

Shakespeare's 'the merchant of venice?' essay sample



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There are many fairytale elements in 'The Merchant of Venice'. For example, there is the idea of being three different items such as the three caskets, three thousand ducats in the bond and the three marriages. There is also the idea of deception, which is featured in many fairy tales. An example of this idea is when Jessica betrays her father to elope with Lorenzo. There is also disguise, when Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as male lawyers to save Antonio from the bond. The idea of Shylock taking a pound of flesh from Antonio's body is a gory image, which makes Shylock a typical villain from a fairytale.

The element of a princess who is imprisoned in a tower is added when Portia is not able to choose her own suitor due to her deceased father's wishes, as the suitor must choose from one of three caskets, and if he chooses the correct one he will be able to marry Portia. However, Portia's ideal suitor, Bassanio, choosing the correct casket, completes this element and they are able to fall in love and live 'happily ever after'. Although 'The Merchant of Venice' displays a few characteristics from fairytales, there are very obvious elements missing such as magic and a moral to all that has happened. There is normally an obvious villain as well; although Shylock is the 'villain' in this play, there are parts where we do feel sorry for him.

The main characteristic that 'The Merchant of Venice' contains is that of the number three being used throughout the duration of the play. This characteristic occurs several times and plays a significant part in the storyline. A very popular fairytale that contains this element of the three is 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. Throughout this story, the number three is used many times; the three bears, the three bowls of porridge and the three

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beds. There are a lot of examples of "three" in the Merchant of Venice, similar to that of the aforementioned fairytale. There are the three caskets containing either gold, silver or lead, which are a highly important part of the story.

As the caskets are an important part of the play, this emphasises the importance of this fairytale element. Money is also of great importance and is shown using the element of three as well. This part of the play involves three of the main characters (Shylock, Antonio and Bassanio). The bond made between Shylock and Antonio is worth three thousand ducats and Antonio has three months to pay it back. When Antonio is not able to pay back the debt on time, he offers Shylock three times the original bond.

Often in fairytales, characters hide their true identities to help achieve something. There are several examples of this. In 'Little Red Riding Hood', the wolf disguises himself as Red Riding Hood's grandmother to be able to eat her. In 'Snow White', the evil queen disguises herself as an old woman to sell a poisoned apple to Snow White in order to kill her. 'Sleeping Beauty' is another example of disguise and deception as the witch coaxes Sleeping Beauty to use the spinning wheel so that she will prick her finger and die. An example of disguise and deception in 'The Merchant of Venice' is Jessica disguising herself as a man and running away to elope with Lorenzo.

She betrays her father and her religion by doing this. Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as male lawyers because Bassanio was so worried about what would happen to Antonio as a result of the bond. At the time, women were not considered able enough to have such a profession. These points are

extremely important because if Jessica had not run away, Shylock may have been more willing to accept Antonio's offer and have been more merciful to him. Portia and Nerissa have also deceived their Bassanio and Graziano by making them think that they had given their rings away when they had really given them to their wives.

Some fairytales have an aspect that is somewhat gruesome. An example of this is in 'Cinderella' when the ugly sisters cut off their toes to make the shoe fit. In 'Little Red Riding Hood', the lumberjack cuts the wolf open and the grandmother comes out which is also a rather gory image. The gory aspect of 'The Merchant of Venice' is the bond; if Antonio cannot repay his debt (three thousand ducats) in three months, then Shylock will be able to take a pound of flesh. This part of the play is in Act 1 Scene 3, using the number three to signify the importance of this part yet again.

Chance and fate are huge parts of the play as well as in fairytales. In 'Cinderella', it is by chance that she drops her shoe at the dance so the Prince is able to find her again and it is fate that they are together again. In 'Beauty and The Beast', Belle's father gets lost in the woods near the Beast's castle which is fate as he is able to see his beloved daughter again. Throughout the play, Shylock's fate and chance changes. At the beginning of the play, we see him to be in a strong position as he is able to make Antonio agree to this outrageous bond. We see him to be even stronger when the debt has not been repaid and he has won. However, when Shylock discovers that he cannot spill a Venetian citizen's blood, his fate has changed and he has lost. His fortune also changes, because his wealth has gone to his daughter.

