Who Knew?

*When you ponder through pieces of literature that are possibly very complex, confusing, and downright extraordinary, what do you think of?* Overall, time has procured a plethora of authors that rattle the brains of their audience; however, none boggle the mind of a reader like Shakespeare. Not only is he difficult to envelope, but his writings leak, drip with an abundance of inquiries and themes that were relevant in his era and are still apropos today. One of these questions that is included in a few of his scribings is: does Shakespeare combat common prejudices and stereotypes? In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare does exactly this; he addresses two major ideals concerning religion and gender, and in turn, teaches his audience lessons that they can carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Once in a blue moon, there will be authors that survive the test of time, have ideas that still apply to today's society, and are associated with the quality of brilliance. Shakespeare is one of these. His views on prejudice against specific types of religion -- especially Judaism in *The Merchant of Venice* -- are remarkable. In the plot line of *The Merchant of Venice*, there is a Jewish character known as Shylock. Just peering in, it appears as if Shylock has a lot of power, money, complacency; however, looks can be be deceiving. Due to the sole fact that Shylock is Jewish, he is perceived as an “ inhuman wretch” (Shakspeare, 140), “inexecrable dog” (Shakespeare, 149), and is constantly ostracized -- solely by Christians. Which brings to play the character known as Antonio; Antonio is a Christian who borrows money from Shylock, and is completely aware, accepting of the terms of the deal he makes with Shylock. If Antonio doesn't repay Shylock, he will owe Shylock a pound of flesh. And yes, you've guessed it, Antonio doesn't repay Shylock. When the issue is brought to court, Shylock is asked to show some mercy for Antonio, and is eventually cheated out of all of his possessions. His entire life is ruined, which is beyond unfair. Shylock has been tormented his whole life, has developed wanton characteristics due to the macabre mistreatment that was imposed upon him, and has only ever desired to hover above his tormentors. When he is finally able to overcome one of his bullies, he is stripped of his entire identity, pleaded to show some mercy that was never blessed upon him, and Antonio ends up vrooming onto the high road. Frankly, this is wrong. As Shylock would say “ we [Jews] are like you [Christians]’ (Shakespeare, 97). So, in the end, Shakespeare begs the reader to ask the question: *why is there so much loathing towards certain types of religions? Why?* As Shakespeare clearly states, there's no reason to cling to so much hate, because at the core, humans are all humans.

Another issue that Shakespeare addresses is the issue of gender equality. Time and time again, Shakespeare has developed his female characters to be intelligent, feisty, and clearly superior to some men. This is transparent in the *The Merchant of Venice*, when Portia is depicted to be quite wealthy, and able to disguise herself as a man that is depended upon during times of crisis; such as, the time when Shylock and Antonio had to settle their quarrels in the courtroom. Overall, Portia clearly knows the laws of the lands -- as she was able to declare that Shylock’s “bond is forfeit” (Shakespeare, 156) due to the laws that his bond would break -- and she knows how to manipulate people to get what she wants. She's a genius, and Shakespeare purposely sculpted her this way, in order to sway the public, in a time when women had no rights, to comprehend that women are not unlike men -- maybe even a little superior to men. They should be regarded highly, and are quite capable of accomplishing any tasks that men can. *Who knew that Shakspeare was somewhat of a feminist?*

It’s a shame that Shakespeare disintegrated so long ago, because he truly could have been a great asset to today’s society. Our society faces the same issues that Shakespeare’s society thwarted way back when and that he so cleverly conveyed in one of his many masterpieces known as *The Merchant of Venice*. While his visions in his era were known as flabbergasting, galvanizing, and maybe a bit humorous, his preachings would be praised in the world today; he would make tremendous strides in the social issue departments of scrutiny of specific religions and feminism with his proposals that at the cease of the day, we are all the same. Everyone is “fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, [and] subject to the same diseases” (Shakspeare, 97), so *why should Jews be ostracized, when they are no different from Christians?* *Why should women be inferior to men, when they are clearly no different from men?* Shakespeare teaches us that equality is crucial, and that everyone should treat thy neighbor as thy desires to be treated. And that, right there, is marvellous. Thank you Shakespeare for blasting bright beams upon certain corruptions in our society today; the people sincerely needed you then and they fervently need you now. Honestly, everybody needs a little Shakespeare spice in their life.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. N.p.: Simon & Brown, 2011. Print.

**SCORE: 40/40**

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| **A** | **B** | **C** | **D** |
| I have thoughtful, creative analysis and complete response that addresses the prompt (10pts).        I use thoughtful, well cited and integrated evidence (10pts).      I have thoughtful, creative, and effective organization (10pts).    I have inventive mechanics and no distracting errors (5pts)    I have the appropriate MLA format: 3-4 pages, double-spaced (5pts) | I have solid/appropriate analysis and a complete response that addresses the prompt (8pts)        I use appropriate, clearly cited and integrated evidence (8pts).      I have clear and effective organization (8pts).      I have solid mechanics, and some errors, but they aren’t distracting (4pts).      \*\*\* | I have some analysis, but its basic, surface level, underdeveloped and/or my response may be complete but it does not fully address the prompt (6-7pts).    I use some appropriate and clearly cited evidence, but it is limited and/or had some minor errors (6-7pts).    I have relatively clear organization, but it is limited, cliché, etc. (7pts).    I have basic mechanics and some distracting errors (3pts).      I have most of the MLA format (3pts). | I have little analysis and/or it poor and has lots of misinterpretation and/or it is not complete, and/or it does stay focused on the prompt (0-5pts).    I use very little evidence and/or there are errors, poorly connected, etc. (0-5pts).      I have weak, incomplete, and/or confusing organization (0-5pts).    I have poor mechanics and lots of distracting errors (0-2pts).    I do not follow the MLA format and/or my paper is too short (0-2pts). |