

Merchant of venice: injustice and revenge essay sample

Law



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During the Venetian era in which *The Merchant of Venice* takes place, the law is heavily depended on among society. Within the law, it is asserted that justice must be shown impartially to both parties and that the outcome will be a just balance for the good of society. Within this play lies a court case between two parties, Antonio and Shylock, where justice must be served to abide by the laws and to the contracted agreement made between them. A legal agreement in which a pound of Antonio's flesh is demanded as payment in regards to a money loan given out by Shylock that was not paid back. The court case serves as a principle of justice for the good of society but unrevealed personal retribution is seen within the character of Shylock. The court case in a whole is a representation of justice being served but in reality the outcome is tainted by partiality and revenge.

Revenge is a sweet theme revealed within the character of Shylock, a Jewish moneylender in Venice who has been mistreated by his Christian counterparts. The personal toll that Shylock has taken on with criticisms and disrespect from the Christians in Venice such as, " You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog, and spit upon my Jewish gabardine, And all for use of which is mine own" (1. 3 109-112) and " You spit 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 much moneys?" (1. 3 124-127). Shylock shows that he has good reason to have a cold heart towards the character of Antonio who is asking for a loan of money. A way that Shylock can out think Antonio is by having a legal contract between them stating that if the money is not paid back in thirty days, a pound of Antonio's flesh must be the fine.

The pound of flesh represents a form of revenge for Shylock because he despises Antonio so much that he would demand a personal debt to be paid (possibly his life) over that of money. This personal retribution that Shylock has for Antonio carries over once the court case occurs in Act 4. 1 even though Shylock appears to be inflexible and respectful to the law. The court case that takes place now within Act 4 is due to Antonio not repaying the loan to Shylock. It is a display to the people in which justice is being used towards the good of society. Justice is represented by impartiality towards the two parties in case and defending that which is lawful. The scene begins with the Duke showing partiality towards Antonio by saying, " I am sorry for thee, Thou art come to answer a stony adversary, an inhuman wretch incapable of pity, void and empty from any dram of mercy" (4. 1 3-5).

The Duke is already giving away that this case may not be fully justifiable and that the favored outcome is with Antonio. Although Antonio is the favored one, having a court case over the matter makes it appear fair to both parties. As the case begins, the reader learns of the characters Portia and Narissa disguised as the doctor of laws and the lawyers clerk (both male roles). Everyone is blinded to these two characters disguises and still believes that the case is being treated as impartial justice. However, Portia and Narissa both have relation with Antonio and are there to seek him out of paying his debt. They put on a very intelligent case between Shylock and Antonio, with the use of showing their knowledge of the law and reading into the agreement made between the men very clearly. They inevitably alter the situation away from the demanding Shylock and turn to the idea of mercy.

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Portia's speech (Act 4. 1 182- 203) states that if Shylock shows mercy towards Antonio he will then be like God and be twice blessed. Shylock persists with his defense of " I crave the law, the penalty and forfeit of my bond" (4. 1 204-205). Portia continues to manipulate the law in such a skillful way that Antonio does not need to give up his pound of flesh and Shylock gets placed in the wrong, such as with not letting blood spill (Act 4. 1 307-313). The case ends on terms turned in the favor of Antonio and against Shylock. This court case was meant to display justice but in reality was a form of injustice due to partiality. Shylock is shown as a representation of inflexibility towards what the law states and even brings a knife and scale to the court case, both symbols of justice. However his underlying root for revenge turns on him once in the court and is stripped of what makes him the man he is.

Although the representations within the court case were meant to symbolize justice, injustice was actually carried out. At a first glance, one may say that the case was justified due to Portia following the law in such an exact way that the outcome may have been the same if the real doctor of law was in position, but the fact that it was someone who was strictly there to assist Antonio in the case makes it a form of injustice. Not only the underlying partiality on the side of Antonio but also the underlying revenge within Shylock makes leading up to the court case a miscarriage of justice and a use of the law to satisfy personal retribution. To conclude, The Merchant of Venice takes on a court case where both sides are ones who obey the law and are willing to follow suit with whatever the deciding outcome may be.

However, during these Venetian times, asserting justice within the law is a very important factor when being practiced for the greater good of society and that is not ideally expressed here. The big picture of a court case weighing both sides of an issue and allowing for interpretation of the contracted agreement is present but within this you find partiality towards the side of Antonio and a manipulation of the law to see to it that he is spared from the pound of flesh that he owed in debt. There is also personal retribution that is seeking to be paid rather than a merciful negotiation of extra payment. The court case presented in *The Merchant of Venice* is a miscarriage of justice along with a side of personal retribution and manipulation of the sacred law that should be withheld within this time period.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William, and David M. Bevington. "The Merchant of Venice." *The Necessary Shakespeare*. 3rd ed. New York: Longman, 2002. 79-112. Print.