

Is shylock a villain or a victim essay



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I am going to discuss the treatment the Jews received by the Christians during Elizabethan times, I will also compare this to the treatment that Shylock received by the Christians in the play to see if there are any similarities between something that is fact and fiction.

I am also going to discuss and view different aspects of Shylock's character, in what ways he thinks of the Christians as business partners and friends, but also as a race. Later at the end of this essay I will write my conclusion on my views if I think Shylock is a villain or a victim giving reasons for my answers. During Elizabethan times Jews were treated as scum and as vile people and also a devil worshiping religion, the Christians thought they were much superior to the Jews and considered them as the lowest of the low. I can give an example of this sort of treatment, when in 1594 three years before The Merchant of Venice was first staged injustice and discrimination was brought to the courtroom, the Queen's private physician and doctor named Dr Roderigo Lopez was accused of trying to poison the Queen Elizabeth the doctor was waiting to be called in to the courtroom the judges referred to his statement 'Bring in the vile Jew' they did not call him 'doctor' or 'sir' but all the way through the trial he was called 'vile Jew'. Later Dr Lopez was found and executed, from this true story we can see how much racial prejudice was brought upon the Jewish people.

In Act 1 Scene 3 Shylock tells Bassanio 'Antonio is a good man'. However Shylock is not really meaning what he is saying, he is referring to Antonio as a good man because Antonio has vast amounts of money, this is telling us that Shylock's one and only main concern and desire is money, there is now way that Shylock would call Antonio a good man and actually mean it. We

know why Shylock would not do this because of the way Antonio has treated him in the past, when Shylock talks to Antonio about the loan he says ' You call me a misbeliever, cut throat dog, and spit upon my Jewish gaberdine'. From this quote we can understand that Shylock has received racial hate from Antonio and the Christians in the past, also we can tell that Shylock has no sympathy for any of the Christians especially Antonio.

Such other reasons why Shylock despises Antonio is that Antonio is of the Christian faith, I can back up my suggestion, when Shylock is talking to Bassanio about Antonio he says ' I hate him for he is a Christian'. To add to this Shylock also tells Bassanio ' I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following. But I will not eat with you, nor drink with you, nor pray with you'. From this quote we can understand how much hatred Shylock has against the Christians, because he will do business with them, but he will not participate with them in any social way such as eating and drinking also he will not join them in praying and worshiping.

So far from my analysis I think Shylock is being a villain more than a victim because he only desire of getting the 3, 000 ducats, but he does not want to make a friendly bond with the Christians. Antonio later says he will be entitled to do what he desires to Shylock in the future, he tells Shylock ' I am as like to call the again, to spurn the too'. So from this quote we also understand that Antonio hates Shylock too and he will continue spitting on him and calling him names. In Act 2 Launcelot wishes to stop working for Shylock he says to himself at he beginning of his though thought ' Certainly my conscience will serve me to run from this Jew my master' so he is thinking of not working for Shylock anymore and his conscience tells him to <https://assignbuster.com/is-shylock-a-villain-or-a-victim-essay/>

leave also. Later Launcelot describes Shylock, as 'Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation' there is so much hate that Launcelot shows towards Shylock that he even calls him the incarnation of the devil.

Launcelot wants to start working for Bassanio. Jessica does not want to live in Shylock's house anymore because she feels lonely and trapped in it, she wants to leave as soon as possible. Shylock wants Jessica to stay and look after the house, he is very controlling of Jessica's life and all of her movements he says 'I am kind forth to supper Jessica there are my keys. But therefore should I go? People who would have been watching this play would have felt that Shylock is very controlling of his daughter's life, he tells her what to do and where to go, people would think he is selfish and he is very self minded, he does things to fill his riches. In Act 2 Scene 6 Jessica appears dressed as a boy, and throws down the money she has stolen from Shylock. She is alarmed at having to appear in public.

