Ex 1. pag. 126 - What is a stereotype? Provide a definition.

It is the attribution of a set of complex characteristics to individuals on the basis of preconceived notions. This racial or ethnic stereotyping is a collectivist way of thinking. It judges a person not by his own character and actions, but by the characters and actions of a collective of ancestors – as if values and character are determined before one is born. It is based implicitly on the irrational and discredited doctrine of inherited, innate knowledge. So while stereotyping may provide cognitive shortcuts, it leads to false conclusions. It is an obstacle to human thought and social progress.

Ex 2. pag. 126 - What stereotypes are connected with Jews?

Many Jewish stereotypes are understood by viewing history. Jews have been stereotyped as being adept money handlers. In medieval Europe, many governments restricted money handling and money lending to Jews and Arabs, believing them to be practices morally inappropriate for Christians. Entry into many fields was barred to Jews. Those who were competent financiers were most likely to succeed in a society where they were essentially personae non gratae. Jews learned by experience to develop skills in professions dependent on intellectual talents – they became teachers, doctors, lawyers, accountants. In a Europe where Jews were always considered resident-aliens, subject to expulsion or expropriation at the whim of the political class, it made sense to have a livelihood not tied to the ground. A Jew in exile could resume his profession and offer a scarce and valuable service wherever expulsion landed him. These money-handling and intellectual skills often gained favour with political power holders, bringing individual or group protection. Many Jews actually became tax collectors or other government officials and advisors. But it also made Jews hated by enemies of the regime and especially likely to become targets in the event of an overthrow. The images of Jews as blood-thirsty murderers of Jesus who snatch innocent Christian children for slaughter in bizarre passover rituals seems to provide a potent backdrop for the demonic appellations that are heaped upon Shylock in The Merchant of Venice.

Stereotypes and Misconceptions About Jews

Jews have been singled out for persecution and dehumanisation based on prejudice, bigotry, and stereotyping. Each of the following assumptions are false, but perpetuated as a means to dehumanise Jews and continue using them as scapegoats for problems in society.

1. Jews have big noses.
2. Jews are ‘tightwads’.
3. Jews are swindlers.
4. Jews are an inferior race.
5. Jews think they are better than everyone else.
6. Jesus Christ condemned the Jews himself and justified their persecution.
7. Jews control the economy of America.
8. The Holocaust never happened, Jews made up the whole story.
9. Jews established the state of Israel by stealing territory from Palestinians.
10. America supports Israel against Arab countries because of Jewish influence in Congress.
11. The Jews are to blame for the Arab world's hatred of America.
12. International terrorism would cease if America would stop supporting Israel.

Ex 3. pag. 126 - Discuss with your classmates.

1. What is usury?

Usury is the lending of money at interest. In The Merchant of Venice, Shylock's status as a usurer is never in doubt because his first line in the play defines him as such. Shylock is first seen pondering the amount of a loan: “Three thousand ducats, well”.

- Synopsis

Bassanio, a young Venetian of noble rank, wishes to woo the beautiful and wealthy heiress Portia of Belmont. Having squandered his estate, he needs 3,000 ducats to subsidise his expenditures as a suitor. Bassanio approaches his friend Antonio, a wealthy merchant of Venice who has previously and repeatedly bailed him out. Antonio agrees, but since he is cash-poor – his ships and merchandise are busy at sea – he promises to cover a bond if Bassanio can find a lender, so Bassanio turns to the Jewish moneylender Shylock and names Antonio as the loan's guarantor.

Antonio has already made an enemy of Shylock through his outspoken anti-Semitism, and also because Antonio's habit of lending money without interest forces Shylock to charge lower rates. Shylock is at first reluctant to grant the loan, citing abuse he has suffered at Antonio's hand, but finally agrees to lend the sum to Antonio without interest upon one condition: if Antonio is unable to repay it at the specified date, Shylock may take a pound of Antonio's flesh. Bassanio does not want Antonio to accept such a risky condition; Antonio is surprised by what he sees as the moneylender's generosity, and he signs the contract. With money at hand, Bassanio leaves for Belmont with his friend Gratiano.
Meanwhile in Belmont, Portia is meeting her suitors. Her father left a will stipulating each of her suitors must choose correctly from one of three caskets – one each of gold, silver and lead. If he picks the right casket, he gets Portia. The first suitor, the Prince of Morocco, chooses the gold casket, interpreting its slogan “Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire” as referring to Portia. The second suitor, the conceited Prince of Arragon, chooses the silver casket, which proclaims “Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves”, imagining himself to be full of merit. Both suitors leave empty-handed, having rejected the lead casket because of the baseness of its material and the uninviting nature of its slogan: “Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.” The last suitor is Bassanio, who chooses the lead casket, winning Portia’s hand.

