
A Description Of Shylock in The Merchant Of Venice

The Merchant of Venice portrays a Jewish man named, Shylock, and his struggles over constant abuse and mistreatment in a Renaissance era Venice. Prejudice against marginalised groups often ignites a long lasting feud, which in turn can lead to suffering and possibly violence. The Merchant of Venice clearly shows the effect of prejudice being held against Shylock and the desire for revenge that he has. Racism plays a big role in his motivation and is obviously seen to be the only cause for his acts. Without prejudice, none of the acts shown in the Merchant of Venice would have happened. The role that prejudice plays is seen when: Shylock wishes to murder Antonio without mercy or remorse and how Shylock becomes drunk with power during the trial.

Racism against Shylock is the main motivation for his actions exhibited in the play. Throughout the play Shylock is treated as a second class citizen and is spat upon by Christians. After treatment like this, presumed to be ongoing through his entire life, he would definitely be willing to take 'justice' upon those who have wronged him. In one scene Shylock says "My deeds upon my head! I crave the law. The penalty and forfeit of my bond." In this phrase it has become apparent that Shylock has been mistreated so harshly that he does not fear the afterlife and only wishes for revenge. Secondly, he remarks "An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven. Shall I lay perjury upon my soul? No, not for Venice." He claims that his actions are justified in heaven and he would be disobeying it if he did not carry them out. This statement would be said by someone that has suffered a great deal of abuse. This is further emphasised when he says, "I have possessed your grace of what I purpose, and by our holy Sabbath have I sworn to have the due and forfeit of my bond." He again states his hate for Antonio (and his actions against him) when he plainly states-without any remorse or alluding to something else: "Hates any man the thing he would not kill?" Simply he said, would a man not want to kill something he hates? This clearly shows how the racist and xenophobic actions can start a cruel and merciless feud between two groups.

Shylock becoming 'drunk' with power during the trial alludes to how much hate and thirst for revenge that he has, due to racism against him, shows the effect prejudice has. In the trial Shylock has moments where he appears intoxicated by his newfound power even going as far as mentally torturing Antonio with 'death threats'. The first of his many 'threats' involves him comparing Antonio's flesh with a slave. Shylock says, "Many of you own slaves, which—like your donkeys and dogs and mules—you use to perform awful jobs just because you bought them. Should I say to you, "Set them free! Let them marry your children! Why are you making them work so hard? Let their beds be as soft as yours, and let them eat the same food as you"? No, you'd answer, "The slaves are ours." And that's just how I'm answering you." He says Antonio's flesh is his property that he 'bought' and it is what he deserves, no matter what. Another moment where he shows his power is when he is caught sharpening a knife on his shoe, Bassanio asks why he sharpens it so eagerly, Shylock then replies "To cut the forfeiture from that bankrupt there." He says it in a fashion that is almost mocking him for his fate. Any person who mocks someone who is potentially going to die, definitely loathes that person. If someone were to tease someone for having cancer, would you not think that there has been a long lasting quarrel between them? These moments of intoxication show the hate and suffering that is a result of a long history of racial abuse.

As seen by the events in *The Merchant of Venice*, one can see the toll that racism has on an individual. The consequences of prejudice can be seen when: Shylock unrelentingly wishes to murder Antonio and how his thirst for revenge simply makes him drunk with power or even to an extent, on the verge on megalomania. Imagine the effects racism would have over an entire group, over hundreds of years.

eduzaurus.com