

The merchant of venice essay sample



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In this world of deceptive appearances, motives, and beliefs, the ability to be able to understand the complexity of human beings is simply a not-so-common skill. When William Shakespeare wrote, *The Merchant of Venice*, he included characters which are neither good nor evil; instead, in order to make the play more realistic and create metaphors for real life situations, Shakespeare created the characters with both positive and negative aspects, as the same applies in real life. In this essay, the positive and negative aspects of Antonio, Portia, and Shylock will be discussed, and the effect of these aspects on the total outcome of the play.

Shakespeare was successful in creating many complex characters in *The Merchant of Venice*, although from my point of view, Antonio is one of the less complex characters introduced in this play. Antonio is a good and generous man, who promises to pay Shylock the money borrowed by Bassanio or else allow Shylock to cut off a pound of his flesh. This risk that Antonio is brave enough to take upon is a great example of Antonio's devotion to Bassanio, and his generosity to the person who Antonio loves the most in this play. Although Antonio's part in the play is rather a passive one, he very much shows his hatred to Shylock, the money-usurer.

Antonio simply does not comply with the Jew's occupation, and his religion, and shows his hate towards Shylock. He makes him "To quit the fine for one half of his goods... He presently become a Christian... The other, that he do record a gift, here in the court, of all he dies possessed unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter". Because of these, Shylock is utterly defeated in the trial scene. It is correct to observe that Antonio did not treat Shylock with respect,

or as a human being, by plainly looking for his pure revenge on Shylock, the person who nearly took his life away.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare also included a female character that influences the play dramatically. In most of Shakespeare's plays, the women have little power and intelligence. In *The Merchant of Venice*, however, Portia is a woman that saves the life of a man with her wit and intelligence. Portia displays all the graces of the perfect woman. She is not ambitious; she is quiet rather than restrictive. She is modest in her self-estimation. Her generous spirit makes her wish she had more virtue, wealth, and friends, so that she can better help those she loves. Besides saving the life of Antonio, Portia is also used to convey the theme of deceptive appearances. Throughout the play, Shakespeare uses his characters to show the audience that a person cannot be judged by how they appear to the eye and that a person can truly be identified by their inner soul. An example for this intention by Shakespeare is when Portia later dresses up as a man and finds a way to release Antonio from his bond with Shylock, when no one else is able to.

She proves to the audience and to her friends that even though she might have been perceived as an uneducated woman, austere looking for the husband of her dreams, she possesses the strength, intelligence and experience that enables her to do what she did. Even though Portia is a woman, she still possesses the intelligence to use and manipulate words, the beauty to woo men, and the soul that stands above the other characters. One of the most prominent pieces of evidence is when the audience can sense her cleverness in Act 4, Scene 1, in which she saves Antonio from a vicious death by Shylock.

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Her knowledge of the Venetian law and her careful and precise thinking simply turned the scene around and put Shylock, once the person who was entitled to carry out Antonio's execution, in Antonio's position, the person who was about to be punished by the full extent of the Venetian Law. Gratiano later proclaims about Portia, " an upright judge, a learned judge!". Nevertheless, Portia does seem to be a cruel woman. She convicted Shylock of an alien trying to murder a Venetian (Antonio), and gave Antonio the option to decide upon Shylock's fate; whether he should be killed or not. This is truly an evil act by Portia, which easily could have let Shylock leave the court, defeated and humiliated; without losing half of his property, becoming a Christian, and write a will for Lorenzo and Jessica.

One of the most interesting and thought provoking characters in The Merchant of Venice is Shylock. Throughout scenes in the play, he is looked down upon, betrayed, deserted, punished and humiliated by Christian society, his daughter and all those that will eventually want his money. His religion and his occupation are the Christian's only justification for this treatment. Shylock's first appearance in The Merchant of Venice is in Act 1 Scene 3, where Bassanio is talking about Antonio taking out a loan on his behalf. Shylock seems jovial in this first scene, before the Christians start to hurl insults upon him. From my point of view, only this scene contains the true indicator of Shylock's true appearance, an agreeable businessman. This appearance is unfortunately shattered by the arrival of Antonio and his good credit rating. As Shylock says, " I hate him for he is a Christian; but more, for in low simplicity he lends out money gratis, and brings down the rate of usance here with us in Venice".

Even now, we can recognize Shylock's hatred, firstly upon his religion, and secondly hatred on behalf of his business, which may be the most important thing to Shylock apart from his Judaism. Shylock's absence of a wife does pose questions as to how close he and his daughter are, and if whatever treatment he gives her can be justified by his grief. Shylock is not portrayed as the model father, but we have to assume this from his one scene with his daughter, Jessica, and of course the scene after she has stolen his money. We can learn from several lines in this scene about Shylock's portrayal as an inattentive, restrictive father. Evidence for this is present in this scene, as Shylock has only to order his daughter to lock up and not watch the Masque ball.

William Shakespeare, one of the greatest play writers of all time, has created some of the most complex characters the English drama has ever encountered with. Antonio, Portia, and Antonio are eminent examples of Shakespeare's wisdom of selection of values and qualities for each character. Although, in Shakespeare's plays, some characters are antagonists, and others are protagonists, Shakespeare is always able to add elements to their personalities in order to create certain even-handedness among these characters. As a result, Shakespeare's plays and characters have remained timeless classics.