

The Merchant of Venice

Shylock

Shylock is a Jewish moneylender in Venice, who detests and despises Christians.

He makes his money by charging interest on his loans, and dislikes Antonio for not doing so and therefore ruining his business – particularly as Antonio sometimes pays the debts of those who cannot repay their loans in time, and therefore spoils Shylock's enrichment by taking control of their forfeitures.

Shylock says about Antonio ' I hate him for he is a christian / if I can catch him once upon the hip / I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him ' . When he calls Antonio out on the latter's insults, he merely provokes more insults from the merchant. He decides to ask for a pound of flesh as his bond from Antonio, apparently as a jest . He claims he wants Antonio's flesh for no other practical reason other than spite . He says "if it will feed nothing else / it will feed my revenge " . He is a miser and something of a puritan, having no taste for music or other reveling, starving his servant and letting him wear out his clothes rather than replacing them. Considering Launcelot a spendthrift, he is happy to let him leave to go serve Bassanio, as this will make the latter go through his money more swiftly. Even his daughter considers him cruel. He flies into a wild passion when she flees his house, taking with her massive amounts of his money, and has her chased after as much if not more for the money than for her own sake. Knowing that Antonio was aware of this abduction, and hearing that the latter is ruined, he is delighted at the possibility of cutting out the merchant's heart. He is able to justify revenge on the basis of the bad behavior of Christians. His insistence on the letter of the law will be his undoing, leaving him not only unable to kill Antonio, but losing all the extra money offered him, the return of his principal, and soon forfeiting all of his wealth and his life. He accepts to turn Christian to save his life, but is left ill by the sudden reversal in his fortune. He is not a particularly nice man. When Shylock leaves the courtroom in Act iv scene i , he is stripped of all that he has. He is a defeated man. Yet we cannot feel deep sympathy for him though it sometimes appear that he is a "man more sinned against than