or a contraction of muscles. Immediately following this flash the actor must resume total self-control. This

will make the audience definite that Shylock is to be a main character and interesting events have preceded and will follow. With the opening of Act 1, Scene 3 portrayed this way, the audience will be filled with anticipation throughout the play. They will wonder what twists and turns Shylock's greed and hatred will bring, and how it will affect their other favorite characters.

Bibliography: