

The merchant of venice paper essay sample

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



Antonio is considered the hero in the story and he is himself the merchant of Venice. He lends money to his beloved friend Bassanio, as Bassanio intends to woo the fair maid that is Portia. Antonio borrows money from the money lending Jew, Shylock (who is often tormented in the play) and the two are stuck in a fierce battle in which we get an insight into their characters.

During this essay one will discuss the characteristics of both characters and discuss whether Antonio is the hero and Shylock the villain and to what extent.

The two authoritative, influential characters have similar statuses in the book, as they are both rich, businessmen and are opposite characters (ie rivals, good versus evil). Antonio is a Christian and is considered the hero, but a quantity of evidence suggests that he has another side to him, which is not in a heroic manner. Shylock is often treated unfairly and is considered a villain, he is a Jew and faces much discrimination from the Christians, the audience are biased so naturally dislike him because of the fact that he is a Jew, even though he can be seen as honest. During the play he is treated badly and ultimately portrayed erroneously. In Shakespearean times Jews were hated, as there were rumours that they killed Christian babies in cold-blood and drank their blood.

At the start of the story we feel Antonio has a heroic sense to him, he seems powerful and very generous. He is extremely loyal to Bassanio as a friend and their friendship seems very strong. Antonio helps his friend when help is needed, ' I pray you good Bassanio let me know it, and if it stand as you yourself do, within the eye of honour, be assur'd my purse, my person, my extremist means lie all unlock'd to your occasions', and the audience are

fond of him for this commitment, we see how courageous he is later on in the story.

In act 1 scene 3 we are introduced to the man that is Shylock and blood begins to boil between Shylock and Antonio, the atmosphere becomes very tense. During this fierce confrontation we get characteristics from both characters, the Merchant of Venice Antonio gives us an eerie sense that suggests he is not as heroic as he first seems.

We learn of the discrimination in which Shylock faced from Antonio and the racist comments he had to take in, ' you call me misbelieve, cut-throat dog, and spet upon my Jewish garbedine, and all for use of that which is mine own. Well then, it now appears you need my help'. This is surely not what a hero would say about someone is it? We learn Antonio is prejudice and more aggressive to Shylock (ie he started the conflict).

It is almost mocking as Antonio hates Shylock and moans about his money rates but still wants his help. Antonio is evil as he goes onto say, ' if thou wilt lend this money, lend it not as to thy friends, for when did the friendship take a breed for barren metal of his friend? But lend it rather to thine enemy, who if he break, thou may'sy with better face exact the penalty'. Here Antonio is saying that he is not sorry about the past and he will torment him again and again, so he might as well lend him the money. Up until this point it seems that Antonio is nothing but evil and racist, not a heroic figure.

We learn Shylock is also prejudice, ' I hate him for he is a Christian', but he is acting naturally and so his views can be acknowledged. We feel sorry for

Shylock as he is the subject of racial torment, but then there is a significant turning point in which Shylock introduces a malicious bond, this ultimately turns everyone against him. In pure revenge he becomes cold blooded and introduces the bond which states that if the bond is not paid within 3 months, than 1 pound of flesh can be taken from Antonio (this would eventually kill Antonio) this brutal bond is shocking and we see Shylock as psychotic and we turn against him. Antonio accepts the bond.

We distinguish Antonio's arrogance, ' why fear not a man, I will not forfeit it,- within these two months, that's a month before this bond expires, I do expect return of thrice times there value of this bond', here he is saying in two months he will have three times the values of the bond, again he seems extremely brave and courageous and this audience warm to this.

Until this point we can conclude that Antonio is a brave, committed man and is a Christian and so the audience warm to him and because of this courage, but we see the vile side so some might hate him for he is prejudice. Naturally the audience will hate shylock for he is a ' cut-throat' Jew and is also somewhat prejudice and evil with his malicious bond. We see Shylock is full of revenge, anger, rage and hate, but Shylock is acting naturally and is portrayed wrongly, he is at first an affectionate businessman that is until the Christians throw insults at him.

The character of Shylock is quite complex, we know he faces racial torment from the Christians and therefore hates Christians, he is exceptionally faithful. We find out he is religious and that he is treated unfairly and we feel sorry for him. Especially when his daughter Jessica leaves him to get married

to a Christian, this is extremely painful for Shylock emotionally. We know he doesn't get on well with his daughter, she says, ' the house is terrible to live in' (2, 3, 2) and she is ' ashamed to be my fathers child'.

This is more pain for Shylock, made even more painful by the constant insults and even his butler leaves him. Here we pity him, he has lost his daughter and has nothing left but his religion and his bond, so he keeps hold of his bond throughout the story. We feel sorry for Shylock but we also find he is very greedy. While sulking about his daughters absence he says, ' my daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!', here it seems that money is just as or even more important than his daughter.

