

# Merchant of venice - tragic hero

Experience, Meaning of Life



The Merchant of Venice is a comedy written by Shakespeare, but it is arguable that it can also be called a tragedy. A dictionary meaning of a tragedy is, " a drama or similar work, in which the main character is brought to ruin or otherwise suffers the extreme consequences of some tragic flaw or weakness of character. " Shylock is a main character and succumbs to the tragic flaws he possesses. This play introduces Shylock, a Jew fighting against Christian society. Although Shylock is depicted in the play as the villain, there are moments that show his vulnerability. A tragic hero is a man who is prosperous in the early stages of the play, but is defeated by his own flaw. His hamartia (or tragic flaw) is what consumes him and is the pit of his downfall. In The Merchant of Venice, Shylock possesses all these qualities as well as hubris, tragic pride. This is defined as a struggle between a character and external forces. Fate, fortune, the gods, and circumstance can be used as examples of external forces. In this case, Shylock is battling his fate as a Jew and his desire for justice. Shylock demonstrates qualities of a tragic hero by inviting the audience to feel sympathetic for him in various ways. Shylock can be called a tragic hero because he is undone by a tragic flaw in the end. Being a Jew, Shylock is already shown to be " evil" to Christians. Mark you this, Bassanio, The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose. An evil soul, producing holy witness, Is like a villain with a smiling cheek (1, 3, 97-100) Antonio says this secretly to Bassanio when Shylock quotes the bible to explain why interest is necessary. Launcelot, Shylock's servant, says something similar in Act 2, Scene 2. "... I should stay with the Jew my master, who (God bless the mark!) is the devil himself. Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation... " (20-24). Vengeance also has a part in defining

Shylock as a tragic hero. As a wealthy moneylender in Venice, Shylock lives in the ghetto where all Jews are forced to live, separate from Christians. By separating the two major groups in Venice, it incites conflict between them. Every time Shylock goes to town for business, he has to constantly deal with ridicule from Antonio. " Fair sir, you spet on me on Wednesday last;/You spurned me such a day; another time/You called me dog; and for these courtesies/I'll lend you thus such moneys? " (1, 3, 126-129) This is only one example, but this was a contributing factor in Shylock's extreme search for revenge. He believes that revenge is right because Christians engage in revenge. Shylock uses Christian teachings to justify his vengeful actions. He exposes Christian hypocrisy in his " Hath not a Jew" speech. " If a Jew wrong a Christian,/what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian/wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian/example? Why, revenge. " (3, 1, 60-63). Shylock's last tragic trait, his insistence of the law, ultimately seals his fate. His downfall occurs in Act 4, Scene 1 in a Venetian courtroom. The Duke is presiding over the trial against Antonio. At this point in the play, Shylock's insistence of the law and the letter of the law is so strong that his tragic pride consumes him. The " letter of the law" is understanding the literal meaning of the law and following as it is written, however, following the " spirit of the law" means to obey the intent behind the law.