He also had to agree to " presently become a Christian" meaning he had lost his religion as well. In the scene with the caskets, there could be an element of chance there as well as you have to choose which casket to choose.

However, the idea of the lottery was there for a reason; whoever chose the right casket would be the ideal suitor for Portia. Bassanio's fortune changes as he was desperate to marry Portia and was able to when he had chosen the correct casket. This is the same idea as ' Cinderella', as the oppressed character (Cinderella and Bassanio) manage to win the prize (the Prince and Portia).

Love is important in fairytales and the play. The majority of fairytales involve love in some way; in ' Beauty and the Beast', Belle and the Beast fall in love, in ' Snow White', the Prince and Snow White do as well and the same thing also happens in ' Cinderella' and ' Sleeping Beauty'. There are several relationships in ' The Merchant of Venice'. Portia and Bassanio were brought together by Portia's deceased father's will, Nerissa and Graziano met when Bassanio decided which casket to choose and Jessica and Lorenzo ran away to elope, whether it was because they really did love each other or it was just to spite Jessica's father, Shylock, as Jessica was Jewish and Lorenzo was a Christian.

In ' Aladdin', Princess Jasmine is forced to marry a suitor that her father, the Sultan, finds suitable. Jasmine does not agree with this and wishes to choose her own partner, in this case, Aladdin. Portia is in the same situation here, as she does not agree with her father's idea of the lottery to begin with.

However, unlike Jasmine, Portia does not defy her father's wishes and she realises that her father has her best interests at heart. Her father's will
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means that Portia eventually gets the person that she wishes to marry, unlike Jasmine.

Families are usual incomplete in fairytales, such as Belle from 'Beauty and the Beast' does not have a mother, as does Cinderella. In 'The Merchant of Venice', Jessica's mother has passed away, making her family incomplete. Her and Shylock do not see eye to eye, such as Cinderella and Snow White with their stepmothers. Their relationships are very poor because of this, which is important as if the relationship between Jessica and Shylock has been a good one, she would not have betrayed him and run away.

The ending of a fairytale usually has a moral so that we can learn something from it. 'Beauty and the Beast' teaches that it is inner beauty that counts. 'The Merchant of Venice' does not have a moral as such, but it does depend on what audience is reading the play. The play was written in approximately 1597, during the Elizabethan era. The Elizabethan audience would have been anti-Semitic and therefore would have had no sympathy whatsoever for Shylock, simply because he was Jewish. However, modern audiences would be more sympathetic towards Shylock's feelings now because we live in a more multi-cultural society. Events such as the Holocaust have made people realise that just because a person is a different race or religion, it doesn't make them any different. We would be much less likely to agree with the Elizabethan audience about Shylock. There could also be a moral in the casket scene; that if you think hard enough before doing something, you will be rewarded. In this case, Bassanio thought hard about which casket to choose and when he did so, he was rewarded with Portia's hand in marriage.

'The Merchant of Venice' has a happy ending for everybody except Shylock, who is the 'villain'. In an anti-Semitic society, we would say that Shylock is a villain but he is not considered a villain nowadays. Shylock is a villain in the sense that he wished harm towards Antonio and cared more about himself and his wealth than other people, but audiences at the time would have felt no sympathy towards him simply because he was Jewish. Shylock may have a few qualities of a typical villain in fairytales, but we feel sympathy for him at times, like when his daughter betrays him and when he is forced to convert to Christianity.

On last reason that we cannot really consider 'The Merchant of Venice' to be a fairytale is because there are too many characters. The plot is a lot more complex than those of our traditional fairytales. In fairytales, there is usually one main character and the plot revolves around them. The reason the plot in 'The Merchant of Venice' is more complex is because there are several different storylines that intertwine for the ending to make sense.

In conclusion, I would say that there are many fairytale like elements in 'The Merchant of Venice' but there are some elements missing, such as magic and an obvious villain. However, when the play was first written, it may have been considered a fairytale as people would have considered Shylock to be much more of a villain than do.