At Venice, Antonio’s ships are reported lost at sea. This leaves him unable to satisfy the bond. Shylock is even more determined to exact revenge from Christians after his daughter Jessica had fled home and eloped with the Christian Lorenzo, taking a substantial amount of Shylock’s wealth with her. Shylock has Antonio brought before court.

At Belmont, Bassanio receives a letter telling him that Antonio has been unable to return the loan taken from Shylock. Portia and Bassanio marry. Bassanio and Gratiano then leave for Venice, with money from Portia, to save Antonio’s life by offering the money to Shylock. Unknown to Bassanio and Gratiano, Portia has disguised herself as a servant, Balthazar, to seek the counsel of Portia’s cousin, Bellario, a lawyer, at Padua.

The climax of the play comes in the court of the Duke of Venice. Shylock refuses Bassanio’s offer of 6,000 ducats, twice the amount of the loan. He demands his pound of flesh from Antonio. The Duke, wishing to save Antonio but unable to nullify a contract, refers the case to a visitor who introduces himself as Balthazar, a young male “doctor of the law”, bearing a letter of recommendation to the Duke from the learned lawyer Bellario. The doctor is actually Portia in disguise. As Balthazar, Portia repeatedly asks Shylock to show mercy in a famous speech, advising him that mercy “is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes” (IV, i, 185). However, Shylock adamantly refuses any compensations and insists on the pound of flesh.

As the court grants Shylock his bond and Antonio prepares for Shylock’s knife, Portia deftly points out that the contract only allows Shylock to remove the flesh, not the “blood”, of Antonio. Thus, if Shylock were to shed any drop of Antonio’s blood, he would have lost his lands and goods. She also tells him that he must cut precisely one pound of flesh, no more, no less; she advises him that “if the scale do turn, But in the estimation of a hair, Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate.”

Defeated, Shylock concedes to accepting Bassanio’s offer of money for the bond, which Portia also prevents him from doing on the ground that he has already refused it “in the open court.” She then cites a law under which Shylock, as a Jew and therefore an “alien”, having attempted to take the life of a citizen, must give his property, half to the government and half to Antonio, leaving his life at the mercy of the Duke. The Duke immediately pardons Shylock’s life. At Antonio’s request, the Duke grants remission of the state’s half of forfeiture, but on the condition of Shylock converting to Christianity.

At Belmont, Antonio learns from Portia that three of his ships were not stranded and have returned safely after all.

TEST YOURSELF p. 127
4. Before reading the text revise your knowledge about The Merchant of Venice.
1. How is the plot organised?
On two levels: the main plot is the conflict on money matters between the venetian Antonio and the Jewish money-lender Shylock; the subplot regards the choice of a husband by the rich lady Portia, who lives in Belmont.
2. What tradition did Shakespeare draw upon to portray Shylock?
The traditional portrayals of Jews as villains and objects of mockery and Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta.
3. How does Shylock differ from Marlowe’s Jew of Malta?
Shylock is a more complex character than the Jew in Marlowe’s play, and Shakespeare makes him seem more human by showing that his hatred is born of the mistreatment he has suffered in a Christian society. He elicits pity rather than simply scorn and derision, but he can’t be viewed in a completely positive light because of his coldly calculated attempt to revenge the wrongs done to him by murdering his persecutor, Antonio.
4. What is the difference between Shylock and the Christian merchants as regards business? Christian characters regard human relationships more valuable than business ones, whereas Shylock is only interested in money. Merchants like Antonio lend money free of interest, and risk their wealth and reputation for those they love, whereas Shylock’s greed seems to be stronger than his love for his daughter.
5. What Christian teaching lies behind the symbol of the lead casket?
Several Christian teachings are behind this symbol: the idea that desire is an unreliable guide and should be resisted, that appearance is often deceiving, and that people should not trust the evidence provided by the senses.
ATTO I - SCENA TERZA
A Venezia, in un campo
Entrano Bassanio e Shylock.

SHYLOCK: Tremila ducati, va bene?
BASSANIO: Sissignore, e per tre mesi.

BASSANIO: E per tre me si, come v'ho detto, Antonio garantiste di persona.

SHYLOCK: Antonio è garante, va bene.

BASSANIO: Allora m'aiutate? M'accontentate? Mi fate conoscere la vostra risposta?

SHYLOCK: Tremila ducati, per tre mesi, e Antonio è impegnato.

BASSANIO: È la vostra risposta.

SHYLOCK: Antonio è buono.

BASSANIO: Avete mai udito niente contro di lui?

