

Shylock is one of the best-known characters in the entire range of Shakespearean drama. He is also a controversial character. Some critics and readers regard him as a through villain while others believe that, in spite of his villainy, he deserves some sympathy also. It is necessary for us therefore to assess this man's character impartially. He certainly has his hateful traits of character; and he certainly deserves to be called a villain. But we still feel some sympathy for him because, in our opinion, he is not only a writing-doer but also a victim of wrong-doing by others. By profession, Shylock is a money-lender. Money-lending by itself is not something shameful or discreditable, or degrading, or even objectionable. However, money-lending becomes something odious and abhorrent if a money-lender becomes an exploiter by charging excessive rates of interest. Shylock is a money-lender who tries to enrich himself and to accumulate wealth by exploiting the financial needs of others. One reason why he hates Antonio is that Antonio lends money to needy persons without charging any interest at all, and Antonio thus brings down the rate of interest in Venice. Shylock has already hoarded a lot of wealth by his usury, but his craving for more money is not satisfied. This makes him a contemptible person in the play. In this respect he is a typical Jew because the Jews have traditionally been regarded as usurers. It is only in our own times that the Jews have been able to shed that image. Today the Jews are regarded as a versatile race of people, possessing many gifts and talents.