

SHAKESPEARE: THE CRITICAL TRADITION

The Merchant  
of Venice

*Edited by*  
WILLIAM BAKER  
BRIAN VICKERS

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE, 1775–1939

SHAKESPEARE: THE CRITICAL TRADITION

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Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition

## **The Merchant of Venice**

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# Contents

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
1 GEORG LICHTENBERG, on Macklin's Shylock, 1775	20
2 RICHARD HOLE, an 'apology' for Shylock, 1796	22
3 AUGUST WILHELM VON SCHLEGEL, 'one of Shakespeare's most perfect works', 1815	27
4 WILLIAM HAZLITT, Kean's debut as Shylock, 1816	30
5 WILLIAM HAZLITT, sympathy for Shylock, but not for Portia, 1817	32
6 AUGUSTINE SKOTTOWE, the major sources, 1824	35
7 GEORGE FARREN, in defence of Shylock, 1833	39
8 ANNA BROWNE JAMESON, Portia, 1833	46
9 THOMAS CAMPBELL, Shylock 'ill-used', 1838	52
10 HEINRICH HEINE, Shakespeare justifies 'an unfortunate race', 1838	54
11 HERMANN ULRICI, <i>summa jus summa injuria</i> , 1839	59
12 CHARLES KNIGHT, lessons of charity, 1849	61
13 GEORGE HENRY LEWES, Shylock's humanity, 1850	65
14 HENRY NORMAN HUDSON, Shakespeare's evenhandedness, 1851	68
15 JAMES O. HALLIWELL-PHILLIPPS, human rights and religious belief, 1856	77
16 WILLIAM WATKISS LLOYD, sympathetic liberality versus murderous avarice, 1856	79
17 HENRIETTA PALMER, in praise of Portia, 1859	86
18 FRIEDRICH KREYSSIG, 'a just estimate of things', 1862	88
19 CHARLES COWDEN CLARKE, Shakespeare's love of justice, 1863	91
20 GEORG G. GERVINUS, 'the relation of man to property', 1863	97
21 JOHN RUSKIN, Shylock 'the corrupted merchant', 1873	108
22 JAMES SPEDDING, Portia the central character, 1875	110
23 FREDERICK JAMES FURNIVALL, Shylock 'the hero of the piece', 1877	118
24 DENTON JACQUES SNIDER, a Hegelian reading, 1877	121
25 FREDERICK WILLIAM HAWKINS, a plea for toleration, 1879	124
26 HENRY IRVING, Shylock: an actor's view, 1879	126
27 FREDERICK JAMES FURNIVALL, not a doctrinal play, 1879	128
28 JAMES SPEDDING, 'not about Jewish grievances', 1879	129
29 ISRAEL DAVIS, Shylock's 'nobility and distinction', 1879	131
30 DAVID ANDERSON, Shylock 'a product of history', 1879	133

## Contents

31	OSCAR WILDE, a sonnet to Portia, 1879	135
32	SIDNEY LEE, 'the Lopez case' and Shakespeare's Jew, 1880	136
33	HENRY JAMES, a critique of Irving and Terry, 1881	143
34	CHARLES KENSINGTON SALAMAN, Shylock from a Jewish point of view, 1882	147
35	JOSEPH HATTON, an interview with Henry Irving, 1884	153
36	RICHARD G. MOULTON, Shakespeare's interweaving of plots, 1885	158
37	HELENA FAUCIT, on acting Portia, 1885	183
38	M. LEIGH-NOEL, Portia's womanliness, 1885	188
39	EL SEYONPI, privileged Christian, proscribed Jew, 1885	191
40	WILLIAM POEL, staging the play, 1887	196
41	EDWIN BOOTH, Shylock's 'revengeful selfishness', 1888	200
42	FRANCIS A. MARSHALL, 'the first of his [Shakespeare's] great comedies', 1888	202
43	SIR GEORGE HEYNES RADFORD, Shylock's character determined by the plot, 1894	206
44	FREDERICK SAMUEL BOAS, Shakespeare's concession to bigotry, 1896	209
45	GEORG BRANDES, Shylock 'a monster of passionate hatred, not avarice', 1898	221
46	A. W. VERITY, Shylock and modern criticism, 1898	227
47	C. H. HERFORD, 'two communities which meet but never mingle', 1900	229
48	STOPFORD A. BROOKE, 'some faint sympathy' for Shylock, 1905	233
49	CHARLES KNOX POOLER, Shylock 'a man of one idea', 1905	241
50	OTTO JESPERSEN, Shylock's language, 1905	244
51	SIR WALTER RALEIGH, Shylock more sinned against than sinning, 1907	247
52	THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON, 'untrammelled' as against 'plot-ridden' characters, 1907	249
53	E. K. CHAMBERS, the opposing principles of Love and Hate, 1908	254
54	ALGERNON SWINBURNE, Shylock less sinned against than sinning, 1909	259
55	WILLIAM POEL, Shakespeare's Jew and Marlowe's Christians, 1909	260
56	E. E. STOLL, Shylock a comic villain, 1911	268
57	WILLIAM WINTER, Shylock and his interpreters, 1911	279
58	SIR ISRAEL GOLLANCZ, 'man is what man had made him', 1916	294
59	SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH, Shakespeare's 'stage-cleverness' and the story's 'monstrous absurdity', 1916	303
60	ISADOR HENRY CORIAT, Shylock's anal-erotic tendencies, 1921	311
61	GERALD FRIEDLANDER, Shylock not an authentic Jew, 1921	316
62	LEVIN L. SCHÜCKING, Shylock's self-revelation in soliloquy, 1922	320
63	E. E. STOLL, Shakespeare's intentions and the dynamics of comedy, 1927	323
64	ANDREW TRETIAK, the 'alien' question, 1929	343
65	HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER, Shakespeare's attention to character and story, 1930	348
66	CECIL ROTH, Shylock the Venetian, 1933	357
67	THOMAS ARTHUR ROSS, Antonio a depressive homosexual, 1934	361
68	JOHN W. DRAPER, Shylock a London usurer, 1935	367

## Contents

69	CAROLINE SPURGEON, the distribution of imagery within the play, 1935	371
70	G. WILSON KNIGHT, the idea of riches, true and false, 1936	374
71	JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY, Shakespeare's 'matter-of-fact fairy tale', 1936	378
72	H. B. CHARLTON, the two Shylocks, 1938	383
73	JOHN DOVER WILSON, anti-Semitism, ancient and modern, 1938	391
74	MARK VAN DOREN, no hint 'where Shakespeare's sympathies lay', 1939	397
	NOTES	403
	SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	420
	(a) Editions and Playtexts (in chronological order)	420
	(b) Literary Studies	422
	(c) Theatre Studies	426
	INDEX	429

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BRIAN VICKERS

## General Editor's Preface

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The primary aim of this series is to increase our knowledge of how Shakespeare's plays were received and understood by critics, editors, and general readers. His work, with its enormous range of represented situations, characters, styles, and moods, has always been a challenge, both to the capacity of readers and to their critical systems. Two extreme reactions may be expected: either the system is expanded to match the plays, or the plays are reduced to fit the system. If we study Shakespeare's reception in the neo-classic period, as I have done in my six-volume anthology of primary texts, *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage, 1623–1801* (London and Boston, 1974–81), we see his plays being cropped – literally, cut, drastically adapted – to accommodate the prevailing notions of decorum and propriety. If not hacked about for the stage, they were evaluated by literary-critical criteria that seem to us self-evidently anachronistic and inappropriate, and found wanting. Yet despite this frequent mismatch between system and artefact, the focus of neo-classic critical theory on issues of characterization, structure, and style did enable many writers to respond to the experience of reading or seeing his plays in a fresh and personal way.

Since most of the eighteenth-century material has been dealt with in the previously mentioned collection, the main emphasis in this series will be on documenting the period 1790 to 1940. While the major Romantic critics (Coleridge, Hazlitt, Keats) have often been studied, and will need less representation here, there are many interesting and important writers of the early nineteenth century who have seldom attracted attention from modern historians. As one moves on chronologically, into the Victorian period, our knowledge becomes even more thin and patchy. But there was a continuous, indeed constantly increasing stream of publications in England, America, France, and Germany, hardly known today. (See my select bibliography of the 'History of Shakespeare Criticism' in the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, Third Edition, Volume 2: 1500–1700*, ed. Douglas Sedge, Cambridge University Press; forthcoming). This period saw the founding of the Shakespeare Society by J. P. Collier in 1840, which produced a huge number of publications by 1853, when it unfortunately collapsed, following Collier's exposure as a forger. In 1873 the New Shakspeare Society was founded by F. J. Furnivall, and over the following twenty years produced some eight series of publications, including its *Transactions*, which contain many important critical and scholarly essays, a group of reprints of early quartos, allusion books, bibliographies, and much else. This was also the period in which the first journals devoted exclusively to Shakespeare appeared, some short-lived, such as *Poet-Lore* (Philadelphia, 1889–97) and *Shakespeariana* (Philadelphia, 1883), *Noctes Shakespeariana* (Winchester College, 1887), or *New Shakespeariana* (the organ of the Shakespeare Society of New York), but at least one is still

## General Editor's Preface

with us, the *Jahrbuch* of the *Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft*, which appeared as such from 1865 to 1963, was divided into separate volumes for West and East Germany in 1964–5, but happily reunited in 1991.

Shakespeare's plays were constantly edited and reprinted in this period. Of the complete editions, the two great peaks are the 'Third Variorum edition' of James Boswell, Jr. in 21 volumes (1821), the apotheosis of the eighteenth-century editions by Johnson, Steevens, and Malone, and the Cambridge edition by William G. Clark, John Glover, and W. Aldis Wright in 9 volumes (1836–66), which in turn provided the text for the enormously long-lived, one-volume 'Globe edition' (1864). The Cambridge edition, which presented Shakespeare's text with minimum annotation, broke with the eighteenth-century tradition of reprinting all the important footnotes from every earlier edition, an incremental process that burdened the page but certainly led to a great dissemination of knowledge about Shakespeare's plays. That service was recommenced on a new and more coherent plan in 1871 by Dr H. H. Furness with his 'New Variorum Edition' of separate plays, continued by his son H. H. Furness, Jr. (15 titles by 1908), and revived in our time as the 'New Variorum Shakespeare', currently under the aegis of the Modern Language Association of America. But in addition to these well-known scholarly editions, a vast number of competing sets of the plays were issued for and absorbed by an apparently insatiable public. Their popularity can be judged by the remarkable number of reprints and re-editions enjoyed, for instance, by Charles Knight's 'Pictorial edition' (8 vols., 1838–43), followed by his 'Library edition' (12 vols., 1842–4), rechristened in 1850–2 the 'National edition', not easily distinguishable from Knight's own 'Cabinet edition' (16 vols., 1847–8), not to mention his 'Imperial edition' and 'Blackfriars edition', all of which were followed by a host of spin-offs of their constituent material; or those by J. P. Collier (8 vols., 1842–4; 6 vols., 1858; 8 vols., 1878, now described as having 'the Purest Text and the Briefest Notes'), or Alexander Dyce (6 vols., 1857; 9 vols., 1846–7; 10 vols., 1880–1, 1895–1901). Other notable editions came from J. O. Halliwell (16 vols., 1853–65); Howard Staunton (3 vols., 1856–60; 8 vols., 1872; 6 vols., 1860, 1873, 1894; 15 vols., 1881); John Dicks, whose 'shilling edition' (1861) had reputedly sold a million copies by 1868, but was undercut by the 'Shakespeare for Sixpence' edition (Cardiff, 1897); Nicolaus Delius (7 vols., 1854–61), the text of which was reused by F. G. Furnivall for his one-volume 'Leopold edition' (1877, '100th Thousand' by 1910); Edward Dowden (12 vols., 1882–3); F. A. Marshall and Henry Irving in the 'Henry Irving' edition (8 vols., 1888–90); C. H. Herford's 'Eversley edition' (10 vols., 1899); the 'Stratford town edition' by A. H. Bullen and others (10 vols., 1904–7); the 'University Press' edition with notes by Sidney Lee and important introductions to the individual plays by over 30 critics (40 vols., 1906–9); and many, many more, as yet unchronicled by bibliographers.

America also launched a vigorous tradition of Shakespeare editing, starting with Gulian C. Verplanck's edition (3 vols., New York 1844–7), continuing with those by H. N. Hudson (11 vols., Boston 1851–6 and 20 vols., 1880–1); R. G. White (12 vols., Boston 1857–66, 1888), and the 'Riverside edition' (3 vols., Boston 1883); J. A. Morgan, the 'Bankside edition' (22 vols., New York, 1888–1906), with parallel texts of the plays from the quartos and folio; W. J. Rolfe, a larger edition (40 vols., New York 1871–96), and a smaller or 'Friendly edition' (20 vols., New York 1884); and two

## General Editor's Preface

notable editions by women, Mary Cowden Clarke's (2 vols., 1860, 4 vols., 1864), and the 'First Folio edition' by Charlotte E. Porter and Helen A. Clarke (40 vols., New York 1903–13). These editions often included biographical material, illustrative notes, accounts of Shakespeare's sources, excerpts from contemporary ballads and plays, attempts to ascertain the chronology of his writings, and much else. The fortunate – largely middle-class – purchasers of these sets had access to a surprisingly wide range of material, much of it based on a sound historical knowledge. In addition to the complete works, there were countless editions of the individual plays and poems, many of them of a high scholarly standard, (the best known being the original 'Arden edition', ed. W. J. Craig and R. H. Case in 39 vols., 1899–1924), not to mention numerous facsimiles of the Folios and Quartos.

The more we study the Victorian period, the less likely we shall be to indulge such facile dismissals of it as Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918). Where Strachey could follow the common practice of rejecting the values of the preceding age, we now should have sufficient historical distance to place the scholarly and critical output of that period into a coherent perspective. Nineteenth-century scholars produced a number of studies that held their place as authorities for many years, and can still be used with profit. For Shakespeare's language there was E. A. Abbott, *A Shakespearean Grammar* (1869; many editions), Alexander Schmidt, *Shakespeare-Lexicon* (Berlin, 1874–5, 1886), revised and extended by Gregor Sarrazin (2 vols., Berlin, 1902), and Wilhelm Franz, *Shakespeare-Grammatik* (Halle, 1898–1900, 1909; Heidelberg, 1924). It is only very recently that modern works, such as Marvin Spevack, *A Shakespeare Thesaurus* (Hildesheim, 1993), have added anything new. On the fundamental issue of the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, such as his collaboration with John Fletcher in *Henry VIII*, the division of labour independently proposed for that play by Samuel Hickson and James Spedding in 1847 and 1850 has been largely confirmed by Jonathan Hope in *The Authorship of Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge, 1994), and by Brian Vickers in *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (Oxford, 2002). In other areas we now have more reliable tools to work with than the Victorians, but it was they who laid the basis for many of our scholarly approaches to Shakespeare.

As for their Shakespeare criticism, while a few authors are still known and read – A. C. Bradley for his *Shakespeare Tragedy* (1904), Walter Pater for his essay on 'Shakespeare's English Kings' in *Appreciations* (1880) – the majority are simply unknown. Among the English critics who clearly deserve to be revalued are Richard Simpson for his essays on Shakespeare's historical plays, R. G. Moulton for his *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1885; 3rd edn 1906), Edward Dowden, and F. S. Boas. As for the many German critics whose work was eagerly translated into English – A. W. Schlegel, Hermann Ulrici, G. G. Gervinus, Karl Elze, Wilhelm Creizenach – who today can give any account of their writings?

★ ★ ★

In addition to documenting Shakespeare's reception this series aims to retrieve from obscurity critics whose work can still help us to understand his plays. The unremitting outpouring of Shakespeare criticism in our time means that writers of previous generations gradually disappear from view. And when a change of critical taste is billed as a revolution that makes all previous approaches obsolete – such being the claims made



## General Editor's Preface

since the 1970s by the competing schools of deconstruction, new historicism, feminism, cultural materialism, post-colonial criticism, and others – then earlier critics may be not just forgotten but pillorized and stigmatized for not having seen the light in which their successors are now basking. In such a time it becomes especially important not to lose sight of those critics writing fifty, a hundred, or even two hundred years ago who still have much to tell us. Shakespeare criticism has become so specialized, and so fragmented into schools flourishing their group identity over and against other schools, that we are increasingly forgetting perceptive contributions produced by writers outside the narrow range of professional literary critics. In 1905 the great Danish philologist, Otto Jespersen, produced an outstanding analysis (No. 50 below) of Shylock's language, the features by which Shakespeare individualized him. So far as I can see, no editor of *The Merchant of Venice* has ever cited Jespersen's observations,<sup>1</sup> and they have ignored two other insightful accounts of Shylock's distinctive style, by Heine in 1838 (No. 10), and by Mark Van Doren in 1939 (No. 74). Many writers pay homage to Shakespeare's language, but few can be bothered to study it.

