

Was shylock a victim or a villain essay sample



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The Jews have unfairly endured extreme persecution for thousands of years, because of their strong beliefs. The Jews lost their own country to the Romans, and had to move out. They have not had an official country until recently, and had to settle down in tight-knit communities, in foreign countries. Their racial prejudice towards them was caused by their intelligence, hard work and success in business in conjunction with their hate for keeping up their customs and religion. Another reason for their loathing is because they can be used as a scapegoat.

They are a convenient group to single out and blame for troubles. Hitler, like many totalitarian dictators before him, needed to divert blame for his nation's problems by ascribing them to an innocent victim. He randomly selected the Jews as his scapegoat and launched a massive campaign against them to alienate them from mainstream German society. He succeeded in his efforts, and as a result, the overwhelming majority of Germans came to hate Jews.

Two thousand years ago, the Jews lived in a country now called Israel. Unfortunately for them, the Romans had succeeded to take over their land. The Romans let the Jews have religious freedom at first, but later tried to abolish the Jewish faith and country, in a process called 'Diaspora'. This led to Jewish communities living all over the world. Their hatred towards them can be understood, because of their differences to the Christian faith.

Today, there is still quite a lot of racial hatred towards the Jews. One example is the Palestinians. They live in a country next to Israel, called

Palestine and attack the Jews regularly. The Palestinians are Arabs and have strong views against the Jews.

The first scene where Shylock appears is Act 1 Scene 3, where Antonio and Bassanio ask Shylock for the loan. It is clear in my opinion, that their relationship is quite bad, and has tension between them. Even though Shylock is plainly plotting his revenge on the Christians," Be nominated for an equal pound/Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken/In what part of your body pleaseth me." I think that most people still sympathise with him, because of Antonio's bullying and name calling, and also taking his money lending business just for the sake of it, by lending money free of charge. I think this makes Shylock appear more like a victim in this instance. His bullying isn't fair because in my view, Shylock is just a man who is trying to run a successful business. Antonio's bullying isn't provoked, and is unneeded. By reading just this quotation, in my opinion Shylock's behaviour later on in the play is somewhat understandable.

In Act 2 Scene 2, Launcelot delivers a soliloquy. Because this is a part where the character speaks to the audience by himself, usually the speaker is honest. Launcelot insults Shylock calling him a " kind of devil" and wants to run away from him, or to be ruled by a " fiend" forever. He then says that he is the " devil himself" and " the devil incarnation", which are anti Semitic insults. I think that this is quite extreme for a Jew to insult another Jew with anti Semitic insults. This suggests that Launcelot deeply detests him.

Because we know Launcelot is telling the truth, there are suggestions that Shylock is a very cruel master and I think these suggestions can be believed.

In my opinion, it gives the impression that Shylock is more a villain than a victim in this scene, which was the view people in Shakespeare's time used to agree with. Launcelot's name calling is fair in my point of view because, Shylock is a cruel master, and treated him very badly.

In Act 2 Scene 3, Jessica tells Launcelot her feelings about her father, Shylock. " Alack, what heinous sin is it in me/ To be ashamed to be my father's child." I believe this is quite harsh of Jessica, because she is only saying this, because she is in love with Lorenzo the Christian. I think this is quite unfair on Shylock, her father because he is a Jew. This also, in my view makes Shylock look a victim, as he has done nothing wrong except to be a Jew. His hatred is targeted again, because he is a Jew and for no other reason. I think that Jessica didn't mean what she said, and only said it because she was with Lorenzo.

Act 2 Scene 4 makes Shylock look both a victim and a villain. Because this is the part Jessica is planning to run away from her father, it naturally makes him look a victim. She plans to take a lot of gold and jewels from her father and cause him great pain. " What gold and jewels she is furnished with". This in my opinion is very harsh towards Shylock; after all, she could just have gone without taking anything with her.

In Act 2 Scene 3, where we hear that she is going to elope from her father, we think this is purely because she loves Lorenzo, but she personally insults him by taking his jewels. This might suggest that he has been quite a bad father to her for Jessica to want to insult him. This makes him look a villain slightly. Also in my opinion, what Lorenzo says at the end of the scene

makes him look a villain. " If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven,/It will be for his gentle daughter's sake;" This is not an insult, in my opinion, but a true view of what Lorenzo thinks of Shylock. This shows that he has been a sinner, and a villain.

I believe Shylock looks a villain in Act 2 Scene 5. Although Shylock is a caring father, he doesn't have a personal, close relationship with her. Shylock speaks in poetic iambic pentameters, which shows, that he respects Jessica, but doesn't have the closeness that a father should have with a daughter. This makes him look a villain as; he spends more time with his money, than with his daughter. It suggests that he has no time to talk, and bond with his daughter, and that business is more important to him than Jessica's welfare.

However, in Act 2 Scene 8, I think Shylock is made to look more like a victim. Solanio and Salerio, in my opinion, represent the general Christian point of view, which is complete hatred. They mock Shylock for apparently running down the streets shouting " My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!" after Lorenzo runs away with his daughter. They bully Shylock, like Antonio did in Act 1 Scene 3, calling him " Dog Jew" and they laugh at the prospect of children following him around, running after him. I personally, sympathise with Shylock in this part of the story, because it would be devastating to lose your daughter. But I think there is a bit of villainy in his character, if Solanio and Salerio's second hand account is true, as Shylock is also worried about his ducats. His worry about material wealth makes me sympathise less with him.

