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In William Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice*, choice diction is used to dramatize the animosity between the main character, and Christian, Antonio, and the antagonist, a Jew, Shylock. At the time this play was written, many people saw Jews as stingy crooks who only want to make people suffer and make money. Inventive imagery is another result of Shakespeare’s diction choices. When, in Act V of the play, the characters are in a courtroom, you literally feel the emotions of each character and know how they are acting and what they must look like to the other people in the room. Shakespeare’s use of diction emphasizes the hatred between Jews and Christians while at the same time relays vivid imagery to the reader of the scene that dehumanizes Shylock.

It is a well-known fact that during the time Shakespeare was alive (1564-1616) Jews and Christians did not get along very well. Many Christians blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus Christ. This hatred visually influenced Shakespeare when he wrote this play. The words “Jew” and “dog” are almost interchangeable in Act V Scene I of *The Merchant of Venice*. In this scene, Antonio, and many of his friends, are in court with Shylock, who is trying to get his payment of a pound of flesh. Although most of the people in the court despise Shylock, Gratiano, one of Antonio’s friends, takes it too far by calling Shylock a “…damn’d, inexecrable dog!” (Shakespeare, V.i.149) Not only is this phrase cruel in and of itself, it also dehumanizes Shylock by making him out to be a vicious dog.

The word “Jew” in the play is spoken differently than it is today. Today, most people say the word Jew without any malice or feeling behind it, however in *The Merchant of Venice*, the word “Jew” is almost like a bullet; it is meant to tear into a person and break them down. This is exactly what happens to Shylock in Act V Scene I.

Punctuation is key in this act of the play. Not only does it add emotion to the scene, but it helps to visualizes what is supposed to be acted out on stage. For example, when Portia, dressed as a doctor, tells Shylock that he can take a pound of Antonio’s flesh, Shylock responds “Most rightful judge!” (Shakespeare, V.i.162) The exclamation point shows that Shylock is excited and makes it easy to visualize him virtually shaking with glee at the news. This visualization helps readers to better understand the scene.

Diction is not only the use of fancy, unique words, it is a way to communicate feelings and can change the way we see characters. This is especially true in Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice* when a Jew and a Christian go head-to-head.