Another important aspect of Shakespeare's art for which lip-service all too often substitutes for detailed analysis is his ability to construct unified plots out of very miscellaneous source material, stories which often seem to violate every term in Aristotle's dictum that a work of literature should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. In his immediately preceding comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare demonstrated his skill in organizing three parallel plots so that each throws light on the others, and the whole action seems to naturally fill up the three days remaining before the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta, interrelating action on the vertical plane, so to speak (the levels of plot), with that on the horizontal plane of imagined time. The plot of *The Merchant of Venice* is less often celebrated than that of the *Dream*, but it is just as brilliant in setting, and resolving, problems of construction and motivation. This volume includes a substantial excerpt (No. 36) from the classic analysis of its plot made by Richard Moulton in his book *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1885), still the most detailed and perceptive account. Earlier critics had recognized Shakespeare's achievement in constructing the play – Henry Hallam, in his *Introduction to the Literature of Europe* (1837–9), judged that 'In the management of the plot, which is sufficiently complex without the slightest confusion or incoherence, I do not conceive that it has been surpassed in the annals of any theatre'<sup>2</sup> – but it was left to Moulton to demonstrate just how much thought and care Shakespeare had devoted to achieving the right balance between the constituent parts. Moulton's analysis is worth close examination, since it helps define a crucial principle in interpreting works of literature, especially important with *The Merchant of Venice*, namely the need to achieve a balanced interpretation that accurately reflects the meaning of the play as a whole, as the author intended it. As we shall see, interpretations have all too often mistaken one part for the whole.

Moulton first discusses the main plot, 'the Story of the Cruel Jew, who entered into a bond with his enemy of which the forfeit was to be a pound of this enemy's own flesh', showing it to be a nemesis plot twice over, for 'the nemesis which visits Antonio's fault is the crime for which Shylock suffers his nemesis'. Antonio is guilty of 'self-sufficiency' both in believing his commercial ventures to be above chance and in his dismissive treatment of Shylock, while 'Shylock's sin of judicial murder finds a nemesis of

## General Editor's Preface

retribution in his ruin by process of law'. This 'nemesis on a nemesis' reaches its climax in the symmetrically structured trial scene, which shows in succession 'the Jew's triumph and the Jew's retribution; the two sides are bound together by the principle of measure for measure, and for each detail of vindictiveness that is developed in the first half of the scene there is a corresponding item of nemesis in the sequel'. Moulton then analyses 'the Story of the Heiress and the Caskets', which is based on 'the problem of Judgment by Appearances', the need to make a crucial choice to which a penalty is attached, failure resulting in a vow of celibacy. Moulton shows that the contest presents no information on which a rational choice could be made, so that the three suitors' decisions must be based on 'the weight of their past lives', what we would call their character. The testing of psychological and moral qualities gives the victor, Bassanio, a depth of purpose which recalls Kierkegaard's observation that human beings live their values.

Moulton then considers how Shakespeare addresses the main difficulty of the bond story, how to justify a pound of flesh forming the forfeit, which might seem an impossible task outside of a fairy tale. Moulton analyses Act 1, Scene 3 from the Jew's perspective, as Shylock tries to exploit a situation 'in which his persecutor is appearing before him in the position of a client'. For Shylock's – and Shakespeare's – purpose, a discussion on interest was the most natural topic, but it was a brilliant stroke to make Shylock defend usury 'by citing the patriarch Jacob and his clever trick in cattle-breeding; showing how, at a time when cattle were the currency, the natural rate of increase might be diverted to private advantage'. Antonio tries to disvalue the analogy, but 'with this notion of flesh *versus* money floating in the air between them the interview goes on to the outbursts of mutual hatred which reach a climax in Antonio's challenge to Shylock to do his worst'. I think that one could further argue that Shylock deliberately recalls the enmity that Antonio has shown him in the past, knowing that Antonio will react with another hostile utterance. But in allowing himself to be provoked Antonio puts himself at a disadvantage in the financial negotiations that he must settle if he is to raise a loan for his friend Bassanio. At this point, Moulton observes, Shylock 'smoothes his face and proposes friendship. He will lend the money without interest, in pure kindness, nay more, he will go to that extent of good understanding implied in joking, and will have a merry bond'. In this context Shylock's 'monstrous proposal sounds almost natural. It has further been ushered in in a manner which makes it almost impossible to decline it. When one who is manifestly an injured man is the first to make advances, a generous adversary finds it almost impossible to hold back'. Although some of Shylock's apologists see him acting with innocent good faith here, Moulton helps us to understand how Shakespeare made the bond credible in terms of Shylock's manoeuvring for advantage, its incongruity with commercial negotiations seeming to show 'his non-commercial intentions'.

Moulton then considers how Shakespeare interwove his two main stories so that they assist one another's effect, using the basic dramatic methods of plot complication and resolution. Shakespeare arranges things so that the leading characters in each plot have key functions in the other. Bassanio, 'the happy lover of the caskets story', is the complicating force in the bond story, for without his 'need of money and his blunder in applying to Shylock the bond would never have been entered into, and the change in Antonio's fortunes would never have come about'. Reciprocally, Portia, the maiden

## General Editor's Preface

(and prize) of the caskets story, 'is the means by which Antonio's fortunes are restored to their natural flow'. Where some critics have taken the trial scene (4.1) to be the play's crisis,<sup>3</sup> Moulton justly observes that Bassanio's choice forms the play's real dramatic centre, for 'if Portia and Bassanio had not been united in the earlier scene' Portia would not have transformed herself into a lawyer. Shakespeare demonstrated his control of the play's form and meaning by adding two further plots, 'the Story of Jessica and the Episode of the Rings', organizing the material so that 'all four stories meet in the scene of the successful choice'. The climax of the caskets story, at which Portia and Bassanio exchange rings (laying the base for a later complication and resolution), also includes Bassanio learning of Antonio's arrest by Shylock, news brought by Jessica and her husband.

Such is the symmetry with which the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* has been constructed: the incident which is technically its Dramatic Centre is at once its mechanical centre, its poetic centre, and, philosophically considered, its true turning-point; while, considering the play as a Romantic drama<sup>4</sup> with its union of stories, we find in the same central incident all the four stories dovetailed together.

As Moulton showed, the trial scene is the point at which the nemesis plot against Antonio reverses into the nemesis of Shylock, but it also displays another feature of Shakespeare's constructive skill, his ability to interweave 'a light and a serious story'. The trial scene gathers the emotional threads of the play into a knot, where 'the two personages who are the embodiments of the light and serious elements face one another as judge and prisoner'. Shakespeare's method of alternating happy and threatening plots illuminates a crucial point in the proper understanding of *The Merchant of Venice*, its nature as a comedy. Apologists for Shylock, who take him to be a sympathetic tragic character, not a comic one, often complain at the way in which Portia seems to spin out the suspense in the trial scene, giving Shylock one chance after another to abandon his wish for Antonio's death, until she releases 'the thunderstroke which reverses the whole situation'. Moulton points out that

had this situation been intended to have a tragic termination this prolonging of details would have been impossible; thus to harrow our feelings with items of agony would be not art but barbarity. It is because Portia knows what termination she is going to give to the scene that she can indulge in such boldness

and the audience can accept her authority as 'the signal of deliverance'. This is the point at which Shylock's wish to kill Antonio is defeated, and the play's comic structure is re-established, with a resolution in Act 5 all the more harmonious for the discords overcome.

Finally, Moulton discusses the play's underplot, addressing a 'paradox: that Shakespeare makes a plot more complex in order to make it more simple'. The story of Jessica, with its episodes of planning and executing her elopement, together with its effect on Shylock (2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.8, 3.1) is carefully intercalated with the caskets story (2.1, 2.7, 2.9, 3.2), so helping to fill out the stage time of the notional three months

## General Editor's Preface

elapsing between the signing of the bond and its forfeiture. Secondly, the loss of Jessica heightens Shylock's wish for revenge, and may arouse sympathy for the abandoned father (a moot point in many critics' eyes). Thirdly, the improbability that all of Antonio's ships should be lost at one go 'is lessened by the gradual way in which the news is broken to us, distributed among the numerous scenes of the three months' interval'. Fourthly, Jessica and her suite form a link between the story of the Jew and that of the caskets, for they are transferred from Shylock's care to Portia's, and from Venice to Belmont. Moulton argues that the rings episode helps restore the balance between the two main plots, since 'the Jew Story is complicated and resolved, while the Caskets Story is a simple progress to a goal'. In this way, through a 'sub-action which has a highly comic complication and resolution the two halves of the play become dramatically on a par'. I would add that the rings episode helps to underline the continuity of plot stretching back to the play's beginnings, one in which Shylock took no part, so helping to erase memories of his threatening presence. In discussing 'Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist' Moulton's purpose was to 'combat the notion . . . that Shakespeare, though endowed with the profoundest grasp of human nature, is yet careless in the construction of his plots', and he triumphantly succeeded. By treating the play as a whole, and by demonstrating the care with which Shakespeare constructed and interrelated his plots, Moulton made a lasting contribution to our understanding of *The Merchant of Venice*.

The other outstanding commentator on the play in the period covered in this volume was E. E. Stoll, who wrote two substantial accounts of Shylock, in 1911 (No. 56) and 1927 (No. 63). Stoll was a pioneer of historical criticism, reconstructing the social attitudes and dramatic conventions on which Shakespeare drew. As he showed, Shylock is simultaneously 'A miser, a money-lender, a Jew', three stereotypes of 'popular detestation and ridicule' in Elizabethan drama and character-writing. Stoll's survey of the antipathies traditionally attached to each of these roles supported his main thesis, that Shylock is 'a comic villain', not a tragic one. In forming our evaluation of Shylock, Shakespeare used the dramatist's three traditional resources, starting with the comments of other characters. With the exception of Tubal, everyone who comes into contact with Shylock makes negative judgements on him, while they all praise Bassanio and Antonio, a polarization of sympathies that cannot but guide the audience's judgement. Secondly, by his ordering of the scenes in Act 2, Shakespeare arranges that we see Launcelot and Jessica separately before Shylock returns to his house, so that, 'hearing their story, we may side with them'. Similarly, in order to forestall misplaced sympathy for Shylock, Shakespeare introduces Solanio in advance to report his outcries over losing his daughter and his ducats. Since Shylock confuses two incompatible value categories, money and love-relationships, his 'griefs excite no commiseration'. Thirdly, 'as with Shakespeare's villains generally, Aaron, Iago, or Richard III', we cannot believe their public utterances: 'only what they say concerning their purposes aside or to their confidants can be relied upon'. Shylock's 'motives, confessed repeatedly', in direct communication to us (1.3.41-52), in conversation with Salerio and Solanio (3.1.53-73), with Tubal (3.1.116), or as reported by Jessica (3.2.284-90), amount to an obsessive hatred that seeks to destroy Antonio. By reference to this motivation we can gauge the hypocrisy and false friendship he displays towards his intended victim (1.3.59-60, 137-41).

## General Editor's Preface

Stoll denied that Shylock could also be seen as 'a pathetic creation', for although some of his utterances may seem pathetic torn from context,

Shakespeare plays the familiar dramatic trick of clapping upon a seemingly pathetic sentiment a cynical, selfish, or simply incongruous one. Shylock cannot wish that his daughter were dead at his foot (if that be pathos) without, while he is at it, wishing that the jewels were in her ear, the ducats in her coffin.

In such incongruous juxtapositions, 'in true Elizabethan style, there is glaring contrast. . . . The pathos is a pretense, the laughter alone real'. The trial scene cannot be tragic, since it first presented Shylock's vindictiveness, then systematically reversed it: in Shakespeare's source, *Il Pecorone*, this sequence is described as 'the biter bit'. 'The mistake of the critics' who elevate Shylock's defeat to the play's tragic centre, Stoll argued, was 'that of viewing the text piece by piece, and not as a whole'. In this play 'the Jew's story is, and is meant to be, but an episode' in a more complex structure.

When Stoll expanded his Shylock essay in 1927 he returned to a point made in passing, the importance of identifying 'the author's intention' in creating a literary work. By formulating this principle Stoll did not imply either that the author's intention was 'necessarily clear and conscious in him; or that he keeps to it without changing'. Rather, the artist embodies his intention in the whole literary work, and all its constituent parts:

A character is as much the author's means of communication to the public as a phrase or sentiment. . . . And a convention or dramatic device, though now outworn, is as important a means of such communication as the wording of the text.

The Elizabethans' 'old undramatic convention of comment and description', for instance, is one way in which a dramatist could make the audience see a character or moral issue in one light, not another. The sequence of presentation is another authorial tool guiding our perception and evaluation of characters. In our first view of Shylock, Shakespeare places early his soliloquy declaring his hatred for Antonio (1.3.41–52) to give us the vital perspective on his subsequent behaviour. In Stoll's words, this is 'one of the most remarkable instances in dramatic literature of a man saying one thing but thinking another and the audience made to see this', an insight into Shylock's hypocrisy that must alienate us still further. Stoll drew attention to the fact that Shakespeare makes Shylock deliver the now famous speech, 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' to precisely those characters, the 'two merry gentlemen' Solanio and Salerio, who had just delivered that 'ludicrous report' of Shylock's 'variable lamentations. . . . If in the theatre it is to be pathos, he should be speaking to someone more responsive on the stage; at every word he is expected to burst out in his "daughter-ducats" vein once more; and presently so he does'. The speech itself, Stoll protested, had been misread for generations: 'everyone fails to see the thread running through it, the idea, not that Jews have been inhumanly treated but that from a Jew mistreated you may expect the same as from a Christian – revenge, though in a richer measure'. Elizabethan audiences expected Jews to behave like this (witness Barabas in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*), a cultural conditioning that no longer

## General Editor's Preface

affects us moderns, 'with our humanitarian impulses'. But Shakespeare was not writing a humanitarian tract:

There is no suggestion that Christians should no longer do any hurt to the Jews, and we make Shylock overstate his case. He is only defending himself in what he intends to do; we make him defend his race against all that has been done to it. He is putting in a plea for the right of revenge; we turn it into a plea for equal treatment at the outset.

Shakespeare nowhere presents Shylock as pathetic or heroic.

In strengthening his account of Shylock as a comic figure Stoll drew on Henri Bergson's *Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique* (1900), which he had recently read. Bergson pointed out that the comic dramatist 'isolates his material, insulates it' by preserving 'the comic current' intact within the play's system, not allowing us to respond to characters being made fun of with the emotions that we might feel in real life. It is important that the spectator be kept '*insensible*, unsympathetic'. Another of Bergson's criteria for comedy was that the comic character should be shown as '*insocial*', out of harmony with his social environment. Shakespeare isolates Shylock as Antonio's antagonist, for everyone in the play views him with disapproval, save Tubal. And Shakespeare uses even Tubal to present Shylock in a comic light. In 1911 (before he read Bergson) Stoll had described the scene in which Tubal alternates, apparently absent-mindedly (or perhaps with the senility of Silence and Shallow<sup>5</sup>) reports of Jessica's spendthrift behaviour and Antonio's losses, as one in which 'Shylock is a puppet, and Tubal pulls the strings'. In 1927 he added: 'surely nowhere else in Shakespeare do we get so distinctly as here that effect of the human being turned mechanical – automaton, or jack-in-the-box – which is frequent in comedy', as Bergson had shown.

Throughout both essays Stoll had recreated Shakespeare's intentional use of the resources of drama to control our reactions to Shylock. Some of these devices, he showed, were specific to comedy, such as repetition (as in Shylock's laments) and inversion (as in the Trial Scene), and in the 1927 essay he added much comparative material from the comic tradition. Ever since Plautus comedy has dealt with situations involving standard roles and standardized reactions, in which the audience's sympathies lie with 'the debtor and against the money-lender', with 'the amorous son or eloping daughter and against the hard-hearted, stingy father'. It is not ideal justice, but that is not the business of comedy. Secondly, the hard-heartedness necessary to enjoy comedy is not a historical universal, but subject to changes of taste. Due to the influence of a new kind of sensibility in the eighteenth century, the comedy of Molière was sentimentalized by critics who had lost the comic 'insulation', and were offended by the dramatist ridiculing or humiliating his butts. The comic spirit was lost in the French theatre, but was restored by Coquelin at the Comédie Française in the late nineteenth century. Stoll's work was designed to recreate a historical context and to achieve the same recognition: that Shakespeare's apparently heartless treatment of Malvolio or Shylock was inseparably allied to the dynamics of comedy. As Stoll wrote in 1911, 'Scholarship is all that can rescue Shakespeare'. That comment continues to be relevant.

R. G. Moulton and E. E. Stoll provide an example that is still relevant to modern

## General Editor's Preface

readers and writers by addressing *The Merchant of Venice* as a whole, reconstructing its creation from the dramatist's point of view, and by always considering the function of a character or episode in the overall design. They were exceptional critics then, as now, in their ability to register the play's totality, and they have left a permanent legacy to Shakespeare criticism. Other critics have looked at only part of the play, treating its characters as if they were people who one might meet in real life, and whose behaviour might be praised or blamed in the same way that we comment on our friends or neighbours. In the case of Portia, detaching her from her functions in the play led to her idealization as the perfect Victorian woman. We might have expected such panegyrics from explicitly feminist writers, such as Anna Brownell Jameson (No. 8) in 1833, Henrietta Palmer (No. 17) in 1859, Helena Faucit (No. 37) and Madeline Leigh-Noel (No. 38), both writing in 1885. But adulation of Portia came even more strongly from male writers, such as Henry Hudson (No. 14) in 1851, Friedrich Kreyszig (No. 18) in 1862, Charles Cowden Clarke (No. 19) in 1863, James Spedding (No. 22) in 1875. Some of these tributes verge on the excessive: Oscar Wilde's sonnet to her (No. 31) in 1879 includes the line

O Portia! take my heart: it is thy due.