Solanio and Salerio taunt Shylock in Act 3 Scene 1 to make him feel worse than he is already. This scene makes him look the victim in my view. Again the insult "devil" is included in the scene, as an anti-Semitic insult. Shylock refers to Jessica as his own flesh and blood, but Salerio responds by cruelly saying that there is more connection between "jet and ivory" and "red wine and Rhenish". In this scene is a famous speech, lines 54-69, by Shylock that portrays him as a mixed character, both a victim and a villain.

The parts that show he is a villain in Shylock's famous speech are that he is intent upon revenge, "If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge!". Even though he might appear to be a pure villain in this part of the speech, he argues logically, not out of spite, that Christians exact revenge, so why shouldn't a Jew? Shylock uses argument straight out of the Christian church. Shylock uses the Christians' arguments against them.

The rest of the speech tries to make the Christians feel guilty, and I think it makes him look the victim again. He discusses all the times that Antonio has insulted him, and "cooled my friends". He then increases their guilt, "what's his reason? I am a Jew." This makes them and the audience think that it's not for his character he is targeted, but his beliefs. Shylock explains that a Jew is a man like any other "Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" which makes the Christians think that they are targeting one of their own, and to make the audience think he is a victim of racial hatred. I believe this is a very clever way to try to get the people on his side.

I think that the use of prose in this speech makes Shylock appear more human than usual, which may also make the reader think that he is a victim in all of this. If he felt happy and dominant over Salerio and Solanio, he might have used iambic pentameters. The fact that he uses prose might suggest that he feels inferior, and a victim. He seems less noble in this part of the play than usual. In a way, he begs Solanio and Salerio to treat him as an equal. This indicates that he is a victim in this part of the play.

Still in Act 3 Scene 1, Tubal enters. Here, we can be quite sure that Shylock is honest in what he says, because, Tubal is a personal friend of Shylock's so he isn't likely to lie to him. I think there is a strong suggestion of villainy in this part of the scene, "I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear!" He prefers material wealth over his own flesh and blood. This is a sign of villainy in my opinion.

Also, when talking to Tubal about one of Antonio's ships sinking, which brings him closer to killing him, this quotation shows he's a villain at this point "I am very glad of it. I'll plague him; I'll torture him. I am glad of it." He relishes the chance of being able to kill Antonio painfully.

We then sympathise with Shylock, when he loses his turquoise ring. "I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys." He is again the victim in this part as I think it shows that he is more human and has feelings, and not just a money making machine.

At the end of Act 3 Scene 1, I believe Shylock is a victim until now. He was punished by Jessica as a consequence of his bad treatment of her, but he may have been driven by the Christians to keep her in the house out of

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troubles way. Jessica might have misinterpreted this, as an act of cruelty. He also relishes killing Antonio, yet we cannot help but feel that this is not all his fault. After years of being kicked and spat on by people like Antonio, Shylock's hatred is understandable.

Act 3 Scene 2 shows that Shylock is a villain, as he is determined to have his bond. Shylock is shown to be very materialistic in the whole play, but here, when he is offered more money than the bond is worth, he turns it down. "Never did I know/A creature that did bear the shape of a man/So keen and greedy to confound a man. It shows he is a villain, I believe, because he wants this man dead, and doesn't care about anything else.

In Act 3 Scene 3, Shylock is beyond all reasoning, and is almost sadistic. He repeats the word 'bond'; "I'll have my bond! Speak not against my bond!/I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond!" he is now obsessive, and will not change his mind. This suggests villainy, because he has set out to kill a person, has a, ruthless mind, and will not let anyone influence him.

Act 4 Scene 1 is the court scene. Even after the duke pleads with him to show mercy saying "We all expect a gentle answer, Jew." This again shows villainy, because he waves off the prospect of mercy and makes the characters and the audience hate him.

Even though Shylock doesn't have to, Portia asks him if he has a surgeon at hand, to save Antonio. In which he replies "Is it so nominated in the bond?...I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond" This makes all the characters and the audience feel a repulsion against Shylock. This signifies villainy.

After pointing out the loophole, in Act 4 Scene 1 Shylock gets these punishments, “ beg mercy of the Duke.”, “ For half thy wealth, it is Antonio’s/The other half comes to the general state” “ He presently become a Christian;” I think that the punishments are too harsh, because he was driven to all of this by the Christians, and punished also by the Christians. He is both a victim and a villain in this instance.

I believe that it is fair for Shylock to be punished, but I think the Christians have gone too far to punish him. He has to lose his faith, which is what makes him who he is, his whole life’s wealth, meaning that he has worked so far for nothing, and I believe Shylock should have been treated with more mercy than what he had been treated.

I agree with Sir Peter Hall that he is a very complex character, and that is what makes him an interesting character. He is so complex; he is both a victim and a villain, depending on the circumstances. My conclusion is that Shylock cannot be given a label of ‘ victim’ or ‘ villain’; he is a complex mix of both. In the first part of the play, i. e. before the court scene, he is more of a victim than a villain. But as the plot unfolds and his plan comes to action, he is more of a villain. There is no definite answer, and the whole victim and villain argument is open to interpretation.

One thing is for sure, Shakespeare did not want us to think he was a victim in any of this. In Shakespeare’s time, Jews were considered lower class and mediocre, and probably this was the view Shakespeare had. It is only through modern, anti-racist eyes, are we able to see his victimisation.