SHYLOCK: Oh, no, no, no, no; quando vi dico che è buono, intendo dire che è sicuro. Ma il suo patrimonio è relativo: egli ha una nave in rotta per Tripoli e una in rotta per le Indie; a Rialto, poi, ho saputo che ne ha una terza in navigazione pel Messico, una quar...
CONTENTS
1. Read lines 1-27 and find out:
   a) what Bassanio needs: three thousand ducats.
   b) the terms of agreement imposed by Shylock: three months and Antonio bound.
   c) Antonio's securities for the loan: his ships and foreign trade ventures.
   d) why Shylock refuses Bassanio's invitation to dinner: he says he does not want to smell pork but we begin to realise that he hates Antonio.
2. Read the rest of the text and answer the following questions.
   1. Why does Shylock hate Antonio?
      1. He hates Antonio because he is a Christian (line 31),
      2. he lends money for free (line 33)
      3. and lowers the usurer's rate (lines 33-34),
      4. he joins the other merchants against him (lines 38-40).
   2. How does Antonio abuse Shylock? Antonio abuses Shylock both verbally (line 50) and physically (line 51).
   3. Why does he despise Shylock? Antonio despises Shylock because of his Judaism and for his business practice which depends upon usury (lines 72-73).
   5. How does Antonio respond to Shylock's complaints? He responds to Shylock's complaints with threats of renewed violence. Antonio swears that: "I am as like to call thee so again, / To spit on thee, to spurn thee too" (lines 69-70).
   6. What forfeit does Shylock establish? If Antonio fails to repay him in three months, he will cut off a pound of his flesh from where he pleases (lines 87-92).

STRUCTURE AND STYLE
3. How is Shylock represented? What aspects of his personality are shown in these lines? Shylock is referred to by name only once (line 44). Shylock is also referred to as an animal (a dog, a cur) and a slave (a bondman). These labels that are applied to Shylock effectively strip him of his humanity, and his religious identity. Given this tendency to see Shylock as something inhuman, it should come as no surprise that he is also explicitly demonised in the rhetoric of the play.
4. Focus on Antonio's character.
   1. What does Shylock mean when he says that he is "a good man" (line 10)? He means that he can repay his debt since he has the necessary means. He equates good with "useful".
   2. How does his character represent the general nature of the Christians? He appears as a charitable Christian who lends money freely, in contrast to the miserly and extortionist Shylock, who preys upon the hardship of others in order to further increase his own material wealth. The Christian virtue of lending money without interest is positioned, by Antonio, at the basis of Shylock's hatred of him. But what is significant about Antonio's argument is how it undermines the justice of Shylock's hatred; because Shylock hates Antonio for what is an essentially Christian virtue, Shylock attacks not only a good Christian man of good Christian virtue but also, by extension, Christianity in general. The perception created by Antonio's argument is that Shylock hates someone for their following a Christian virtue, which implies that Shylock is against Christianity, and by extension, of the devil's party. His contemptuous attitude towards Shylock, however, highlights his ambiguity.
5. Why does Shylock claim a pound of Antonio's flesh and not the (heart itself)? …and not the money? To show that his hatred outweighs his greed.
   Why does Shylock claim a pound of Antonio's flesh and not the heart itself?
Shylock never explicitly demands that Antonio die, but asks instead, in his numerical mind, for a pound in exchange for his three thousand ducats. Where the other characters measure their emotions with long metaphors and words, Shylock measures everything in far more prosaic and numerical quantities.
   What does this request imply? He wants to carry out his revenge for the abuse he has suffered from Antonio.
6. Revise exercise 2 and say what Jewish stereotypes you found in this text. Had you already mentioned them?
ATTO III – scena I

Entrano SALANIO e SALERIO

SALANIO Ebbene, che notizie ci sono fra i mercanti?

SALERIO Ma! Corre la voce, non smentita finora, che una nave d'Antonio con un ricco carico sia naufragata nello stretto. Credo che il punto si chiami Goodwins, un fondale molto pericoloso e fatale, dove le carcasse di molte grosse navi giacciono sepolti, a quel che si dice, se quella pettugola della voce pubblica (Comare diceria) è una donna onesta in ciò che asserrice.

SALANIO Vorrei che in questo caso fosse una pettugola tanto bugiarda quant'altra mai che rosicchiò dello zenero o dette a intendere ai suoi vicini di aver pianto per la morte del suo terzo marito. Ma è vero, senza scivolare nella profliguità (dettagli inutile), o interruzioni sulla strada maestra [perdere il filo] del discorso che il buon Antonio, l'onesto Antonio... Oh se trovasi un appellativo abbastanza degno da accoppiare al suo nome!

SALERIO Avanti, arriva al punto.