In 1896 F. S. Boas (No. 44) enthused over her 'harmoniously balanced perfection'; the Danish critic George Brandes (No. 45) hailed her in 1898 as expressing 'Shakespeare's idea of womanhood', being 'wise and delicate' and 'noble to the heart's core'. For the Anglo-Irish cleric Stopford Brooke (No. 48), writing in 1905, Portia was 'the queen of the play, the Muse of wisdom and of Love'; for Quiller-Couch (No. 59), in 1916, Portia was one of 'Shakespeare's adorable women, one of his incomparable women', while G. Wilson Knight (No. 70), describing in 1936 how the play should be produced, reasoned that, since 'Portia descends from Belmont almost as a divine being', with the 'office . . . of a *dea ex machina*', she should be dressed in a '*gown of spotless white*', standing 'serene in white purity, symbol of Christian romance'. Barring some excesses, the idealization of Portia was not too damaging to views of the play as a whole, for she does play a crucial role, and both Gervinus (No. 20) and James Spedding (No. 22) acknowledged her to be the play's 'true central point', as the German critic put it.

For Shylock, however, detachment from the play's evolving structure, with its recurring exposure of his hypocrisy, deviousness, and malice, and its systematic blocking off of the audience's sympathy, has had only damaging effects. He has been taken to represent Shakespeare's justification of 'an unfortunate race', as Heine put it in 1838 (No. 10). Victorian liberal and humanitarian attitudes frequently defended Shylock, as if he were a representative Jew who symbolized all that was admirable about a persecuted race. Such apologies were made by many critics, of which those represented here provide a reliable cross-section: A. W. von Schlegel (No. 3) in 1815; William Hazlitt (Nos. 4, 5), in 1816-17; George Farren (No. 7) in 1833; Thomas Campbell (No. 9) in 1838; Charles Knight (No. 12) in 1849; Henry Hudson (No. 14) in 1851; Cowden Clarke (No. 19) in 1863, asking 'Who does not sympathise with Shylock?'; F. J. Furnivall (No. 23) in 1877, arguing that Shakespeare had made an 'unanswerable' case; Frederick Hawkins (No. 25) in 1879, taking at face value Shylock's 'enthusiasm for his

## General Editor's Preface

sacred tribe', the 'great but downtrodden race he represents'; Henry Irving (No. 26), and Israel Davis (No. 29), writing in 1879; 'El Seyonpi' (a *nom de plume* for Isaac P. Noyes) (No. 39) in 1885; F. S. Boas (No. 44) in 1896; A. W. Verity (No. 46) in 1898; Stopford Brooke (No. 48) in 1905; Theodore Watts-Dunton (No. 52) in 1907; H. B. Charlton (No. 72) in 1938; and John Dover Wilson (No. 73) in 1938. All these commentators attach great seriousness to Shylock's utterances, as if they were intended by Shakespeare to have a pathetic or tragic effect, and to draw attention to a human injustice that needed righting. None of them grasped the fundamental principle that we must not naively believe what characters in drama say about themselves, for they may be lying, deceiving, or just putting a more favourable gloss on their behaviour. The truth of this observation is immediately obvious in the case of Falstaff, or Richard III, or Iago, yet is seldom remembered when dealing with Shylock.

The error of these partial, *parti pris* positions will be obvious to anyone who has read the analyses of Moulton and Stoll. Other commentators in the period covered by this volume also attacked the idealization of Shylock as the typical persecuted Jew, and reiterated his dramatic function. J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps (No. 15) wrote in 1856 that Shylock

is represented as a Jew, not in any degree as the type of an entire race, but because it was requisite, in carrying out the design of the play, to introduce a character belonging to a people towards whom the attribution of the most violent persecution would have been accepted by an audience as intelligible, and within the limits of high probability.

In 1894 Sir George Radford (No. 43) made the same point, more briefly: 'Shylock himself is not realistic, is not, as has been foolishly said, a libel on the Jews, but a personage whose character is determined by the requirements of the plot'. Shylock is a 'serviceable villain', sufficiently vindictive to endanger Antonio's life, 'but not sufficiently heroic to interfere with a happy *dénouement*'. Several commentators argued that Shylock's main function in the plot is to be a money-lender, avarice and malice towards a commercial rival being his easily understandable motivation, and that his Jewishness is secondary – although inseparable in Renaissance Venice. Cecil Roth, the great Jewish historian (No. 66), argued in 1933 that 'the whole of Shakespeare's story' turns upon the fact that he was a money-lender, an occupation which only the *Nazione Tedesca*, the so-called 'German Jews', were allowed to practise in Venice. For William Watkiss Lloyd (No. 16), writing in 1856, Shylock is 'the very impersonation of avarice, meanness, and cruelty', a judgement shared by Gervinus in 1863 (No. 20), and Ruskin (No. 21), writing in 1873 and assimilating *The Merchant of Venice* into his private campaign against usury.

Several of these critics who denied that Shakespeare meant Shylock to be the representative of a downtrodden race argued that he was not, in fact, typical of Jewish religious belief or practice. Gervinus judged that Shylock 'knows nothing of religion and moral law, but when he quotes the Bible in justification of his usury; he knows of no mercy, but to which he can be compelled; nothing of justice and mercy dwells in him, nothing of the affection of kindred'. These are not Jewish traits, we might tentatively



## General Editor's Preface

conclude, had not several Jewish writers made the point with forcefulness and authority. In 1882 C. K. Salaman felt compelled by the success of Henry Irving's personation of Shylock in 1879 to pen a defence of Judaism, in a book called *Jews as They Are: Shylock from a Jewish point of view* (No. 34). While admiring Shakespeare's poetic and dramatic power, Salaman protested that 'the fictitious Shylock has been universally accepted, and as widely condemned . . . as a true impersonation' of a Jew, thus casting 'upon the entire Jewish race a foul slander'. The 'dominant feature' of Shylock's character, Salaman asserted, 'the inhuman desire to wreak [revenge] upon Antonio' his enemy by cutting from his body a pound of flesh, 'has, unquestionably, no warrant in reality; no place in any authentic Jewish record; no sanction in Jewish laws, nor in Rabbinical traditions'. Again, Salaman complained, 'Shakespeare misinterpreted Jewish feeling' when he put into Shylock's mouth 'the sentence: "I hate him *for he is a Christian*"'. Jews have never hated Christians on this ground alone, but merely for 'the cruel oppression they suffered at their hands'. In defence of his nation, Salaman produced a memorable, dignified statement of Jewish beliefs:

By all who have attentively studied the spirit of Judaism it will be acknowledged that Jews are strictly enjoined to practise forbearance, and mercy, and charity in its widest sense to all men; and to deal impartial justice to the stranger no less than to each other.

By these criteria Shylock is a highly unrepresentative Jew, a monster according to that moral code just as much as to Christian ethics.

The truth of Salaman's argument was confirmed by both Christian and Jewish scholars. The Reverend Charles Knox Pooler (No. 49) in the first 'Arden' edition of the play (1905), described the plot as arising naturally out of the characters' interaction, implying no additional levels of meaning:

We may dismiss . . . the notion that Shylock is a type of his race. . . . We can no more account for Shylock by a study of Jewish history than for Shakespeare by a study of our own. So far as he is persecuted for his religion, he may be taken as typical of his great nation, but he leaves its ranks when he plans a murder. What is true of him is not true of all Jews or of most Jews.

Gerald Friedlander, an Anglo-Jewish Rabbi and man of letters, writing in 1921 on *Shakespeare and the Jew* (No. 61), reached the same conclusion: 'There is not one word spoken by Shylock, which one would expect to hear from a real Jew. God, the Torah, the Messiah, holiness, love, kindness, prayer are all unknown to Shylock. He becomes like Jessica, his daughter, a Christian on the spot, without a sign of the slightest inward struggle, without a word of hesitation or resistance' (indeed, we might add, this would have been a key episode had Shakespeare wanted to present Shylock as unjustly persecuted). Like Salaman two generations earlier, Friedlander holds Shakespeare guilty for creating a false image of the Jew: 'Shylock is a monstrosity, not a real human being created in the Image divine'. Where many commentators thought that Shakespeare's details of characterization depicting Shylock's Judaism were authentic, Friedlander

## General Editor's Preface

counters that Shylock's religion is very strange, since 'he refers very directly to the New Testament'; he swears by 'Jacob's staff', which would be appropriate for a Christian invoking a pilgrim's staff, but not for a Jew; no Jew would describe Christ as a 'Nazarite'; Shylock swears by 'his tribe' and 'by the Sabbath': 'Such oaths are unknown to a Jew'. For Friedlander, as for Salaman, Shakespeare's greatest error involves the pound of flesh story. Shakespeare

makes Shylock go to the Synagogue. The Jew who frequents the Synagogue knows its teaching. The Synagogue forbids a Jew to cut off a piece, even the smallest portion, of a living animal. How much more does this humane law, known only in Israel, apply to a human being?

The non-Jewish reader must assume that Jewish law, and Jewish customs, have not substantially changed since the Renaissance, and concede that Shakespeare indeed gave Shylock non-Jewish attributes – but perhaps deliberately.

These authoritative judgements remove any historical basis for the claim that Shylock is an authentic representative of his unfortunate race. Such claims lack any warrant in the text, bearing in mind the basic duty of any literary interpretation to give a coherent account of all its features. Those who would turn Shylock into a tragic or pathetic figure either ignore negative aspects of his character or invent positive ones. George Farren, one of Shylock's earliest English apologists – there had been German precedents,<sup>6</sup> as several of the texts in this volume record – writing in 1833 (No. 7), summarizes the first scene between Shylock and Antonio at length, but fails to mention the soliloquy in which the Jew discloses the grounds of his hatred. Farren sees no irony in the biblical texts cited by Shylock praising Rebecca for her 'superior cunning', fails to note any sycophancy in Shylock's handling of Antonio, and describes Shylock's speeches as 'perfectly beautiful'. Farren continues his anodyne commentary on the other scenes involving Shylock, and although he does not condone his obsessive desire for revenge, he claims that 'there is nothing in word or action to show that Shakespeare intended to mark the Jew for . . . execration'. This is perhaps a case of 'hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil'.

Several other apologists for Shylock in this collection find no negative implications in his words and deeds. In 1885 El Seyonpi began his plea (No. 39) by anachronistically defending Shylock's 'vocation' as a money-lender – 'a vocation as honorable as any other' – in terms of modern economic theories of labour scarcity and demand, ignoring the play's historical context, in which money-lenders were the object of scorn, in the streets and on the stage. El Seyonpi believes that the Venetian Christians had a plot against Shylock to ruin him, which 'had evidently been maturing for years'; he argues that Shylock's forfeit of a pound of Antonio's flesh 'was at least, at this time in the play, intended as a joke'; he presents Shylock as unwilling to go to dinner with Bassanio, but does not comment on his explicit motivation for accepting: 'I'll go in hate, to feed upon / The prodigal Christian' (2.5.11–18); and when Shylock presses his claim to a pound of Antonio's flesh he describes this as merely 'an impractical method of obtaining justice'. A partisan reading can even ignore ethics. In 1896 F. S. Boas (No. 44) saw Shylock simply as a 'shrewd bargainer' who expresses 'the scorn of the Jew . . . for the simple-minded

## General Editor's Preface

man who "Lends out money gratis and brings down / The rate of usance". For Boas Shylock's 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' speech was a 'magnificent outburst in which he vindicates against a brutal fanaticism the essential equality of human conditions'. Boas does not mention its climax in the vow of revenge, indeed he later writes that 'the passion of revenge has triumphed over the meaner passion of avarice in Shylock's breast': but Shylock's revenge can hardly be excused as a noble passion, occupying some higher place on a scale of human behaviour.

My argument that Shylock's apologists downplay or ignore the negative aspects of his behaviour, attribute positive values to him, and in the process distort the play and its ethics, could be illustrated many times over. I take one more instance, to show its continuing resilience, from 1938, when H. B. Charlton reprinted a lecture he had given on Shylock in 1934 (No. 72). Where other commentators have seen Shylock as manipulating his Judaism for his own selfish ends, Charlton attributes to him a 'religious and racial sensitiveness' which made him want to 'realise the instinctive demands of his own spiritual life'. Commenting on Shylock's first scene with Antonio, Charlton suspends moral considerations in trying to read Shylock's thoughts: 'a new and exciting notion is fermenting in Shylock's mind: to catch Antonio on the hip'. If you side with Shylock you may end up endorsing his values. Charlton charitably imagines that Shylock introduces the question of interest in order to discuss 'the moral problem of money-lending' and so make a 'bid for mutual understanding'. Seeing things from Shylock's perspective and attributing high-minded motives to his malignity, Charlton complains that 'commentators have almost invariably missed the point of Shylock's illustration' of 'Jacob's thrift', and pronounces, with a sense of superiority, that 'Shylock's exegesis . . . is too subtle for Antonio (probably also for Shakespeare, who very likely took it confusedly from the old Jew play)'. Charlton thinks that Shylock's loan is just 'an offer of friendly accommodation', and the naming of the pound of flesh is really a joke: 'It is, may be, a poor sort of joke; but Shylock has had little practice in developing his sense of humour'. For Charlton, who believes that 'Shylock's proceedings show little sign of cunning', in the speech 'in which ducats and daughter are intermittently spoken Shylock is patently above and beyond the material valuation of material assets. He has lost all that satisfied his deepest religious instincts, his sense of Judaism'. Whitewashing Shylock means a bad press for his opponents. In the trial scene 'Portia, incapable of understanding, is blind to his motive and to his state of mind', and indulges a 'passion for Jew-baiting' which 'makes her moral exultation little better than a pose'. Ignoring both the play's ethics and its dramatic structure, Charlton denounces Portia for her 'callous trifling with a certain victim', 'selfishly inflicting needless suffering on the poor mortals who provide her opportunity for a mere forensic display', the discourse on mercy being 'no more than a pleader's rhetoric'. R. G. Moulton could have enlightened him on that scene's dynamic.

H. B. Charlton may be an extreme case, but his espousal of Shylock's cause shows how identifying with one part of this play and ignoring the rest inevitably distorts its structure and ethics. But the partisans of Shylock have done a further disservice to *The Merchant of Venice* and to Shakespeare himself, for their insistence that Shylock is to be seen as a sympathetic representative of a persecuted race has produced two further accusations. The lesser charge is that Shakespeare intended to make Shylock an evil person but somehow the character – or the dramatist's 'humanity' – took over.

## General Editor's Preface

Although F. S. Boas praised Shylock's 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' as a 'magnificent outburst', he claimed that

it scarcely harmonizes with the general impression which the character of Shylock is intended to leave, or with his treatment at the close of the play. But the inconsistency is the measure of Shakespeare's greatness. Marlowe and others found it easy to fall in with the standard of their age, and to draw Jews who were monsters in human form. Shakespeare too was sufficiently a man of his time to gratify the popular taste by the spectacle of a Jewish villain, but, as is the case with consummate genius, he was carried beyond himself by the irresistible sway of his own creation.

In 1907 Theodore Watts-Dunton (No. 52), for whom Shylock was 'the representative of a great race wronged', took his 'great invective in the third act' as proving that 'the creature of the poet's own genius has conquered the poet'. This line of apologia reaches its climax (for the period covered here) in H. B. Charlton's account, which postulated two Shylocks, 'the mob's Shylock' – that is, the anti-Semitic figure of the medieval story – and 'the artist's', more sympathetic and enlightened. Somehow Charlton conceives of Shylock slipping between the two roles at will, without Shakespeare's permission, but his theory causes him to misdescribe the play. When Antonio joins Bassanio and Shylock, Charlton describes Shylock's soliloquy aside [1.3.41–52] as 'a sort of diploma piece, his qualification for the role he had been brought in to play. . . . Shylock utters an incoherent jumble of furious revilings, urging confusedly religious, racial, and commercial rivalry as his promptings, to revenge, just, indeed, as popular prejudice willed him to do'. But this soliloquy is a crystal-clear piece of verse, in no way 'an incoherent jumble', and it is Charlton's model of 'two Shylocks' that makes him doubt Shakespeare's ability to realize his own design:

For however one reads the play, it is certain that the intentions of the author were in many ways defeated. Shylock, Antonio, Portia and Jessica do not stand forth as they were meant to do. The parts they were called upon to play by their author's prejudices did not square with those the dramatist worked out for them. There is throughout the clash of rival schemes, the proposals of Shakespeare's deliberate will, and the disposals by his creative imagination.

Many readers and theatre-goers will be puzzled at the thought that Shylock and the others 'do not stand forth as they were meant to do'.

