

SHYLOCK: The Jew

An in-depth character analysis

Often, The character Shylock, in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, is portrayed as a beastly monstrosity, with a lust for Antonio's life. Through a more careful examination it can be determined that Shylock was an upstanding member of his community, who endured abuse, forgave easily, and upheld the customs and law.

Shylock endured much of Antonio's abuse, over a long period of time. This can be seen by the sheer volume of disgraces he has bore. A good example is in Act 3 Scene 1, beginning with line 52:

"He hath disgraced me half a million, laughed at my losses,  
mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains,  
cooled my friends, heated mine enemies..."

-Shylock

Shylock had such a magnanimous spirit, that he even offered Antonio, who had abused him terribly, a loan, free of interest. Shylock was willing to loan money to one who totally ruined him in public, on terms that were nicer than his normal business terms. This kind, forgiving heart can be seen in Act 1 Scene 3 beginning with line 148:

"Why, look how you storm ! I would be friends with you and  
have your love, forget the names that you have stained me  
with, supply your present needs and take no do it of usance  
for my moneys, and you'll not hear me! This is kind I offer."

-Shylock

Often, this quote from Act 3 Scene 1 line 83,

"Why, there, there, there, there! A diamond gone cost me two thousand  
ducats in Frankfurt! The curse never fell upon our nation till now, I never felt  
it till now. Two thousand ducats in that and other precious, precious, jewels!  
I would my daughter were dead at my foot and the jewels in her ear;"  
portraying Shylocks' treatment of his daughter, after she ran away, is manipulated  
to make Shylock seem beastly. But, within the Jewish culture and the time period,  
his response was appropriate. After his daughter ran away, she was, for all  
intents and purposes, disowned. Thusly, the theft of his jewels reduced her to the  
level of a thief, and so she deserved to be punished.

Shylock is also an honest, law abiding citizen of Venice, before the very  
end. His great respect for law and order are shown in the following quotes from  
Act 4 Scene 1.

Line 104: "I stand for judgment"

Line 213: "I crave the law"

Line 257: "O Noble judge!"

Shylock the Jew, through a careful examination of *The Merchant of Venice*, is  
found to be an enduring, magnanimous, forgiving, and law abiding citizen of Venice.  
As opposed to his typical role as the wicked blood thirsty villain.