Later Jessica goes off with Lorenzo and Salerio to leave for the party. Although Lorenzo is a Christian and Jessica is a Jew, they both show love and affection towards each other. In Act 2 Scene 6 Lorenzo describes his love for Jessica when he says 'So are you sweet, even in the lovely garnish of a boy'. This shows that even when Jessica is dressed up as a boy she is still as sweet and beautiful even when she looks different.

Jessica's and Lorenzo's love is so strong that they even will not let their religious differences split them apart. This would have made Shylock go ballistic, if he would have found out she was dating and planning to marry a Christian, to Shylock this would be the ultimate and worst sin a Jewish person

would make. Solanio and Salerio discuss the reaction of Shylock to Jessica's elopement to Lorenzo by Solanio saying ' I never heard a passion so confused, so strange, outrageous and so variable, as the dog Jew did utter in the streets: My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! '. Both Solanio and Salerio think that Shylock is just going on about his ducats and nothing else, they have never seen anyone, so strange and weird, they both think he is selfish and he only cares for himself. Considering all that has happened, I think that Shylock here is a victim because his ducats and riches have been taken by his own daughter, also she has fled with Lorenzo to elope with him, and worst of all the Christians are behind all of Shylock's losses.

I think Elizabethan/Modern audience would see Shylock as a villain still because he is a Jew and also what he said about the Christians in the early part of the play. Audiences would think that he deserves everything that is being thrown at him, so the Christians in the play would still be portrayed as heroes rather than villains. In Act 3 Scene 1 Shylock is trying to say in his motivation speech that Christians and Jews are very much alike, he says they both have eyes and nose etc. Why should Jews be treated differently because of their religion and race, Shylock says Jews are entitled to do the same things as Christians.

Shylock tells us ' I am a Jew? Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? If you tickle us do we not laugh? ' from this quote Shylock has a very good point to make. Shylock is saying that Christians and Jews both humans, and also that Jews should be entitled to equal rights as the Christians. After Shylock's discussion with his

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friend Tubal, I think that Shylock had been mistreated by his daughter despite all the negative things she has said about him. From this point I think that Shylock is a victim, because he is trying to make a good understandable point about the Jews and Christians but he knows that no one will take his point in consideration. When Shylock speaks to Antonio he says a very interesting and thoughtful point 'Thou call'st me a dog before thou hadst a cause.

But since I am a dog beware of my fangs'. Shylock is telling Antonio to beware of his fangs since he is called a dog. Shylock is picking up on a good metaphor used by William Shakespeare, by comparing himself to a wild animal. In Act 4 Scene 1 the Duke refers to Shylock before he enters the courtroom as 'Go one and call the Jew into the court'.

This reminds me of the way Dr Lopez was treated in court by his judges. Shylock tells the Duke that Antonio owes him money that was the reason for the bond. Shylock sharpens his knife on the sole of his shoe, and audience watching this would think that he is a bloodthirsty, definitely a villain and a very non-merciful person. Unfortunately for Shylock his luck and hope is turned upside down when Portia tells him 'The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh' take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh but in cutting it, if thou dost shed one drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods are by laws of Venice confiscate unto the state of Venice'. Shylock is not allowed to let Antonio shed one drop of blood as it says in the Venice law book that one drop of Christian blood is shed, Shylock will go in jail, and lose his money. Also to add to this he is not allowed to cut no less or more than one pound of

Antonio's flesh, which make it impossible to cut exactly on pound of flesh and not shed one drop of blood.

Shylock is dumbstruck, he feels that every one has cheated him. I think it is not necessary for Antonio to force Shylock to become a Christian, I think that is a great example by Shakespeare about racial prejudice that was brought in to the courtroom. After all of my analysis I have come to one conclusion that I think Shylock is a victim he has been victimised by his daughter, Antonio the Christians and the courtroom. He was made to look like a villain but all he wanted was revenge.

I think that there are a lot of similarities between fact and fiction for example when the Duke called in Shylock to the courtroom he used racial words and phrases to describe him. So I think that William Shakespeare done a good and detailed job to show us how Jews were treated a long time ago.