Shakespeare needs no defence on the grounds of artistic control of his materials, but this lesser accusation often accompanied the much more serious charge of racial prejudice. In 1882 Charles Salaman (No. 34), as we have seen, alarmed by Irving's personation of Shylock, pointed out that Shakespeare's Jew did not correspond to Judaic social and ethical principles and practice. This was fair comment, but Salaman (who went on to give an admiring account of Shylock), could still 'deplore the circumstance that the immense genius of Shakespeare has been employed in disseminating an evil impression of Jewish character, and thus of perpetuating a great national wrong', a

## General Editor's Preface

'perpetual wrong to the Jewish race'. Salaman did not see Shakespeare as unable to control two Shylocks struggling for supremacy, but the three critics I have picked out as making what might seem to be a purely aesthetic observation added the much more serious charge of anti-Semitism. F. S. Boas (No. 44), although taking Shakespeare's 'inconsistency' over Shylock to be 'the measure of [his] greatness', balked at the Jew's enforced conversion to Christianity:

In including this among the articles of Shylock's pardon, Shakespeare has shown himself scarcely at all in advance of his age, whose average attitude is faithfully reflected in Gratiano's brutal jeers and suggestion of 'a halter gratis' as the only mercy for the Jew. The crowd in the Globe theatre doubtless roared hilariously as the baffled wretch slunk out of the court, but Shakespeare has had to pay the penalty of what can be at best called a concession to the bigotry of the day.

Boas's anachronistic criterion for this harsh judgement was the taste of readers in 1896, no doubt familiar with Irving's distortion of the play, for 'in the unsatisfactory impression left on modern readers at the close of the trial-scene', he claimed, 'Shakespeare has suffered the nemesis which in the long run always overtakes the artist who from conviction or opportunism ministers to the prejudices of his age'. In 1907 Watts-Dunton (No. 52) evidently recalled Boas's judgement when he eloquently evoked the 'persecution of the Jews' by the 'hideous' and 'wicked folly of anti-semitism' in the Renaissance, before declaring that

Shakespeare was influenced by these prejudices when he sat down to write *The Merchant of Venice* as every line in the opening of the play shows. But mark the Nemesis which comes to him who allows personal bias to cripple the wings of his imagination! In consequence of this anti-semitism Shakespeare makes mistakes in the opening scenes – mistakes which show a failure of vision such as he could never have made had he given full play to his imagination and allowed himself to live for the time being in the character he was delineating. Whenever this bias of the period declares itself in the play we get a failure in dramatic vision.

Watts-Dunton did not reveal by what criteria Shakespeare made 'mistakes'.

Retrospectively, it should now be clear why I began this discussion with the work of Moulton and Stoll respecting the play as a unified whole, a comedy intentionally constructed by Shakespeare, in which Shylock's malignity is a force to be feared, denounced and defeated so that harmony can return. Detaching Shylock from the comic structure, ignoring his cunning, malice, and hypocrisy, ascribing to him high-minded motives, seeing him as a sincere representation of persecuted Judaism, even imagining that Shakespeare was unable to 'control' his character – this whole seemingly innocent distortion of the play's central emphases results in the charge that Shakespeare was guilty of anti-Semitism. That was a serious enough accusation in 1882, 1896, 1907, or 1938 – Dover-Wilson's lecture on the play (No. 73), delivered in 1938, includes references to Nazi Jew-baiting. But after the Holocaust, it is an accusation that has done considerable damage to Shakespeare, in many people's eyes, and made it difficult to discuss the play,

## General Editor's Preface

or Shylock, in the disinterested terms which, as Matthew Arnold saw, are necessary for the practice of criticism. I hope that my analysis of these partial interpretations of *The Merchant of Venice* – ‘partial’ both in the sense of ‘incomplete’ and ‘taking sides’ – may persuade readers that Shylock is a character fulfilling several functions in a comedy, that he is not meant as a sincere witness to Jewish religion or persecution, and that Shakespeare was not an anti-Semite.

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So far I have traced some lines in the debate over this play as it took place in written commentary between 1833 and 1938. But *The Merchant of Venice* also enjoyed a lively career in the theatre, where once again the role of Shylock was the centre of dispute. The earlier stage tradition, as in Lichtenberg's recollection of Macklin in 1775 (No. 1), was for Shylock to be acted as ‘a calm, determined villain’, a figure of malice. In 1816 Edmund Kean, according to Hazlitt (No. 4), although an engaging stage presence, failed to convey the ‘inveterate, inflexible, malignity of Shylock’, a character ‘bent on an unalterable purpose, that of revenge’. These readings faithfully reflect Shakespeare's conception of the Jew's consuming hatred. Theatre historians record the emergence of a more sympathetic reading of Shylock, but seldom recognize that it reflects the numerous published commentaries on the play, already noticed here, which saw him as the representative of an unjustly persecuted race. The influence of the study on the stage is clearly visible in the suggestion of Edwin Booth in 1888 (No. 41) that ‘Macready was the first to lift the uncanny Jew out of the darkness of his native element of revengeful selfishness into the light of the venerable Hebrew, the Martyr, the Avenger’. G. H. Lewes witnessed Macready's debut in 1850, but his account (No. 13) describes his Shylock ‘as an abject, sordid, irritable, argumentative Jew – not a haughty, passionate, and vindictive man whose vengeance is a retribution of wrongs to his sacred nation and to himself. Whether Booth erred, or Macready subsequently changed his interpretation, it is clear that by 1850, in theatrical circles, the image of Shylock as the Noble Jew had been taken over from literary sources.

Although some actors had played Shylock as a dignified and austere figure – Edwin Booth's father did so, according to William Winter (No. 57) – it was Henry Irving who fully realized the possibilities of a sympathetic portrayal. The journalist Frederick Hawkins (No. 25), writing in *The Theatre* (a journal owned by Irving) on the eve of the Lyceum production of December 1879, argued that ‘the sympathy enjoyed by Shylock . . . is designedly aroused in the interest of the great but downtrodden race he represents’. This article was intended to initiate a ‘Round Table’ discussion of the play, in which Irving agreed with Hawkins that ‘Shakespeare intended to regard the Jew of Venice with feelings of exalted pity and commiseration’. Like so many partisans of Shylock, Irving described Shakespeare as having been ‘constrained by the anti-Jewish prejudices of his time to exhibit Shylock in a more or less odious light’, but that the dramatist somehow rose above these prejudices.

In an interview (No. 35) with the English journalist Joseph Hatton, Irving said that he looked on Shylock ‘as the type of a persecuted race; almost the only gentleman in the play’, a ‘bitterly persecuted . . . religious Jew, strict in his worship, and deeply read in his Bible’. Irving believed that ‘this idea of something divine in his act of vengeance is the key-note to the trial scene, coupled, of course, with the intense provocation he has

## General Editor's Preface

received', and in his production he did everything in his power to arouse the audience's sympathy for Shylock. I have shown that partisans of Shylock, in their written commentaries, ignored or played down his most vicious characteristics, and attributed positive features to him on the basis of slight, or non-existent, evidence in the text. The same double process took place in the theatre. (G. H. Lewes, reviewing Macready's performance, argued that 'in the scene with Jessica an actor may effectively show paternal tenderness. It is true the actor must *read into* the scene that which is not expressly indicated; but precisely in such interpretations consists the actor's art'.) When reading literary criticism we can always turn to the text to check whether or not a commentator has left out some revealing speech or action. It is harder to bring such knowledge to bear in the theatre, when the rhythm of a production can deny us the time to reflect.

Irving made several crucial cuts in the text, removing passages where Shakespeare presented Shylock in an unfavourable light. As James Bulman summarizes, Irving systematically

omitted passages that disparaged Shylock: Solanio and Salarino's derogatory remarks about him – 'his stones, his daughter, and his ducats' in 2.8, and their mockery of him – 'Out upon it, old carrion' in 3.1; the whole of Lancelot Gobbo's spirited exchange with Jessica about her father's tyranny in 2.3; and their similar banter in 3.5. Such omissions helped to preserve Shylock's decorum as a tragic figure by denying his affinity with earlier comic stage Jews.<sup>7</sup>

But these omissions drastically altered the play's balance, as did Irving's ruthless cuts in the casket plot, which reduced the roles of Portia and Bassanio to such a degree that Shylock became the chief character (Bulman, pp. 40–1).

As well as cutting and rearranging Shakespeare's text, Irving added significant stage business to increase the pathos he wished to evoke. After Jessica has eloped with Lorenzo, Irving inserted a mute scene in which Shylock slowly returned to the house – 'Perhaps I will return immediately' (2.5.52), he had warned – knocked three times on the door, but had no response. 'The curtain fell again as, without word or outward sign, Irving conveyed to the audience Shylock's crushing realization of his daughter's perfidy. This postscript to the scene was Irving's interpolation – for once an improvement on Shakespeare' – or so his grandson thought.<sup>8</sup> When Shylock exclaims of Jessica, 'I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! would she were hearsed at my foot and the ducats in her coffin' (3.1.87–90), according to William Winter, Irving 'interjected, in tones of poignant anguish, "No, no, no, no, no."' According to his grandson, Irving 'paused, and, murmuring, "No, no . . .", hid his face in his hands. This momentary emotion affected the next sentence which was spoken in a softer tone, almost a sob. The last sentence was delivered beautifully in a low tremulous voice, full of deep pathos' (p. 351) – at which point I cannot refrain from echoing Hamlet's irascible word to the actors: 'And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them'.

Irving imposed his conception of Shylock on the play not just through his own performance but also by writing in roles for crowds, both Jewish and Christian. Joseph Knight, reviewing the opening performance for *The Theatre* (which Irving owned),

## General Editor's Preface

'cited as an example of Irving's "ingenious and intelligent explanation and comment in the shape of action", the introduction among the spectators of the Trial scene of a knot of eager and interested Jews upon whom the sentence upon Shylock, condemning him to deny his religion, fell like a thunderbolt'.<sup>9</sup> The actor Fuller Mellish, who played Lorenzo in Irving's American tour in 1895, copied out stage directions from the prompt book that record how the scene began. Part of the crowd of spectators

point and jeer as two Jews enter. One of the Jews brushes against Gratiano who angrily resents it. Solanio and Salarino interpose and the Jew retires upstage right, joining the other Jew. While this has been going on, some of the crowd at the back – all of whom have been watching the foregoing – take the opportunity to jeer at three Jews who are amongst them; the guards interpose across the barrier, and with their halberds, gently force the three Jews into a corner by themselves right. The rest of the crowd now keep apart from them. (cit. Bulman, p. 45)

As Bulman put it, 'by opening the scene in this way, Irving conditioned his audience to sympathise with these Jews before a line of dialogue was spoken'. Further, when Shylock entered, having recognized one of the Jews in the crowd, he 'gently and fervently pressed his hand: Irving clearly wanted Shylock to be regarded not as a solitary victim but as belonging to a whole persecuted race' (Bulman, pp. 45–6). As for the scene's ending, the reviewer in the *Spectator* judged that

Shylock is Mr. Irving's finest performance, and his final exit is its best point. The quiet shrug, the glance of ineffable, unfathomable contempt at the exulting booby Gratiano, . . . the expression of defeat in every limb and feature, the deep, gasping sigh, as he passes slowly out, and the crowd rush from the court to hoot and howl at him outside, make up an effect which must be seen to be comprehended. (cit. Brereton, I. 305)

As a successful actor-manager Irving could easily rent a crowd to evoke the enmity and prejudice that could complete his sentimentalized picture of the persecuted Jew, so successful in arousing the audience's sympathies. 'I never saw a Shylock that obtained more commiseration from the audience', one theatre critic wrote, 'for usually . . . Shylock is so robustly vindictive and energetically defiant, as to compel the spectators to withhold from him their sympathies' (Dutton Cook, cit. Brereton I. 306). Irving was well aware of this feature of Shakespeare's Jew, as he confided to those near him. Ellen Terry recorded that he 'played Shylock for sympathy and told me himself (smiling) he *ought* to play him as a ferocity' (L. Irving, p. 500). Similarly William Winter (No. 57) testified: "Shylock", he said in my presence, "is a bloody-minded minded monster, – but you mustn't play him so, if you wish to succeed; you must get some sympathy with him". Irving certainly succeeded, for his production ran for 250 consecutive performances during its first season alone, and reached a thousand performances both in England and America over the next twenty-five years (L. Irving, p. 708). But, with its omissions and unwarranted additions, it was a success achieved at the expense of Shakespeare's intentionally structured and carefully executed play.



## General Editor's Preface

Fortunately Irving's was not the only voice in the English and American theatres, and others saw the 'bloody-minded monster' for what he was. Henry James, in his secondary (and unsuccessful) career as playwright and drama critic, felt that Irving's performance had suppressed fundamental aspects of the role. Writing a survey of London theatres in 1879–80 for the American journal *Scribner's Monthly* (No. 33), James reported that 'his representation of the rapacious and rancorous Jew' was visually impressive, since 'he looks the part to a . . . repulsion'. But as for Irving's interpretation of the role, 'His conception of it is a sentimental one, and he has endeavoured to give us a sympathetic, and, above all, a pathetic Shylock'. James found Irving's interpretation untrue to the play, unable to represent

The deep-welling malignity, the grotesque horror, the red-hot excitement of the long-baffled, sore-hearted member of a despised trade, who has been all his life at a disadvantage, and who at last finds his hour and catches his opportunity. . . . Mr. Irving's Shylock is neither excited nor exciting, and many of the admirable speeches, on his lips, lack much of their incision; notably the outbreak of passion and prospective revenge after he finds that Antonio has become forfeit, and that his daughter has fled from him, carrying off her dowry. The great speech, with its grim refrain: 'Let him look to his bond!' [3.1.47] rising each time to an intenser pitch and culminating in a pregnant menace, this superb opportunity is missed; the actor, instead of being 'hissing hot', as we have heard Edmund Kean described at the same moment, draws the scene out and blunts all its points.

James saw the original production, in which, as William Winter independently testified, Irving 'manifested a poetically humanitarian ideal of the part, and . . . indicated the Jew as the venerable Hebrew patriarch, the lonely, grieved widower, and the affectionate, while austere father'. Winter's incomparably vivid description of Irving's later interpretation saluted him for embodying 'the true Shylock of Shakespeare – hard, merciless, inexorable, terrible'. How Irving could have squared this reading with the humanitarian representative of a persecuted race it is hard to tell, especially when we read that his delivery of Shylock's 'revenge' speech reached a climax at 'It shall go hard but *I will better the instruction!*' (3.1.72–3), 'which always elicited a tremendous burst of enthusiastic fervor'.

Modern theatre historians tend to present Irving's Shylock as the high point of Victorian productions, but to some of his contemporaries it seemed an anomaly, falsifying Shakespeare's intention. In a lecture given to the New Shakspeare Society in 1887 (No. 40), William Poel, that all-round man of the theatre, who pioneered historically accurate productions with his Elizabethan Stage Society,<sup>10</sup> said of Shylock's first encounter with Antonio that

The dramatic purpose of this scene is to show us Shylock directly plotting to take the life of Antonio, and the means he employs to this end are contrived with much skill. Shylock, in his opening soliloquy, discloses his intention to the audience, and at once deprives himself of its sympathy by admitting that his motives are guided more by personal considerations than by religious convictions.

## General Editor's Preface

Poel, without formulating any theory of drama, instinctively realized that a dramatist controls the audience's responses by revealing a character's ethics, for our sympathy goes to those who deserve it, not to malignant would-be murderers. When Jessica makes her 'final adieu' to her father, Poel noted the purpose for which Shakespeare intended this scene: 'that, at a moment when we are ready to sympathize with Shylock, who is about to lose his daughter, the dramatist denies us that privilege by further illustrating the malignancy of the man's character'. Despite Shylock's various reasons for not accepting the invitation to Bassanio's feast, he still decides to 'go in hate to feed upon / The prodigal Christian' (2.5.14–15). As Poel drily puts it, 'No personal inconvenience must hinder the acceleration of Antonio's downfall'. Similarly, in the 'piteous scene' where the Jew laments his loss: 'Shylock's misfortunes in this scene would arouse sympathy were it not for the damning confession to Tubal of his motive for hating Antonio: "for were he out of Venice I can make what merchandise I will"'. Shakespeare gave us all these indications of Shylock's malice to deliberately create an unsympathetic character, however much Irving downplayed (or cut) them. Poel had Irving in mind when arguing that 'the dramatist intended the [trial] scene to be acted with more vigour and earnestness on the part of all the characters than is represented on the modern stage, and with more vehemence on the part of Shylock'. As Ellen Terry recorded, Irving played it with such 'an extraordinary . . . quietness' that she had to forego her own conception of Portia's calmness: 'His heroic saint was splendid, but it wasn't good for Portia' (cit. Bulman, p. 41). Poel also included Irving in his complaint that 'When Shylock is worsted the traditional business is for him to leave the stage with the air of a martyr going to his execution, and thus produce a tragic climax where none is wanted'.

Poel returned to *The Merchant of Venice* in 1909, in a brilliant essay on 'Shakespeare's Jew and Marlowe's Christians' (No. 55), in which (like other independent minds reviewed here) he denied that Shylock was meant to be 'a typical study of Judaism'. Although 'the Christians in Shakespeare's comedy' use 'unnecessarily harsh' language in mocking Shylock, Poel argues that

if we read between the lines it is evident that religious differences are not the chief grievance. Shylock is a Jew, therefore a moneylender; a moneylender, therefore rich; rich, yet a miser, and therefore of little value to the community, which remains unbenefited by his usurious loans. This, in the eyes of the Christian merchants, is the real significance of the word Jew. The Catholic Church, by forbidding Christians to take interest, had unintentionally given the Jews a monopoly of the money-market, but with it that odium which attaches to the usurer.

