

For the above reasons, it is clear that viewing *The Merchant of Venice* as an early critique of religious discrimination has no substantive grounding in the text and that its pervasive antisemitic roots run deep. This begs the following question: why have audiences and readers been tempted to interpret the play this way in recent years? The most plausible answer is what George Bernard Shaw has famously called “bardolatry”: the type of excessive reverence that we reserve for William Shakespeare alone. We are taught in school that Shakespeare is the greatest writer of all, and we make the mistake of extending this to the understanding that we cannot be critical of him. We want to believe that Shakespeare is attacking religious discrimination in Shylock’s “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech, but, as this essay has shown, to do so is to force an interpretation that does not hold up to careful analysis.

Red = re-statement of thesis is *totally different* language than the thesis statement in introduction

Blue = why the thesis of this essay is significant