Throughout the story his puzzling characters are revealed and we find he has many characteristics. We see he is;

Arrogant - ' I will not dine'

Sarcastic - ' I would befriends with you'

Humble - ' I will be assur'd I may: and that I may be assur'd, I will bethink me - may I speak with Antonio'

Prejudice - ' I hate him for he is a Christian'

Greedy and Faithful ; ' I will by with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you and so following: But I will not eat with you, drink with you nor pray with you'

Vengeful - ' you call me misbeliever cut throat dog. Well then it now appears you need my help'

Later in the play, in a tense twist, Antonio is unable to acquire the funds needed to pay off the bond and the matter is taken to court, Shylock is delighted, excited and ready for revenge. We again see an evil, psychotic but passionate side to him as the news of Antonio's problem reaches him via his Jewish companion Tubal, ' I thank god, I thank god! Is it true, is it ture? I thank thee god tubal, good news, good news: ha ha! Heard in genoa!'. It is ironic as now Shylock has the power and he seems to use this to his advantage, making Antonio sweat over the bond, this probably would enrage the audience.

The court scene shows us further characteristics and again Shylock is discriminated and we feel sorry for him, every time the duke calls him, ' Jew' and never does the duke call him by his correct name. ' Call the Jew into the court', the duke doesn't like Shylock and expects Shylock to take money, this is also gives a very stereotypical view of Jews and is unfair.

The court scene is very tense and the suspense is high, there always seems to be a sense that everyone is against shylock. The tone used against him is very aggressive and there is much evidence that shows this, ' the must the Jew be merciful' and ' what mercy seasons justices: therefore Jew'. In another complexion, Portia is dressed up as Antonio's lawyer and is the one who has the most aggressive attitude towards Shylock. Shylock is offered three times the original value of the bond but refuses and this shows that he is committed and very competitive, if 6 thousand ducats were in six parts

and every part a ducat, I would have my bond!', ' the slave are ours - so do I answer you the pound of flesh which I demand him stand for judgement - answer, shall I have it'.

Shylock is continually asked to be merciful but always wants his bond, this is justified as the bond is a legal agreement, plus it is the only thing he has left.

' Shylock adds more tension as he sharpens his blade, ' why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?'. This shows his rage and his cold-blooded side, again he is somewhat psychotic, only a mad man would behave in this way. At this point Antonio is sweating and nervous and his strong image is somewhat shattered but he restores his heroic stature. After much conflict and persuasion a conclusion is made, Shylock is not merciful and doesn't get attracted to the luscious amounts of money Bassanio offers him and prepares for Antonio's downfall.

Now we see the true courageousness of Antonio as he steps up and makes a final, emotional speech. ' give me your hand Bassanio, fare you well, grieve not that I am fall'n to this for you: of such misery doth she cut me off.

Commend me to your honourable wife, tell her process of Antonio's end, say how I lov'd you speak me fair in death'. This is very emotional and shows how loyal he is to Bassanio and this really wins the crowd over and shows his heroicness. Bassanio feels guilty as the a man is about to be killed for a little bit of money he needed, Bassanio states he would even give up his wife, this is embarrassing as Portia is obviously right there but dressed up.

The demented Shylock is about to cut Antonio's flesh and this shows his maliciousness and we hate him for this as it is inhumane, but in a dramatic twist Portia finds a clue in the bond, 'but in cutting if thou dost shed one drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods are confiscated'.

Shylock dramatically loses the case as one cannot spill a drop of Antonio's blood (and obviously cutting his flesh would result in blood being spilled), again we see the greedy side of Shylock as he asks for money, 'pay the bond thrice and let the Christian go', but he can't have it as he is an outsider and in turn Shylock loses the case, which results in him conceding half of his business and the Christians throw insults at him once again, 'the Jew shall have all justice, - soft no haste!'. This is again unfair for Shylock and because of his malicious intent he is a villain. Even worse is the fact that he is forced to convert to Christianity, his religion is the only thing he has left, this is extremely harsh and doesn't show Antonio as a hero.

The Merchant of Venice is an engaging play with many twists and turns that keep the audience interested till its sudden, dramatic finale, though it is a bit eccentric. In the play the characters of Shylock and Antonio are similar and throughout the story we do see Antonio as a hero and Shylock as a villain. Antonio is seen as a hero as he seems courageous, strong and is loyal to his friend Bassanio, his emotive speech during the court scene convinced me that he was a strong, heroic figure. Shylock however is a Jew and can be seen as a malicious, wretched slime-ball. He is full of rage, vengeance, anger, arrogance and has the typical characteristics of a villain.

Though the characters are not as clear-cut as they seem, first of all we see that Antonio has an evil, prejudice side to him when we learn of his comments towards Shylock.

We feel sorry for Shylock as he has been the subject of racial torrent and every time he tries to show a generous side, the Christians insult him. At first Shylock is a very pleasurable businessman but the insults naturally make him vengeful. So at this point Antonio is a villain.

But it soon changes not due to Antonio but because of Shylock. Shylock introduces the malicious bond and he is the one who is not merciful. Throughout Shylock's desire is to virtually kill Antonio as an act of revenge as a result of Antonio's insults so in a way it is Antonio's fault.

We can conclude that Antonio is the hero in the story as he is a Christian and is courageous, but is made a hero due to the fact of Shylock's malicious intent and his perceived perception to kill Antonio, Antonio doesn't do anything heroic, but is exceptionally brave.