In the play 'Shylock is an isolated figure, unsociable, parsimonious, and relentless', an isolation which 'tempts the modern actor to represent him as a victim of religious persecution, and therefore as one who does not merit the misfortune that falls upon him'. Such a reading falsifies the play's basic nature, for 'the figure becomes tragic, and contrary to the dramatist's intention, is made the leading part; so that when the Jew finally leaves the stage, the interest of the audience goes with him. But if Shakespeare intended his comedy to produce this impression, he was at fault in writing a last act in

## General Editor's Preface

which every character that appears is evidently not aware that Shylock's defeat was undeserved'.

The cumulative effect of Irving's interpretation was to create a curious reversal of Shakespeare's intentions, by which, 'while the exigencies of the drama require Shylock to be the wrongdoer, he now appears on the stage as the one who is wronged'. Poel attributes this reversal partly to a 'change in public taste', a 'newly awakened conscience' concerning the oppression of minorities, and partly to the fact that 'our playgoers are rarely familiar with the text of Shakespeare's plays, and thus increased opportunity is given to the actor to overrule the author'. Disturbed that 'an interpretation quite unjustified by the text should find favour with many dramatic critics', as Irving's Shylock had done, Poel urges critics to 'dissociate history from sentiment and discriminate between old conventions and modern innovations'. It is significant that the terms Poel invokes – the dramatist's intention, history, theatrical conventions – are precisely those used by E. E. Stoll a few years later, and Poel also relates Shylock to theatrical tradition: 'Shakespeare . . . thrusts the conventional usurer of the old Latin comedy into a play of love and chance and money-bags in order to serve the purpose of a stage villain, and calls him a Jew'. For Poel, Shylock's Jewishness is a secondary quality. His real affinities are with the misers of comedy, Euclio in Plautus's *Aulularia*, Harpagon in Molière's *L'Avare*, who are mocked and outwitted with the audience's approval.

In recent years Shakespeare commentators have deferred increasingly to theatre people, directors and actors, whose practical experience of bringing his texts to life before a paying audience may give them insights that can supplement, or correct, those achieved by a scholar in the study. This is a valid enlargement of discussion, but the examples of Irving and Poel suggest that our trust in theatrical witness cannot be unthinking. There is a great difference between an actor-manager who seizes on a role as a star vehicle, often distorting the text and subordinating his fellow actors (as Ellen Terry complained<sup>11</sup>), and a producer who has to decide on the play's overall interpretation. So far as Shylock is concerned, Poel's account respects the whole text, and gives a coherent account of *The Merchant of Venice* as a totality that ranks with those of Richard Moulton and E. E. Stoll.

The other great Shakespeare producer represented in this volume, Harley Granville-Barker, saw the play as a vehicle in which 'Shakespeare's practical business' was to dramatize his two main stories, of Shylock's bond and Portia's caskets, so that the characters achieved a sufficient degree of humanity to become credible, without making the fairy-tales ridiculous. Granville-Barker encourages the play's producer to 'ascertain . . . the way in which [Shakespeare] did this, the nice course that – by reason or instinct – he steered'. Once the balance of the whole has been grasped, the interpretation of individual characters will become clear. Some producers might want to 'turn Bassanio into a heartless adventurer', but 'the actor will find that he simply cannot play Bassanio as a humbug, for Shakespeare does not mean him to'. As for the Jew,

Despite the borrowed story, this Shylock is essentially Shakespeare's own. But if he is not a puppet, neither is he a stalking horse;<sup>[12]</sup> he is no more a mere means to exemplifying the Semitic problem than is Othello for the raising of the colour question. 'I am a Jew.' 'Haply, for I am black'. Here we have – and in Shylock's

## General Editor's Preface

case far more accutely and completely – the *circumstances* of the dramatic conflict; but at the heart of it are men; and we may surmise, indeed, that from a maturer Shakespeare we should have had, as with Othello, much more of the man, and so rather less of the alien and his griefs.

But the balance of the whole might have been damaged: as Granville-Barker put it, 'this Shylock does not overwhelm the play, as at a later birth he might well have done – it is a near thing, though!'

A director faithful to the text, as Poel and Granville-Barker were, can preserve *The Merchant of Venice* as a comedy in which Shylock is suddenly and totally eclipsed. As Granville-Barker wrote of the play's 'Return to comedy': "The tragic interest is posted to oblivion cavalierly indeed. Seven lines suffice, and the Duke's professional departure'. The final Act, as almost every commentator agrees, restores harmony on all the levels of action, as if Shylock had been a foreign body that the play's organism had expelled, allowing it to return to health. The modern director, like the reader, can keep a sense of the whole play, in which Shylock plays an important but still subordinate part. Making him the major character results in the inversion that William Poel described, where Shylock the wrongdoer becomes the wronged. I have argued that, in order to bring about this reversal, the play has to undergo major surgery, with stage business being invented, characters interpreted 'against the grain' of the text, as the euphemistic metaphor puts it, reducing the comedy to a state of confusion.

The truth of this diagnosis can be seen from a celebrated recent production of *The Merchant of Venice* at the National Theatre in 1970, directed by Jonathan Miller, with Laurence Olivier as Shylock and Joan Plowright as Portia.<sup>13</sup> The production was set in the 1880s, with Shylock dressed in the formal attire of a banker and having a remarkable visual likeness to Disraeli (an effect Olivier achieved with specially made false teeth). James Bulman suggested that, in order to produce 'a realistic portrait of late Victorian society', in which 'Jews were nominally assimilated . . . Miller *had to adjust Shakespeare's text*' to remove what might seem anachronistic utterances. He cut the crucial aside (1.3.41–52) in which Shylock reveals his grounds for loathing Antonio ('I hate him for he is a Christian' who 'lends out money gratis') – 'thereby effacing both the economic and the religious motives for Shylock wanting to catch Antonio "upon the hip"' (Bulman, pp. 81–2, my italics). It may be that Miller cut this speech as being inappropriate to 'Victorian gentility', as Bulman supposes, but a quite different motive can be seen when Miller 'reshape[d] the text to Shylock's advantage, cutting such obviously prejudicial lines as "I did dream of moneybags tonight" (2.5.18) or, more significantly, the entirety of 2.8' (p. 88). By deleting the preparatory scene where Solanio recounts Shylock's divided passion, 'O my ducats! O my daughter!' Miller did away with Shakespeare's intention to curtail our sympathy for Shylock in the scene that follows with Tubal (3.1.). In Miller's production, however, that scene showed Shylock as 'a tragic figure maimed by his struggle for assimilation'. To preserve this favourable view, Miller retained Shylock's revengeful threat, 'I will have the heart of him if he forfeit', but cut the telling conclusion of that sentence: 'for were he out of Venice I can make what merchandise I will'. Such cuts hark back to the bad old days of Irving, an odd reproach to be making to Jonathan Miller, that remarkably versatile, inventive, and thoughtful

## General Editor's Preface

director, equally at home in theatre as in opera. Yet it is the inevitable consequence of taking Shylock's part.

While granting Shylock dignity, Miller denied it to the Venetians. As he explained, he presented the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio to recall that between 'Oscar Wilde and Bosie, where a sad old queen regrets the opportunistic heterosexual love of a person he adored'. Bassanio was shown as a 'cunning opportunist', as James Bulman described the performance, a parasite exploiting first Antonio, then Portia (pp. 79, 86). Massive cuts weakened the scenes with the suitors. Worse still, the Prince of Morocco was caricatured as 'a diplomatic Al Jolson minstrel just back from the colonies', while Arragon was a senile aristocrat who could barely see straight. As Bulman comments, 'Such comedy makes mischief of the casket plot; for if Portia's suitors are patently unsuitable – if their merits are exploded by absurd pomposity or grotesque senility – and if, furthermore, their hazarding for her entails no element of risk, then one cannot take the romantic premises of the lottery seriously' (p. 85). Miller's ridiculing of the suitors weakened further the status of Portia, whose role in the casket scene had been considerably reduced, while the director's downbeat handling of the trial scene deprived her of the dominant position she enjoys in Shakespeare's text. The muted presentation of the trial (very much as in Irving's production) made all the more shocking Shylock's final action, in Olivier's performance. After a slow exit in the style of Irving, the audience heard offstage 'an otherworldly keening, "sharp and intense at first and then barbarically extended – that reminds one of a wolf impaled on a spike and dying a slow death"', as one critic described it. In his book *On Acting* (1986) Olivier recorded that he "wanted something to remain ringing in the ears long after [he] was in the dressing room, something that would rather stay with the audience through the sweetness and light of the final romantic comic scene'" (cit. Bulman, p. 95). This astonishing invention, almost more than anything else, set Shylock's mark on the play.

But Jonathan Miller was not content just to have Olivier's howl ringing in the audience's ears during the Belmont scene: he had to destroy its 'sweetness and light', too. Under his direction, the lovers' games did 'not affirm marital harmony so much as anticipate discord'. In their playful banter about famous lovers ('In such a night / Stood Dido with a willow in her hand'), this Lorenzo and Jessica were made to 'speak at cross purposes, he attempting to humour her, and she, sadly disillusioned, accusing him of false promise' (p. 95). Lorenzo was played as 'a dogged, middle-class didactic Hampstead intellectual' whose speech on music bores Jessica so much that she falls asleep (p. 96). When she meets the returning Venetians their patronizing attitudes made her feel completely alienated: 'coming from Shylock's sober household, Jessica cannot but be struck by the crass materialism and emotional chill of the group she has married into' (p. 97). At the end Shakespeare has Portia give Lorenzo and Jessica, 'From the rich Jew, a special deed of gift, / After his death, of all he dies possess'd of (5.1.290–2). In most productions this guarantee of the lovers' future security is cause of rejoicing, but in Miller's, Jessica 'pores over' the deed, and 'walks slowly away from the group, conscious of betraying both her father and her heritage, guilt and doubt darkening her face'. As our focus narrows to Jessica alone, we hear an offstage voice plaintively intoning the Kaddish, 'the eternal wail and lamentation of Orthodox Jewish prayer' (p. 98). James Bulman commented that Miller had no warrant in the text for these interpretations, and

## General Editor's Preface

'essentially fashioned a play of his own' (p. 99). I would say that, using the theatrical director's unique power, he only carried to its logical conclusion the process of siding with Shylock against all the other characters, completely reversing the meaning of Shakespeare's intentionally constructed comedy.

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Taking Shylock's part may seem the inescapable response to *The Merchant of Venice* after the horrors of the Shoah, but it is a response that should be resisted, since it distorts the play and ultimately causes Shakespeare to be branded an anti-Semite. I have illustrated both these unfortunate consequences from a number of critics working in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but they can be seen much closer at hand in a well-received book by John Gross, *Shylock: Four Hundred Years in the Life of a Legend* (London, 1992). This is a thoroughly researched, wide-ranging study of both the literary and theatrical traditions, informative and illuminating in many ways. But while summarizing the work of scholars, critics, actors, and theatre directors, Gross displays a partisan attitude that often downplays Shylock's malice and finds admirable qualities in his character. Above all, Gross disapproves of anyone laughing at a Jewish character on stage (pp. 92–3, 153–4, 258). When we see Tubal, 'alternating the bad news about Jessica with the good news about Antonio', Gross protests: 'It is an ugly device – one Jew, a supposed friend, goading another, out of what looks like pure malice. The effect is ugly, too. Shylock is driven further along the road to revenge' (pp. 54–5). This is to attribute motives to a character (Tubal's malice: I think senility, rather) without considering why the dramatist introduced that character at this point. Gross is equally indignant over the earlier report of Shylock's anger at Jessica's elopement with his money, for to him Shylock is a loving father:

The one thing about her that is not in doubt is that Shylock loves her. Even the cry that amuses his enemies so much – 'O my ducats! O my daughter!' – implies that if he did not love her more than his ducats, at least he did not love her less. (p. 60)

Gross's protective attitude distorts his reading of the play. If Shylock's exclamations are supposed to show that he did not love Jessica less than his ducats, why does he wish she 'were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear'? He is indifferent to her death, provided he gets his property back. Defenders of Shylock since the early nineteenth century have proposed benign readings of even his most unsympathetic utterances, and Gross aligns himself with this tradition. E. E. Stoll commented on two German apologists for Shylock who found nothing incongruous about him weighing his daughter and his moneys in the same scales: 'Professor Jastrow and Dr. Honigmann, like Heine (*mirabile dictu!*) before them, see no fun here. Racial sympathy hinders them. "*He would prefer burying his child and his gold*", says the former, "to knowing them to be in the possession of the Christian fools"'. Stoll commented: 'If Shylock buried it he would not forget the spot' (No. 63).

Unable to stomach this comic-grotesque report of Shylock's loss, Gross next casts doubt on its reliability:

## General Editor's Preface

We should remember, too, that we never hear the cry ourselves. It occurs in the account of his distress that Solanio gives Salerio, an account which shows every sign of being a highly coloured comic turn. Solanio also expects us to believe that 'the dog Jew' cried out 'O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!', and that he raised an unintended laugh by bewailing the loss of 'two rich and precious stones' ('stones' being Elizabethan slang for testicles). (pp. 60–1)

But such an objection would deny a fundamental convention in drama, that characters' reports are to be believed unless we have good reason to think that they are lying. Shakespeare gives us enough guidance to recognize false reports, such as Falstaff's claim that he killed Hotspur, or Iago's claim that he overheard Cassio's erotic dream. Gross complains that 'we never hear the cry ourselves', and says of Solario – as if he were a character from real life – that he 'expects us to believe' that Shylock would cry out in this way. Throughout his book, Gross avoids asking himself why Shakespeare makes Shylock do or say something unpleasant, or why scenes are constructed to have a particular effect (see, e.g., pp. 31, 34–5, 56–7), and he seems to take personal offence whenever anything damaging to Shylock is revealed. So he comments disapprovingly that we need not 'feel obliged to applaud when Jessica [discloses] what she knows about her father's state of mind' – that is, having heard Shylock say that he 'would rather have Antonio's flesh / Than twenty times the value of the sum' (3.2.284–90). Gross adds: 'Rather pointedly, nobody takes her up on this' (p. 61) – as if the other characters on stage were silently expressing the disapproval that he feels. But Jessica's report is just a standard Elizabethan theatrical convention, according to which characters' comments on people or issues are to be accepted, and if we start questioning such things we would destroy theatre.

Not surprisingly, Gross does not take kindly to commentators who present Shylock as a figure of ridicule as well as malice, or who place him within the traditions of stage comedy, and he is especially scathing about the two critics who have done this most forcefully, William Poel and E. E. Stoll – both of whom also revived an appreciation of Elizabethan dramatic conventions. Gross is not pleased with Poel's first lecture (1887; No. 40) which, as he summarizes it, presented Shylock as 'an unqualified villain to start with, and a figure of fun to end with' (p. 153). From Poel's 1909 essay (No. 55) he merely quotes the conclusion, that 'Shylock is meant to be laughed at and defeated "not primarily because he is a Jew" – religious differences are at most a side-issue – "but because he is a curmudgeon"' (p. 154). Gross then delivers the unargued verdict that Poel could be 'simplistic and wrong-headed, and in the case of *The Merchant of Venice* you feel that he was essentially over-reacting' (p. 155). As for Stoll, Gross dismisses him as an 'intimidating', 'hard-boiled' figure embodying 'a tough-minded historicism', concerned with facts, and dogmatic with it ('he has the strength that comes from feeling completely sure of himself'). Gross reports Stoll's arguments as being neither 'particularly exciting' nor 'particularly new' (pp. 161–3), a dismissal that can only discourage readers from exploring an account which opposes Gross's own conception of Shylock as a character of tragedy and pathos, whose Jewishness is his major significance. Gross is equally unhappy with Granville-Barker's declaration that Shylock 'is no more a mere means to exemplifying the Semitic problem than is Othello for the raising of the colour

## General Editor's Preface

question', commenting: 'This seems unlikely', and then attributing to Granville-Barker 'a certain degree of discomfort' with Shylock's Jewishness (pp. 175–6). But the discomfort seems rather to be Gross's.