SALANIO Eh! Che cosa dici? Ebbene, la conclusione è che egli ha perduto una nave.

SALERIO Vorrei che ciò segnasse anche la conclusione delle sue perdite.

SALANIO Lasciami dire "Amen" in tempo, per paura (prima che) che il diavolo non disturbi la mia preghiera; perché egli viene da questa parte sotto le sembianze (aspetto) di un ebreo.

(Entra SHYLOCK)

Ebbene Shylock, che notizie ci sono fra i mercanti?

SHYLOCK Voi eravate a conoscenza - e nessuno così bene, nessuno così bene come voi della fuga di mia figlia.

SALERIO Certo. Io conoscevo, per parte mia, il sarto che le ha fatto le ali con le quali è volata via.

SALANIO E Shylock, da parte sua, era a conoscenza che l'uccellino aveva messo le penne e che è quindi nella natura di essi tutti di abbandonare la mamma (che lascino il nido).

SHYLOCK Essa è dannata per questo.

SALANIO Certamente, se il diavolo può essere il suo giudice.

SHYLOCK La mia carne, il sangue mio, ribellarasi così! 

SALANIO Vergogna, vecchia carogna, cosa vuoi che ti si ribelli a questa età?

SHYLOCK Io dico che mia figlia è carne e sangue mio!

SALERIO C'è più differenza tra la tua carne e la sua che fra l'ebano e l'avorio, ce n'è più fra i vostri due sangui che non ce ne sia tra il vino nero e quello del Reno. Ma, dici, hai sentito dire o no, se Antonio abbia avuto qualche perdita in mare?

SHYLOCK Eccome per un altro cattivo affare! Un fallito, uno scialacquatore, uno che ora osa appena mostrare la faccia a Rialto, uno straccione che era solito venire così compiaciuto al mercato! Pensi alla sua obbligazione! Aveva l'abitudine di chiamarmi usuraio. Pensi alla sua obbligazione! Era solito prestare danaro per cristiana compiacenza. Pensi alla sua obbligazione!

SALERIO Ebbene, sono sicuro che se fosse inadempiente tu non vorrai prenderti la sua carne. A che ti servirebbe?

SHYLOCK A farne esca per i pesci. Se essa non potrà alimentare almeno la mia vendetta. Egli mi ha insultato, mi ha impedito di guadagnar mezzo milione, ha riso delle mie perdite, si è burlato dei miei guadagni, ha fatto affari... Lasciami dire "Amen" in tempo, per paura (prima che) che il diavolo non disturbi la mia preghiera; perché egli viene da questa parte sotto le sembianze (aspetto) di un ebreo.

(SALANIO e SALERIO usciti)

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the Jews are an inferior race.
3. Do you sympathise with him or do you think he is a villain? Class discussion.
Suggestion: There have been many to point out that Shylock is by no means a monster. He has traits that humanise him and excite the audience's sympathy. He is both the representative of the world of money because he himself lends it, and of exclusion, because he is dismissed by the Venetians as too disturbing. Perhaps they hate him because he reminds them of their own unconfessed evil qualities.

4. Why do you think Shakespeare set this play in Italy? Why did he use a Jewish money-lender as a villain? Class discussion.

5. Do you think Shakespeare was an anti-semit? It does seem foolish to argue that Shakespeare's Shylock is the same kind of exaggerated monster that populates earlier drama, such as the Medieval morality plays or The Jew of Malta by Marlowe. Clearly, Shakespeare has invested Shylock with a degree of depth and realism that contributes to Shylock's status as one of the great villains of the stage. But, at the same time, it seems clear that Shakespeare creates Shylock against a historical and cultural backdrop that was intensely hostile to Jews. Given this social context and historical tradition, it should come as no surprise if some of this hostility against Jews should infiltrate Shakespeare's work. Shakespeare was, after all, a commercial dramatist and many commercial dramatists make their livings by pandering to, rather than working against, conventional social customs. To make the claim that Shakespeare creates Shylock within an anti-semitic culture, and therefore invests Shylock with biased anti-semitic attributes, does not contradict the artistry of the play. Nor does such a claim implicate Shakespeare himself as a monstrous anti-semit. All this claim suggests is that Shakespeare, like most of the rest of his society, was hostile toward Jewry for religious and cultural reasons, and that hostility is revealed most clearly in Shylock.

TEST YOURSELF
4. Before reading the text revise your knowledge about The Merchant of Venice.
   1. How is the plot organised?
      On two levels: the main plot is the conflict on money matters between the venetian Antonio and the Jewish money-lender Shylock; the subplot regards the choice of a husband by the rich lady Portia, who lives in Belmont.
   2. What tradition did Shakespeare draw upon to portray Shylock?
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