

Plot analysis of merchant of venice

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Merchant of Venice Essay The Merchant of Venice is a Shakespearian play whose plot is centered around love and loss. Throughout the play Shakespeare satirizes Jewish stereotypes and depicts acts of extreme bigotry, this has led to a significant amount of debate as to whether or not Shakespeare was anti-Semitic. However when one makes a detailed analysis of the text it becomes increasingly evident that Shakespeare holds a very biased view of the Jewish people. Throughout the story, Shylock is tormented by shallow Christians whom Shakespeare portrays as protagonists, and Shylock himself is made into the picture of the time's Jewish stereotype. Through his characters, Shakespeare deepens and encourages the time's anti-Jewish sentiment. Throughout the play, Shakespeare glorifies the Christians who depersonalize and alienate Shylock by refusing to use his given name. Instead, they call him “ the Jew”, “ the villain Jew”, “ this curish Jew”, “ impenetrable cur”, “ harsh Jew”, “ infidel”, “ cruel devil”, and “ the devil in the likeness of the Jew”. And the Christians of Venice do not stop at verbal abuse; they “ spit upon [his] Jewish gabardine,...[voided their] rheum upon [his] beard And [footed him] as [they would] spurn a stranger cur” (Shakespeare 14).

Even when Shylock speaks out in his own defense by quoting scripture, he is rebuked by Antonio who replies, “ The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose. / An evil soul producing holy witness/ Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,/ A goodly apple rotten at the heart:/ O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath! ” (Shakespeare 14). It is standard practice for Christians to defend their beliefs or actions by citing scripture so with just that single line,

Shakespeare strips Jews on both the inside and outside of his fictional work of there only way to argue back.

Shakespeare depicts these heinous acts while making them sound routine, as if they are nothing out of the ordinary; he even rewards these undeserving characters for their rotten behavior by having them live happily ever after. Shakespeare reinforces Jewish stereotypes all through the play, particularly the ones about greed. Shakespeare made it so that there could be no denying Shylock's passion for accumulating wealth. Shylock says to his daughter, Jessica, that " I did dream of moneybags last night"(Shakespeare 28).

After Jessica raids those moneybags and her father's store of jewels to abscond with Lorenzo, Salanio tells his companion Salarino that he heard Shylock wandering the streets crying "...My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! / Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats! / Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter! /A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,/ Of double ducats, stolen from me by my daughter! / Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats! / Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter! "

(Shakespeare 35).

These lines depict Shylock as a man so consumed by his love of money that he cares more for his ducats than he does for his daughter as Shakespeare furthers the stereotype of Jewish greed. Shakespeare may not have written The Merchant of Venice with the sole purpose of slandering Jews, but that does not stop him from vilifying them at every turn. At the trial, he glorifies Portia who speaks eloquently of the need for clemency and compassion in

her “ quality of mercy” courtroom speech, after which she and her friends promptly humiliate Shylock, ruin him financially, and force him to accept Christianity.

Shakespeare depicts her doing all of this with such grace and dignity that the reader just cannot help but feel that Shylock deserves his punishment even though he has done nothing wrong. (Shakespeare 68-71) Finally, Shakespeare further rewards the Jews' persecutors when, after the trial, without the slightest prick of conscience, the Christians run off to Belmont – a kind of way station between this world and heaven – to partake in the pleasures of the idle highborn and wealthy.

They have their pound of flesh, Shylock’s heart. They also have his daughter, a convert to Christianity. In the end, Shylock becomes a victim of a perverse world, a victim of people who mislead, misuse and prejudge him, and force him to take a desperate stand and lose everything all for his one singular crime, the crime of being a devout member of the Jewish faith. The Christians, meanwhile, live on happily ever after.

At the end, while Christians exult in their victory at Belmont, one can imagine Shylock walking the streets of the Rialto or the Jewish ghetto looking for his dignity and the glow of a friendly candle. And yet this play is not a tragedy; far from it, it is a comedy in which the Jews are the perpetual butt of the jokes. Shakespeare tricks the reader into laughing at the poor victimized Jew. The primary objection to portraying Shakespeare as anti-Semitic comes from the famous “ I am a Jew” speech.

It could be argued that these famous lines indicate that Shakespeare is trying to shed light on the mistreatment of the Jewish population, and it is true that these lines argue that Jews and Christians should be treated equally. (Shakespeare 42) This argument however is irrelevant when compared to the amount of unapologetic bigotry that makes up the rest of the play. In the context of the text one passage does nothing to change the awful ways Jews are portrayed at treated all throe the work.

Shakespeare may not have been unusually bigoted for the times he lived in, and he may not have recognized the themes of anti-Semitism in this work – in fact he may have seen these themes as nothing more than another layer of realism being woven into the play. However, that does not change the fact that there is no way that Shakespeare could write so harshly about a group of people without having some pretty extreme biases of his own. In the Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare satirizes, insults and abuses the Jewish people as a whole, so by the word's very definition, that makes Shakespeare an anti-Semite.