By constantly insisting on Shylock's Jewishness, downplaying the comedy, disapproving of ridicule, presenting this Jew as having 'a tragic (as opposed to a merely pathetic) quality' (p. 177), Gross follows the other partisans of Shylock in white-washing the character. More seriously, he also follows them in implicating Shakespeare with anti-Semitism. Throughout the book he regularly invokes 'Jewish history' as some fixed point against which the play, and its interpreters, must be measured.<sup>14</sup> Having discussed the age-old mutual hostility between Christians and Jews ('For Christians, the Jews were primarily defined as the people who had *rejected* Christ': my italics), Gross comments that these facts are 'worth remembering, in case our revulsion from the prejudice to which the play bears witness tempts us to cast the real-life equivalents of Shylock wholly in the role of passive (and pallid) victims' (p. 82). Disapproving of Edwin Booth's view (No. 41) that 'revengeful selfishness' is the key to Shylock's character, Gross again introduces an unpleasant personal insinuation ('There is nothing, as far as I know, to suggest that Booth was anti-Semitic'), accuses him of being 'in danger of fanning the flames of prejudice with such a harsh portrayal', and records himself as feeling 'troubled about the inartistic real-life conclusions that some people might draw from them' (p. 125). (We note the term 'real life' applied to both the play and the actor.) Gross also takes Henry James to task for his account (No. 33) of Henry Irving's visually convincing portrait of 'the rapacious and rancorous Jew', withholding approval from James in that 'he did not really countenance the idea of a sympathetic Shylock at all. Nor does he seem to have found anything troubling about the element of racial and religious conflict in the play' (p. 130) – but why *should* James countenance the idea of a sympathetic Shylock? For his part, Gross praises Irving because 'he instinctively distances himself from the prejudices of the past', representing the best aspects of Victorian 'toleration' and 'liberalism' (p. 143). Although he knows Irving's private opinion that Shylock is a villain, but that an actor must play him for sympathy, Gross congratulates him for his far-sighted humanitarian instincts:

he was right to recognise something disturbing in the traditional way of playing Shylock. . . . Many of those who saw him act when they were young lived long enough to learn of Nazism and its consequences, and some of them must have felt that, in however horrible a fashion, he had been vindicated. (p. 145)

Of course, Irving might have congratulated himself on anticipating history. But Gross's transition from that powerful Victorian actor-director to one of the most horrible crimes in the history of mankind, via *The Merchant of Venice*, is disturbing. It is surely wrong retrospectively to indict Shakespeare for barbaric crimes that happened over three hundred years after he wrote, especially since his Shylock is a comic figure – albeit necessarily frightening, if the comedy's resolution is to create a sense of relief. From this point on Gross increasingly assimilates Shakespeare's play to the crimes of the Nazis, but in doing so he is no longer writing literary criticism. By defending Shylock from all the negative comments made about him in the play, by downplaying his real



## General Editor's Preface

murderousness, by attacking actors who remain true to the text in representing the malice it contains, and by dismissing commentators who point out his comic villainy, Gross wants to justify his own concept of a tragic role embodying centuries of Jewish history. Taking sides with Shylock always tends to falsify both the play's totality and Shakespeare's intention, but in Gross's hands *The Merchant of Venice* becomes a pawn in the struggle between philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism, both equally disturbing. In a chapter called 'Between the Wars' Gross comments on Hitler's coming to power in 1933, and the well-known fact that 'responses to Hitler during the 1930s [were] slow and inadequate' from European governments and world opinion (p. 178). But he still manages to criticize Gielgud's production in 1938 for presenting Shylock as a 'dingy, rancorous' moneylender while 'stories of persecution ... were filling the papers' (pp. 179–80), as if Gielgud should have changed his interpretation to a more 'sympathetic' one, or perhaps not performed the play at all.<sup>15</sup> Gross praises H. B. Charlton's whitewashing of Shylock (No. 72) – 'probably the fullest defence of Shylock ever undertaken by a reputable scholar' – for its awareness of the Nazis (pp. 180–1), and congratulates Dover Wilson (No. 73) for also being 'sensitive' on this issue. Conversely, the fact that Mark Van Doren (No. 74) could write about the play in 1939 without sounding 'at least a passing note of regret' seems to Gross a 'chilling' oversight, 'a failure of imagination' (pp. 182–4). – Watts-Dunton had indicted Shakespeare's 'personal bias' and 'anti-semitism' as 'a failure of vision'. However, if an American academic had expressed a 'note of regret' in 1939, what use would it have been? It is as if Gross is monitoring the writings of anyone who might have had a chance to express solidarity with Jewish victims of persecution, and failed to do so. This seems like inverted censorship, after the event.

In his two final chapters, 'Anti-Semites' (pp. 287–98) and 'Since 1945' (pp. 299–326) Gross completes his indictment, starting by quoting a historian of anti-Semitism who declared that Shakespeare's portrait of Shylock 'served to crystallise and reinforce an anti-semitic stereotype for centuries to come'. Gross judges this 'a bleak verdict, but ... an inescapable one', even though, he adds, 'the stereotype was flourishing hundreds of years before Shakespeare, and it would have gone on flourishing for hundreds of years without him. But he endowed it with his fame and prestige, and in a sense his humanising it only made it seem more plausible' (ibid.). Gross puts a lot of pressure on the word 'humanising'.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the book Gross praises any actor or commentator who attributed 'humanity' to Shylock: but everyone agrees that Shakespeare endowed him with personal attributes that make him anything other than a stereotype. But this served to transcend the stereotype, not make it 'more plausible', as Gross suggests. The individualizing features give us a Shylock motivated by a colossal egoism that puts the gratification of his desires above any human relationships, denying the exchange and interplay necessary to human society.<sup>17</sup> All that Shylock cares about is maintaining and increasing his own wealth, a narrowness of perspective that enables us to see that his Jewishness is a secondary quality, one which he readily manipulates to his own advantage. Gross concedes that Shakespeare 'individualised Shylock', but nonetheless blames Shakespeare for the process by which,

Invested with Shakespearean power, and, in time, with Shakespearean prestige,

## General Editor's Preface

Shylock the Jewish villain became part of world mythology. He may not have added anything to existing stereotypes, but as the most famous Jewish character in literature he helped to spread them and to keep them vigorously alive. He belongs, inescapably, to the history of anti-Semitism. (p. 322)

There Gross writes as if Shylock enjoyed an autonomous power as a world-mythological figure ('he helped to spread' stereotypes), a way of talking that would absolve Shakespeare's responsibility for what after later ages had made of his creation. But he does not rest there. 'In the eyes of the other characters' in the play, Gross writes, 'the fact that he is a Jew is an offence in itself' (p. 325). But this is not true. It is what Shylock does, his greed, envy, hatred based on mercenary grounds, readiness to murder under pretext of upholding the law, indifference to others' suffering, and rejection of mercy, that makes him the object of hatred, not his Jewishness. Tubal is not so hated. Shylock embodies the avarice traditionally attributed to usurers, but he carries it to unheard-of extremes. For Gross, however, the other characters are to blame, for

at no point does anyone suggest that there might be a distinction to be drawn between his being a Jew and his being an obnoxious individual. The result is ugly, whether Shakespeare himself saw it that way or not. (p. 325)

Would Gross's objections be met if someone in the play were to say to the audience 'But of course, not all Jews are like this'? That hardly seems likely, for in the next paragraph he writes: 'What is tragic about the anti-Semitism in the play is that it coexists with so many admirable or attractive qualities'. But there is no 'anti-Semitism' in the play, if by that you mean a general and irrational prejudice against Jews on the grounds of their race and their religion. This Jew is loathed for what he does and tries to do, but that does not affect Jews in general. And in any case, there is a crucial point in the trial scene where Shakespeare makes the Duke draw a line between civilization and barbarity, inviting Shylock to identify with the one or the other. The Duke informs Shylock of the general (and optimistic) opinion that he is only prolonging 'this fashion of thy malice' to the point at which 'Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse'. Then, 'touch'd with humane gentleness and love', they think he might express 'pity' for the losses that Antonio has suffered, losses huge

Enow to press a royal merchant down  
And pluck commiseration of his state  
From brassy bosoms and rough hearts of flint,  
From stubborn Turks and Tartars never train'd  
To offices of tender courtesy.  
We all expect a gentle answer, Jew. (4.1.17-34)

Martin D. Yaffe has cited this passage in challenging 'Gross's erroneous assertion' that the play never distinguishes between Shylock's being a Jew and his being 'an obnoxious individual'.<sup>18</sup> As Yaffe points out, the Duke first argues that 'Shylock's apparent lack of compassion was a deliberate theatrical delay', – that is, I add, an individual reaction, not a

## General Editor's Preface

generic feature connected with his Jewishness. Where Turks and Tartars (more stereotypes!) were 'never train'd / To offices of tender courtesy', the Duke pointedly does not argue that 'Shylock as Jew was "never trained" to be gentle, that is, by Jewish law'. So he can imply that 'Jewish law does after all teach moral decency, including compassion, and that Shylock, being uncompassionate, is simply being a bad Jew' (p. 16). It is up to Shylock whether he puts himself inside or outside the pale.

It seems to me that, despite his estimable qualities as a literary editor and man of letters, at several points in *Shylock* John Gross is no longer writing literary criticism, but identifying himself as a Jew with Jewish history, especially its terrible sufferings, for which he somehow holds Shakespeare responsible. His final paragraph indicts Shakespeare indirectly, by contiguity, as it were:

Exactly where the play now stands depends on one's wider reading of European history. I personally think it is absurd to suppose that there is a direct line of descent from Antonio to Hitler, or from Portia to the SS, but that is because I do not believe that the Holocaust was in any way inevitable. I *do* believe, on the other hand, that the ground for the Holocaust was well prepared, and to that extent the play can never seem quite the same again. It is still a masterpiece; but there is a permanent chill in the air, even in the gardens of Belmont. (p. 326)

I personally think it absurd even to mention Antonio and Hitler, or Portia and the SS, in the same sentence. But that is what happens if you take Shylock to be an authentic representative or symbol of an oppressed race, whose religion is the defining element of his character.

This is the point at which we may recall Stoll's observation that 'Scholarship is all that can rescue Shakespeare'. We have seen that several Jewish scholars judged Shylock untypical of Judaism in his self-centredness and ruthless desire for revenge. C. K. Salaman (No. 34) pointed out that Jews are 'commanded by their immutable divine law to love their neighbours as themselves, and to treat all living creatures with kindness, mercy, and humane consideration'. Gross himself agreed with the Jewish scholar Harold Fisch's 'diagnosis of what is missing [in Shylock]: "the whole region of Jewish spirituality". There is no hint in Shylock of an inner faith, or of religion as a way of life, as opposed to a set of rules' (p. 34). Gross approved another distinguished Jewish scholar, Sir Israel Gollancz (No. 58), who 'cited the rabbinical misdrash which proclaimed that Mercy was one of the daughters of God; he invoked the coming-together of mercy, truth, righteousness, and peace described in the 85th Psalm, "the Psalm [as he reminded his readers] that belonged to Christmas Day"' (p. 245). In addition to endorsing those two eminent Jewish scholars, Gross himself supplied one of the most forceful arguments that mercy is not an exclusively Christian virtue. Rejecting some modern readings of the play as a victory of New Testament mercy over Old Testament justice, Gross commented:

Needless to say, the notion that Judaism has an inadequate grasp of the concept of mercy is a travesty – as much of a travesty as it would be to suppose that Christianity has an inadequate grasp of the concept of justice. The word for mercy, *rachamim*, carries tremendous resonance in the Hebrew liturgy (it is related

## General Editor's Preface

to *rechem*, the word for a womb), and endless exhortations to deal mercifully can be found in the writings of the Rabbis. To prove the point, indeed, we need look no further than the opening lines of 'The quality of mercy' itself. If they have a single source, it is generally agreed to be a passage from Ben Sira, the Jewish sage who lived in Jerusalem around 200 B.C., and whose teachings appear in the Apocrypha under the title Ecclesiasticus. There are further reminiscences of the same work later in the speech, and of the Psalms; but then the Golden Rule ('Love thy neighbour . . .') goes back to Leviticus, and the Lord's Prayer itself has its origins in traditional Jewish sources. (pp. 81–2)

Gross refers to the verse 'Oh, how faire a thing is mercy in the time of anguish and trouble. It is like a cloud of raine that commeth in the time of a drought' (Eccl. 35:20; Geneva Bible), the source for Portia's account of mercy, which 'droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven / Upon the place beneath'. Gross adds that 'Shakespeare echoed the Apocrypha on numerous occasions (Shylock's "A Daniel come to judgment" is another instance); he also gave both his daughters names which can be found in its pages – Susanna and Judith' (p. 81 note).

Gross's remarks are indisputably correct, but he does not seem to realize the fundamental contradiction between them and his presentation of Shylock as the embodiment of Jewishness, a worthy representative of his people. One cause of this discrepancy is his pervasive tendency to address the character as an independent being, refusing to consider it as part of a whole which Shakespeare deliberately created and controlled. On the one hand he reaches the admirable insight that 'Shylock's stage-Judaism is a pseudo-religion, a fabrication: there is no true piety in it, and nothing to hold him back as he pursues his revenge' (p. 34). But on the other he ascribes this deficiency in Shylock to ignorance on Shakespeare's part:

Given the circumstances under which Shakespeare was working – his limited knowledge of Jews, the built-in assumptions of his society – it could hardly have been otherwise, and the wonder is that he humanised his Jew as much as he did. But the fact remains that he also left out, in Fisch's phrase, 'the tap-root of his historical existence'. (p. 34)

Gross sees this lacuna as inadvertent on Shakespeare's part, the sign of 'limited knowledge of Jews' in real life, although the work of scholars represented here – Sidney Lee (No. 32) and J. W. Draper (No. 68) – proves that Jews were not unfamiliar in London. But at the same time Gross can observe that 'Shakespeare's objections to Shylock were primarily moral, . . . based on his behaviour' (p. 208).

Altogether missing from Gross's work is any conception that Shakespeare may have worked by design, deliberately ascribing un-Jewish traits to Shylock, in full knowledge of Jewish laws and attitudes set down in the Old Testament. Like every member of the Church of England, at every church service, Shakespeare would have heard one lesson read aloud from the Old Testament, and one from the New. He would have sung, or spoken, one of the Psalms of David at Morning or Evening service, and at baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and he would have recited prayers that incorporated material

## General Editor's Preface

from all parts of the Bible. Shakespeare had a remarkably receptive memory, and scholars such as Richmond Noble and Naseeb Shaheen<sup>19</sup> have traced thousands of biblical reminiscences in his poems and plays, many of them highly appropriate to the dramatic context. Recent scholars have argued that Shakespeare was perfectly well aware that Jewish sacred texts emphasized mercy as an essential human virtue. Roger Stritmatter has pointed to further Old Testament parallels for Portia's praise of mercy, concluding that 'the source of the Christian doctrine of mercy is seen – by well-schooled readers – to be the Jewish doctrine of mercy'<sup>20</sup>. Recently Gilles Monsarrat has re-created more thoroughly the teachings about mercy in the Old Testament, and the Apocrypha, drawing on the Geneva Bible (the main text for Protestants before the 1611 Authorized Version). In addition to the many exhortations to practise mercy, the virtue most often associated with God (more than fifty times in the Psalms alone), Monsarrat has shown that in 'The Second Table', a Concordance of words (the 'First' being of biblical names), references to mercy extend over three columns.<sup>21</sup> In her famous speech Portia alludes to the Lord's Prayer as expressing values common to both Jews and Christians:

We do pray for mercy,  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy. (4.1.200–02)

It is Shylock who (in Sam Goldwyn's immortal phrase) includes himself out. His antipathy to any form of mercy also violates Jewish ethical principles, a negative attribute given him by Shakespeare, we must be prepared to think, in full knowledge of its importance for Judaism.

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If taking Shylock's part leads to the play, and its author, being accused of anti-Semitism, the moral is clear: we must approach *The Merchant of Venice* as a whole. The history of Shakespeare criticism will help us to understand his plays better.

## NOTES

1. Credit is due to John Gross for noticing them in his *Shylock: Four Hundred Years in the Life of a Legend* (London, 1992), pp. 52–3.
2. *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, vol. II, part ii, ch. vi, par. 50.
3. Cf. e.g. Henry James Pye, *Comments on the Commentators of Shakespeare* (London, 1807), p. 77: 'I always consider the *Merchant of Venice* as concluding with the punishment of Shylock in the fourth act; and a finer catastrophe does not occur in any drama, ancient or modern.'
- [4]. Moulton earlier defined 'Romantic Drama' as one that 'uses the stories of Romance, together with histories treated as story-books, as the sources from which the matter of the plays is taken'.
5. Compare Silence's unmotivated switches between serious and mundane affairs: 'Death, as the Psalmist says, is certain to all, all shall die. How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?' (2 *Henry IV*, 3.2.37–8).
6. For the important history of Shakespeare's German reception, see the pioneering anthology by Hansjürgen Blinn, *Shakespeare-Rezeption. Die Diskussion von Shakespeare in Deutschland. I. Ausgewählte Texte von 1741 bis 1788* (Berlin, 1982); *II. 1793 bis 1827* (Berlin, 1988), and his

## General Editor's Preface

excellent bibliography *Der deutsche Shakespeare. Eine annotierte Bibliographie zur Shakespeare-Rezeption des deutschsprachigen Kulturraums* (Berlin, 1993). See also the wide-ranging study by Roger Paulin, *The Critical Reception of Shakespeare in Germany 1682–1914: Native Literature and Foreign Genius* (Hildesheim, 2003), and, for the theatrical tradition, Simon Williams, *Shakespeare on the German Stage, Volume 1: 1586–1914* (Cambridge, 1990), and William Hortmann, *Shakespeare on the German Stage, Volume 2: 1914–1990* (Cambridge, 2003).

- [7]. James C. Bulman, *The Merchant of Venice* (Manchester, 1991; in the series 'Shakespeare in Performance'), pp. 39–40.
8. Henry Irving. *The Actor and his World, by his grandson Lawrence Irving* (London, 1951), p. 341. Austin Brereton, in *The Life of Henry Irving*, 2 vols. (London, 1908) agreed, enthusing at Shylock's unexpected return after the flight of Jessica: 'The pathetic figure of the Jew, lantern in hand, on the darkened stage, as he knocks and waits at the door of the deserted house is one of those illuminating bits of acting which denote the great interpreter. For they are within the spirit of the play and illustrate, without exaggeration, the true meaning of the dramatist' (I, 307–8).
9. Brereton, I.307.
10. See Robert Speaight, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (London, 1954).
11. See Bulman, pp. 45–51.
- [12]. 'A horse, or light portable screen, behind which a fowler or stalker is concealed'; hence 'A false expedient or pretext concealing a person's real intentions or actions': *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.
13. I have used James C. Bulman's history of the production in his volume on *The Merchant of Venice* in *op. cit.*, pp. 75–100.
14. Cf., e.g., pp. 114, 145–6, 287, 299–300, 303, 305, etc.
15. Gross records that 'in 1912 Jewish groups in the United States . . . began campaigning to have [*The Merchant of Venice*] removed from the curriculum. In 1927 E. E. Stoll reported with satisfaction – since it confirmed his own view of how Shylock should be interpreted – that "the Jewish Anti-Defamation League is more and more successful in its endeavours to keep the play out of the schools". By 1930 it had been banned by school super-intendents in some ninety American cities' (pp. 248–9). This comment is grossly unfair to Stoll, who shows no sign of anti-Jewish feelings. In his eyes this ban merely showed the degree to which the play had been misinterpreted.
16. Many commentators have claimed that the 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' speech reveals Shylock's 'humanity', but Gross cannily observes that 'critics have never been slow to point out that the passage culminates in a threat, that Shylock is invoking his humanity in order to justify an inhuman purpose'. However, ignoring what Shakespeare might have been doing, and treating Shylock as if he was a person in real life, Gross argues that these lines 'are wrenched from Shylock; they have the stamp of anger and spontaneity' (p. 54). But this does not eradicate the purpose for which Shylock uses them.
17. See Brian Vickers, 'The Idea of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*', in M. T. Jones-Davies (ed.), *L'Image du Venise au Temps de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1989), pp. 17–49.
18. Martin D. Yaffe, *Shylock and the Jewish Question* (Baltimore and London, 1997), pp. 14–16.
19. See Noble, *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge* (London and New York, 1935); Shaheen, *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Comedies* (Newark and London, 1993).
20. Stritmatter, "'Old" and "New" Law in *The Merchant of Venice*: A Note on the Source of Shylock's Morality in Deuteronomy 15', *Notes and Queries*, 245 (2000): pp. 70–2.
21. Essay in *Cahiers Elisabéthains* (2005).

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# Introduction

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## BEGINNINGS TO 1740

Several of the early Quarto editions of Shakespeare's plays contain sub-titles describing the play's attractions, such as the first Quarto of *1 Henry IV* (1598): *The Historie of Henrie the Fourth; With the battell at Shrewsburie, betweene the King and Lord Henry Percy . . . With the humorous conceits of Sir John Falstaffe*. The title page of the first Quarto of *The Merchant of Venice* (1600), however, also represents an uncompromising judgement on the villain of the piece:

*The Most excellent Historie of the Merchant of Venice. With the extreame crueltie of Shylocke the Jewe towards the sayd Merchant, in cutting a just pound of his flesh: and the obtaining of Portia by the choise of three chests.*

As several modern critics were to show, the cruel Jew was a racial stereotype, in drama as in life. Perceptions of the play have often reflected current social and political considerations. In 1701 George Granville's *The Jew of Venice*, a re-write rather than an adaptation, appealed to anti-Jewish and anti-city of London prejudices. In the light of the subsequent critical and theatrical tradition, Granville's play (performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields on 11 January 1701) was unusual in shifting dramatic emphasis from Shylock to Bassanio, who was played by the leading actor Thomas Betterton. The comedian Thomas Doggett played Shylock as a comic type. The prologue was quite candid about the play's purpose: "Today we punish a *Stock-jobbing Jew*."<sup>1</sup> Granville appealed to prejudice: out of 124 brokers on the London Stock Exchange only 12 were Jewish, for a 1697 law limited Jewish representation (Gross, p. 93). Granville's adaptation moved to Covent Garden in 1714 where it played before large audiences until closing in 1735. Shylock as a comic figure also seems to have been repeated in America, where the first recorded performance of *The Merchant of Venice* was given by a regular company of comedians in Williamsburg, Virginia, on 15 September 1752.<sup>2</sup>

## MACKLIN TO CHARLES KEAN

An indication that Thomas Doggett's comic rendition of Shylock did not satisfy all tastes was provided in 1709 by Nicholas Rowe, the first of the eighteenth-century editors:

Tho' we have seen that Play Receiv'd and Acted as a Comedy, and the Part of the *Jew* performed by an Excellent Comedian, yet I cannot but think it was design'd



## The Merchant of Venice

Tragically by the Author. There appears in it such a deadly Spirit of Revenge, such a savage Fierceness and Fellness, and such a bloody designation of Cruelty and Mischief, as cannot agree either with the Stile or Characters of Comedy.<sup>3</sup>

Rowe's feeling that the play tended more towards tragedy gained some support from Charles Macklin's 1740 Drury Lane appearance as the Jew, a performance which transformed Shylock from a figure of fun into a believable human being. Looking back on the performance, Francis Gentleman, in his *Dramatic Censor: or, Critical Companion* (1770), recalled Macklin's 'forcible and terrifying ferocity; in the third act scene, where alternate passions reign, he breaks the tones of utterance, and varies his countenance admirably; in the dumb action of the trial scene, he is amazingly descriptive.' Gentleman recorded some details of another distinguished performance, Peg Woffington as Portia (who first performed the part in 1744 at Drury Lane): 'while in petticoats . . . [she] shewed the woman of solid sense, and real fashion; when in breeches, the man of education, judgment and gentility' (Gentleman, I, 296).

Regular performances of *The Merchant of Venice* were common throughout the eighteenth century. Macklin's interpretation continued to affect perceptions of Shylock's character. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, who saw him act in the winter of 1775, described the impact Macklin's Shylock had upon him, arousing fear and suspicion: 'it is not to be denied that the sight of this Jew suffices to awaken at once, in the best-regulated mind, all the prejudices of childhood against these people' (No. 1). Richard Hole gave a more favourable account of the Jew in his 'Apology for the Character and Conduct of Shylock' (No. 2), an apologia having a tinge of romantic nationalism. Hole envisages a performance of the drama in a Jewish homeland, in which Shylock's enemies are overcome by feelings of remorse. However, as with his similar 'apology' for Iago, Hole may well have been ironic. A more distinguished contemporary, A. W. von Schlegel, in his *A Course of Lectures* (1815), recorded a divided judgement on Shakespeare's Jew: Shylock's 'morality is founded on the disbelief in goodness and magnanimity'; yet at the same time he stands as 'a symbol of the general history of his unfortunate nation' (No. 3).

### EDMUND KEAN TO IRVING

Criticism of *The Merchant of Venice* during the first half of the nineteenth century was dominated not by editors and annotators of the text but by a great theatrical performance, the debut of Edmund Kean as Shylock. On 26 January 1814 the Drury Lane Theatre was less than half full, due to foul weather, with only two reviewers present: the critic of the *Morning Post* and Hazlitt for the *Morning Chronicle* (No. 4). Hazlitt was enthusiastic about Kean: 'His style of acting is, if we may use the expression, more significant, more pregnant with meaning, more varied, and alive in every part, than any we have almost ever witnessed.' Writing of a later performance, Hazlitt observed how Kean's 'voice swells and deepens at the mention of his sacred tribe and ancient law, and he dwells delighted on any digression to distant times and places, as a relief to his vindictive and rooted purposes'. Other observers, such as Heinrich Heine (No. 10) and

## Introduction

George Henry Lewes (No. 13), recorded how Kean gained the audience's sympathy. At the performance that Heine attended, a young woman exclaimed as Shylock left the stage 'the poor man is wronged'. Harold Child, in his pioneering survey of the play's stage history, judged that 'the germ of the idea of a noble Shylock we probably owe to Macready.'<sup>4</sup>

In these early and post-Romantic productions Shakespeare's text was drastically altered, omitting Morocco and Arragon. Macready's Drury Lane production of December 1841, while not reinstating them, did omit some of the unauthentic songs and duets that had crept into the play. The fashion on the mid-Victorian stage toward more spectacle and greater theatrical effects was all too visible in Charles Kean's lavish production at the Princess's Theatre in 1858, with its realistically presented bridges, canals, and gondolas. Morocco and Arragon were restored, but the scene with Lorenzo and Jessica at Belmont was omitted. The younger Kean's Shylock was generally felt to lack the vitality and pathos of his father's performance. George Henry Lewes, in *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (London, 1875), observed that 'there are no tears in his pathos . . . there is no terror in his wrath' (p. 19).

Meanwhile the play was receiving increased attention from feminist critics. Anna Brownell Jameson's focus on Portia in 1833, in her *Characteristics of Women* (No. 8), was soon followed by Mary Cowden Clarke in *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850). Clarke rejected Hazlitt's derogatory account of Portia as an unfeminine pedant (No. 5), instancing her feminine attributes of mercy and intuition, and the way she complemented male qualities. Clarke made Portia's betrothal speech to Bassanio (3.2.149–71) the central speech in her role, exemplifying Portia's quintessential femininity. Portia's change of gender, her appearance in a young male lawyer's apparel to participate in Antonio's trial, were not the major concerns for Mrs Jameson, Mary Cowden Clarke, Henrietta Palmer (No. 17), or other women writers. As Linda Rozmovits, writing from a late twentieth-century perspective, pointed out: 'to a late Victorian audience the Portia who was the paragon of the Shakespeare woman was not the woman in the courtroom but, rather, the woman who held her breath while her true love chose the appropriate casket and the woman who then declared'<sup>5</sup> allegiance to her Lord Bassanio.

## BOOTH AND IRVING

The later nineteenth century saw two strongly contrasted interpretations of Shylock, by Edmund Booth in New York and Henry Irving in London. While Booth's Shylock was never seen in England, Irving's toured America, and some critics were able to compare both performances. (But Booth communicated his interpretation of the role in a letter (No. 41) which H. H. Furness included in his *New Variorum* edition, widely circulated in England.) William Winter, drama critic for the *New York Tribune* from 1865 to 1909, left vivid accounts of both actors (No. 57), Booth producing an angry, vindictive Shylock, consumed by 'revengeful selfishness'.

Henry Irving's debut at the Lyceum Theatre on 1 November 1879 presented, at least initially, a diametrically opposed reading of the role, making Shylock a figure of almost tragic pathos, embodying the Jews' century-long persecution. Irving, then owner of *The*

## The Merchant of Venice

*Theatre* magazine, arranged that Frederick Hawkins, a regular contributor, should publish an essay in the journal on the day that his production opened, raising the question of the play's attitude to 'the Jewish question'. Hawkins obliged with a piece on 'Shylock and Other Stage Jews' (No. 25), which placed theatrical representations of the Jews within a historical context of persecution and religious oppression, anti-Jewish sentiments and behaviour representing 'one of the darkest chapters of our history'. The December issue of *The Theatre* included a 'Round Table' section that devoted nine pages responding to Hawkins's plea for toleration. The first contributor, Theodore Martin, married to the actress Helen Faucit (No. 37), denied that 'a plea for religion was in [Shakespeare's] thoughts in writing this play', although he felt 'that it indirectly inculcates the un-wisdom of religious persecution in the mischief it works upon the persecutors as well as upon the persecuted.' According to Martin, 'religious intolerance' affects Antonio's 'gentle' just as much as Shylock's 'harsh nature', both being 'perverted by the intolerance of their retrospective creeds'. They bring out the worst in each other, while 'only in Portia is the sweet and humble spirit of Christianity illustrated'.<sup>6</sup> Irving also took part in the debate, as 'An actor', convinced that Shakespeare 'intended us to regard the Jew of Venice with feelings of exalted pity and commiseration.' In the play 'the Jew appears to less disadvantage than the Christian. The spirit of intolerance animates both especially. Antonio, otherwise estimable, shows this spirit in very repelling form. The Duke and Portia preach to Shylock of mercy, but when the day goes against him they do not practice what they preach'. To Irving 'Shakespeare rose without an effort above the prejudices of his time against the Jews' (No. 26).

Frederick J. Furnivall, who had founded The New Shakspeare Society in 1873, also took part in this discussion (No. 27), asserting that 'No greater mistake in criticism can be made than to treat the object of *The Merchant* as doctrinal.' However, Furnivall believed that 'in doing justice to Shylock as a man, Shakespeare meant to do justice to all of Shylock's race'. In his contribution (No. 28), James Spedding, the great editor of Francis Bacon, and a distinguished historian in his own right, also rejected the notion that Shakespeare 'was thinking about Jewish grievances or disabilities'. Had Shakespeare really been looking for a story to put into the minds of the Globe audience 'a more tolerant feeling toward the Hebrew race', Spedding argued, 'I cannot think that he would have selected for his hero a rich Jewish merchant, plotting the murder of a Christian rival by means of a fraudulent contract, which made death the penalty of non-payment at the day, and insisting on the execution of it'. Shakespeare's major artistic problem 'was how he could introduce into a *comedy*, without putting everything out of tune, an incident so shocking, and a project so savage that "the imagination almost refuses to approach it."'

Two other voices contributed to this 'Round Table' debate in 1879. Israel Davis, an Anglo-Jewish newspaper editor and journalist, argued that although Shakespeare presented his Jew as a human being, he 'was too thoroughly an artist to write a play with a moral purpose' (No. 29). Interestingly, Davis concluded his observations with a reference to contemporary literature, George Eliot's sympathetic idealization of a Jewish character, Mordecai Lapidoth in *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Although conceding her achievement, Davis judged that 'it was a greater step for' the sixteenth-century Shakespeare 'to create Shylock' than 'for George Eliot in our own times to imagine ...

## Introduction

Mordecai'. (Presumably because Jews were largely assimilated into English society.) David Anderson (No. 30), happily recording that Jews enjoyed equal treatment before the law in contemporary England, argued that one must place Shylock within the context of late Elizabethan culture and politics in order to understand *The Merchant of Venice*. Whereas other historical critics used this approach to account for the negative presentation of Shylock as a usurer, miser, and Jew, Anderson judged that, 'save for his revengeful spirit', Shylock compares favourably with other characters in the play: 'Antonio deceives his fashionable friends as to the true state of his affairs. Jessica deceives and robs her father, and Lorenzo receives the stolen goods.' In his conclusion to this debate Hawkins reiterated his position that Shakespeare in writing Shylock 'indirectly but deliberately advanced a plea for toleration towards the Jews.'

Davis's reference to George Eliot draws indirect attention to a curious lack of comment on *The Merchant of Venice* by the great Victorian creative writers. Ruskin expressed his views on usury, which he thought to be the play's main target (No. 21); the young Oscar Wilde wrote a sonnet to Portia (No. 31); and Swinburne added his (critical) voice to the debate over Shylock (No. 54). Strangely enough, although novelists and poets such as the Brownings, Dickens, Hardy, and others were fascinated by Shakespeare, they made hardly any observations on this play. It is surprising that George Eliot, given her interest in Judaism, did not draw upon *The Merchant of Venice* as a source for epigraphs for chapter headings in *Daniel Deronda*. Quotations from the play are not among rejected epigraphs in her Notebooks for the novel, and references to it in her letters and journals are perfunctory, mostly mentioning private readings by George Henry Lewes (No. 13) of lines from *The Merchant of Venice*.<sup>7</sup>

The consolidation of English historical scholarship brought about by the *Dictionary of National Biography* (66 vols., 1885–1901) opened up many new avenues of research. The precocious Sidney Lee's essay, 'The Original of Shylock', in *Gentleman's Magazine* for February 1880 (No. 32), heralded Lee's lifelong connection with the *DNB*. Lee excavated, so to speak, the trial and subsequent execution in 1594 of Ruy Lopez, a Jewish Portuguese doctor and personal physician to Elizabeth I, who was accused of an attempt to poison both the Queen and an eminent Spanish refugee called Antonio Pérez. Lee made some errors (he mistook Antonio Pérez for Dom Antonio, pretender to the Portuguese throne<sup>8</sup>), but he uncovered much valuable historical material concerning the presence of Jews in Shakespeare's London. But his argument that Shakespeare's play was meant as a response to the Lopez case has found little acceptance.

Historical scholarship was also illuminating the play's text. The great monument from this period was provided by Horace Howard Furness in his 'New Variorum Shakespeare', of which he produced eighteen volumes between 1886 and 1912. Furness, carrying on the great tradition of the eighteenth-century editors Malone and Steevens (which had resulted in the First Variorum edition of 1803, the Second of 1813, and the Third of 1821), supplied an extensive history of critical commentary and a comprehensive textual analysis. In his edition of *The Merchant of Venice* (1888) practically every word of the text is accompanied by extensive detailed commentary at the foot of the page, drawing upon previous commentators, English, American, German, and French. The text with its notes runs to 268 pages, followed by an Appendix extending for nearly another 200 pages, Furness's secondary sources, chronologically arranged, and an Index.

## The Merchant of Venice

Part of Furness's Appendix (pp. 332–45) was devoted to the 'Duration of the Action' and now serves to illuminate obscure pathways of Victorian scholarship. Furness summarized the ideas of John Wilson (1785–1854), Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University from 1820, who, under the pseudonym 'Christopher North', contributed many essays to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. In the issues for November 1849 – May 1850 Wilson published an essay called 'Double Time', which argued 'that in *Othello* Shakespeare had used two different computations of time, by one of which time is protracted and by the other contracted'. By one of those odd coincidences, no sooner had Wilson announced his discovery than the Rev. N. J. Halpin issued *The Dramatic Unities of Shakespeare* (Dublin, 1849), in which he 'pronounced his theory identical with Wilson's and proceeded to apply it to *The Merchant of Venice*.' The details of Halpin's arguments need not detain us, but it is significant that Furness should take Halpin seriously enough to devote several pages to demolishing him, pointing out that, in order to make his scheme work, Halpin had invented 'a second, fraudulent bond' (p. 336). Furness devoted yet more space (pp. 337–45) to discussing other time-schemes for the play, a branch of scholarship that has not survived into our century. R. G. Moulton (No. 36) makes the essential point that by diversifying his main plot with shorter scenes and episodes Shakespeare was able to suggest the passing of time (three months) without having to strictly account for it.

Although Victorian scholarship made a fundamental contribution to Shakespeare studies, on which we still draw, much Victorian criticism continued the eighteenth-century tradition of commenting on single characters. Shylock and Portia attracted the most attention, but the others came in for their share. In her 1833 essay (No. 8), Anna Brownell Jameson praised Jessica as having 'something of the intellectual brilliance of Portia', and declared that 'Nothing can be more . . . elegant than the scenes between her and Lorenzo.' A. W. Verity (No. 46), in a section of his 1898 edition not included here, wrote that 'One of the things we like best in Jessica . . . is her genuine admiration of Portia. It augurs the development of her own character'. It is not without significance that Irving chose to marginalize Jessica. As Theodore Martin observed in his *Blackwood's* review of Irving's production, her role was 'regarded as of so little importance as to be intrusted to . . . [a young lady, i.e., the inexperienced actress Alma Murray] who would be weak in the smallest of comediettas.'<sup>9</sup> Rozmovits sees an ideological reason for Jessica's marginalization: 'it is harder to imagine anything that would more immediately provoke a late Victorian audience than the suggestion that a faithless daughter could become a faithful wife' (p. 75). Indeed, several of the writers collected here viewed her disapprovingly, starting with Hazlitt (No. 5) and Heine (No 10). In 1850 G. H. Lewes (No. 13) complained that 'Shakespeare has made her a heartless, frivolous girl, who robs her father, throws away her mother's turquoise for a monkey, speaks of her father in a tone as shocking as it is gratuitous. Were a modern poet so to outrage nature and art, no mercy would be shown him'. Charles Cowden Clarke (No. 19) expressed his disapproval of Jessica in 1863, as did F. S. Boas (No. 44) in 1896. W. W. Lloyd, however, thought that her 'trespass . . . against the letter of the law of filial duty is justified' (No. 16), and William Poel (No. 40), who conceived her as 'a tragic figure, dark, pale, melancholy, demure, yet chaste in thought and in action and with a heart susceptible of tender and devoted love', made the penetrating observation that 'she

## Introduction

plans her elopement with the same fixedness of purpose as the father pursues his revenge’.

As for the ‘minor’ male roles, Antonio received a divided reception. In 1815 A. W. von Schlegel found his ‘melancholy and self-sacrificing magnanimity ... affectingly sublime’ (No. 3). In 1849 Charles Knight (No. 12) described him as ‘one of the most beautiful of Shakespeare’s characters’, with a truly generous nature. However, in insulting Shylock Antonio acted an ‘unworthy’ part, which Shakespeare ‘most assuredly ... did not intend to justify’. Knight drew the moral lesson that ‘Antonio is as much to be pitied for his prejudices as the Jew for his. They had both been nurtured in evil opinions’. Two years later the Rev. H. N. Hudson, a distinguished American Shakespearean, judged Antonio ‘a kind and sweet-hearted man; of a large and liberal spirit ... – his character is one which we never weary of contemplating’. Hudson found Antonio’s treatment of Shylock his ‘only blemish’, and could not ‘help siding against him’, although this was ‘more the fault of the times than of the man’ (No. 14). The German scholar Gervinus (No. 20) expressed a favourable opinion of Antonio, as did the English theatre critic Frank Marshall (No. 42). But the American Isaac P. Noyes, writing under the pseudonym ‘El Seyonpi’ (No. 39), produced an impassioned defence of Shylock, in which he judged Antonio’s treatment of Shylock to be ‘simply contemptible’, and concluded with the hyperbolic statement that

when the world finds itself inadequate to express its feelings for the most contemptible, wholesale brutality and downright meanness, let it sum up in one word, and let that word be ANTONIO!

Rightly or wrongly, this was a minority opinion, the dominant view of the two characters’ relative value being represented by Stanley Wood, writing in a school manual in 1891: ‘Unlike the crooked shuffling Jew, Antonio is candid and unsuspecting, untouched by trivial anxieties, incautious, careless, generous’ (cit. Rozmovits, p. 115).

Bassanio provoked less violent feelings. As W. W. Lloyd put it, although we would agree that he has ‘lived like a prodigal, run in debt with his friends, and now coolly proposes to his chief creditor to make a serious addition to his debt’ by the speculative pursuit of an heiress, while experiencing the play ‘we never withdraw our sympathies from the hero of transactions that affect us in common life with the unpleasant associations of dissipation, imprudence, impudence and meanness’. Lloyd’s explanation of this paradox is the fact that when ‘reading a romance ... we accept the compatibility of whatever phenomena the poet chooses to group in the moral as in the material world’. Stopford Brooke visualized Bassanio as ‘not only young, handsome, with love-inspiring eyes’, impetuous and ‘essentially loveable’, but also a man ‘who has considered the world in quiet thought’ (No. 48). Watts-Dunton, however, criticized Bassanio’s ‘selfishness’ (No. 52), and Madeline Leigh-Noel viewed him altogether more warily, appropriately enough for someone peopling *Shakespeare’s Garden of Girls* (No. 38). Of the other minor characters, Lorenzo aroused considerable indignation both in Hazlitt – ‘We should like Jessica better, if she had not deceived and robbed her father, and Lorenzo, if he had not married a Jewess, though he thinks he has a right to wrong a Jew’ (No. 5) – and in Heine, who described him as ‘an accomplice in a most infamous robbery by which

## The Merchant of Venice

according to Prussian law he would be condemned to fifteen years' penal servitude after being branded and put in the pillory' (No. 10). But those critics who mentioned Launcelot Gobbo, such as Hudson (No. 14) and Brooke (No. 48), had only kind words for him, and even Gratiano had his friends, such as Cowden Clarke (No. 19).

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed the beginnings of what became in the twentieth century the profession of English studies.<sup>10</sup> For Matthew Arnold in *Literature and Dogma* (1873) and elsewhere, post-Biblical literature represented an alternative source to the Bible as a repository of wisdom and inspiration. One function of literature, according to Arnold, was to provide a source for contemporary morality, while the study of literature reflects a growth in national identity and consciousness. For Edward Dowden (1843–1913), who occupied the first Chair of English Literature at Trinity College, Dublin, English studies should be concerned with the history of a nation's thought and feeling. Philologically oriented scholars, such as Halliwell-Phillipps (No. 15) and Furnivall (who founded the Early English Text Society), were determined to ensure that as many texts as possible should be edited and published that reflect the national inheritance.<sup>11</sup> The concern with rescuing that which had been lost influenced the work of William Poel (Nos. 40, 55), who campaigned for productions faithful both to Shakespeare's text and to Elizabethan and Jacobean stage conventions.<sup>12</sup> The first play Poel saw was a production of *The Merchant of Venice*, and 'after reading the play when he got home, he was struck (so he said) by how widely the performance he had seen departed from what the playwright had written' (Gross, p. 152). This experience became the determining factor in his campaign to restore authenticity to performances of Shakespeare, rejecting the modern stage tradition as represented by Irving. Poel's company, the Elizabethan Stage Society, duly presented *The Merchant of Venice* at St George's Hall (in Langham Place, London) in November–December 1898, with Eleanor Calhoun as Portia and Poel himself as Shylock. Claiming to be an authentic production that went back to the text, Poel remained true to his own interpretation of Shylock as a comic villain. He 'wore a red wig and a big false nose, indulged in a good deal of clowning, and followed his own prescription by rushing off at the end in a fury, pursued by hoots of laughter' (Gross, p. 154). But Poel's production reversed the trend in the nineteenth century by basing a theatrical performance on a historical approach to a text. Poel's interest in Shakespeare's source materials, principally *Il Pecorone*, confirmed his conception of the play as a comedy.

For Sir Israel Gollancz, lecturing to members of the Jewish Historical Society in the midst of the carnage that was World War One (No. 58), the play was 'a tragi-comedy'. Gollancz, whose wide historical knowledge embraced medieval Christian allegory and Jewish biblical interpretation, was the first scholar to relate Shylock's attempt to kill Antonio to the revenge-tragedies so popular in the 1590s. Just as, in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the murder of the beloved son Horatio caused his father Hieronymo's madness, so here 'it was Jessica who more cruelly struck the heart of Shylock with anguish. Jessica becomes the instrument for determining this side of Shylock's character – that is, the distraught man, keen for vengeance at all costs and not willing to yield, almost maddened, grotesquely maddened, as Hieronymo became grotesquely maddened. . . .' This historical context helps us to understand how Shakespeare uses Jessica's elopement to drive Shylock to a point beyond mercy, but of course the major difference between

## Introduction

Shylock and such revenge heroes as Hieronymo or Hamlet is that they are forced to seek revenge covertly, outside the law, whereas he thinks he has the law on his side. By contrast to Gollancz's wide historical knowledge and sensitivity to many cultures, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (No. 59) represents the no-nonsense tradition subsequently represented by some television pundits and serious newspaper columnists. Another popularizer, John Masefield (1878–1967), a future Poet Laureate, discussed *The Merchant of Venice* in his *William Shakespeare* (1911), for the 'Home University Library' Series. Masefield described Shylock as 'a man of intellect born into a despised race', whose tragedy is that 'the generous Gentiles about him can be generous to everything except intellect and Jewish blood' (p. 104).

### 1920 TO THE PRESENT

In the inter-war period Shakespeare scholarship illuminated several aspects of the play. The historical context of Judaism and anti-Semitism was studied by Gerald Friedlander (No. 61) in 1921, by E. E. Stoll (No. 63) in 1927, repeating all the documentation he had collected in 1911 (No. 56), and at far greater length than can be represented here, and by Cecil Roth (No. 66) in 1933. Friedlander argued that Shakespeare's presentation of Shylock's Jewishness was inaccurate in several respects, especially in showing him becoming 'a Christian on the spot, without a sign of the slightest inward struggle, without a word of hesitation or resistance'. Cecil Roth, the great historian of Judaism, was more concerned to locate Shylock in the actual Jewish community of Renaissance Venice (indirectly paying tribute to Shakespeare's historical imagination). Roth showed that Shylock would have belonged to the oldest community of Venetian Jews, the 'German' nation, who were allowed to practise only two occupations, money-lending and dealing in second-hand clothes. Roth confirmed Shylock's status as an alien, a topic the Polish scholar Andrew Tretiak discussed in 1929 (No. 64) in the context of Elizabethan London. Tretiak invoked several well-documented anti-alien riots, including the 1517 May Day revolt dramatized in the collaborative play *Sir Thomas More*, to which Shakespeare probably contributed one scene and a further speech. Although Tretiak's reconstruction of English history is reliable, not many scholars have agreed that *The Merchant of Venice* is 'an appeal both to Queen Elizabeth for mercy and to the Protestant refugees from France and Holland, residing in London, to seek a sort of *modus vivendi* with the original citizens'. Elizabethan London was also the focus for an essay published in 1935 by that extremely prolific scholar John W. Draper (No. 68), which documented both the widespread resentment against usurers and the extent to which Shylock's attitudes and behaviour correspond to those in Shakespeare's London. Like other commentators represented here, Draper saw 'the conflict between Shylock and Antonio [as] not so much a matter of religion but rather of mercantile ideals'.

To move from literary scholarship, recreating historical contexts that should guide us in interpreting a play, to the theatre, is to find some very divergent readings of *The Merchant*. Probably the most interesting London production in the period immediately following the First World War was that at the Court Theatre in Sloane Square, which ran for nine months during the 1919–20 season, in which Maurice Moscovitch



## The Merchant of Venice

(1871–1940), the Odessa-born Yiddish actor, played Shylock. Six feet one inch tall, Moscovitch's Shylock was a 'realist', without 'a shred of dignity'. According to Toby Lelyveld's account in her *Shylock on the Stage* (1960), Moscovitch played him as 'an every-day huckster, imbued with a spirit of revenge' and intense hatred for those around him (p. 107). Lewis Casson's performance as Shylock (in 1927, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith) was hailed by one journalist as the 'Best Shylock Since Irving'. Casson 'spoke in the accent of the Jews of the Modern East London ghetto. He pronounced "well" as "vell" and "was" as "vas"'.<sup>13</sup> Casson's Shylock was devoid of heroism, mean and distorted, a reading that allowed the Belmont scenes to take on a dignified quality of their own. Some of the least attractive features of the Victorian theatrical tradition persisted into the twentieth century. Frank Benson's last performance at the Stratford-upon-Avon Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, on 16 May 1932, still exemplified 'the tradition of "pictorial realism" that, combined with historical detail, naturalistic acting, and moral sentimentousness . . . dominated productions for half a century or more.'<sup>14</sup> Like several nineteenth-century actor-managers, Benson concluded the play with the trial scene and his exit as the aggrieved Shylock.

A few months later William Bridges-Adams, Benson's successor as the new manager of the Stratford-upon-Avon Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, invited the great Russian-born theatrical director Theodore Komisarjevsky to direct *The Merchant*. Komisarjevsky treated the play as a Venetian carnival, complete with pierrots, and scenery that burlesqued previous settings, including leaning towers and strange bridges. Randle Ayrton's Shylock was meant to be caricature: 'a wicked old scamp, a scamp with drollery inherent, but meriting all the punishment that comes his way.'<sup>15</sup> In the same year Ernest Milton's non-comic Shylock, at the St James's Theatre in London, ran for only three weeks, playing to near empty houses. Graham Robertson, who had seen Irving's Shylock half a century earlier, wrote to a friend that 'the blessed memory of Irving's crucified saint remains with me quite undisturbed – but it wasn't Shylock.' Milton, by contrast, 'gave no fantastic reading, performed no tricks', performing the role 'straight and with wonderful effect.'<sup>16</sup>

In 1932 John Gielgud began his distinguished career as Shakespearean actor and director. His Old Vic *Merchant of Venice*, with Maurice Keen as Shylock, created a strong contrast between the casket scenes, presented as fantasy or romance, and those involving Shylock, given a harsh, stark reality. Six years later, and in a world now haunted by the Nuremberg racial laws and the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, Gielgud himself acted Shylock. The *New Statesman and Nation* reviewer saw his Jew as a synthesis of 'the squalor of a Transylvanian usurer' with 'the ardour of an old testament prophet':

When he stropped his knife upon his shoe, we were appalled, not by fear for Antonio, but by the sight of hatred turned to madness. His appearance throughout was extraordinary – gummy, blinking eyes, that suggested some nasty creature of the dark, and loquacious hands with as many inflections as his voice.

Gielgud's 'remarkable gifts', the reviewer judged, had never 'been shown to greater advantage, and when he is on the stage you can feel the whole house motionless under the painful weight of his realism.' Yet, he added, 'when Jews are being driven to mass-

## Introduction

suicide by unsurpassed brutalities, the spectacle of Shylock's baiting becomes almost unbearable.<sup>17</sup> Echoes of the Nazis' persecution of the Jews can be found in discussions of the play by H. B. Charlton in 1938 (No. 72), who described their policies as 'an entirely indefensible exhibition of those animal passions which it has been the dread of civilization to subdue', and John Dover Wilson in 1938 (No. 73).

Curiously enough, the events of 1939–45 had no immediate impact upon British productions of *The Merchant of Venice*. During the war Donald Wolfitt performed Shylock in repertory throughout the United Kingdom, a 'villain full of venom and hatred, spitting on the Christians at the end of the trial scene.'<sup>18</sup> The less well-known Frederick Valk, a Central European refugee, played Shylock at the Old Vic in 1943, giving a more balanced performance. Other traditional interpretations of Shylock included Michael Redgrave's 'blood-curdling over the top performance at Stratford' during the 1953 Coronation year, with Peggy Ashcroft as a dignified, intellectual Portia.<sup>19</sup> The noted drama critic Kenneth Tynan described Redgrave's performance as 'a prolonged wrestling match with Shylock, each speech being floored with a tremendous, vein-bursting thump.'<sup>20</sup> But as recognition of the horrors of genocide became widespread, the pressure to reflect this in performing the play became inescapable. Soon, 'whatever his interpretation of the role, the actor of Shylock had to take into account the distress and guilt of a whole generation of playgoers.'<sup>21</sup> Another editor surveying the play's stage history agreed that critics and directors 'found the Holocaust impossible to ignore, although their ways of dealing with the recent historical horror varied from production to production.'<sup>22</sup> John Gross recorded that 'Michael Langham's production at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1960 was widely felt at the time to mark a turning-point. Peter O'Toole's Shylock was handsome, dignified, heroic; set against him were "a gushing, nervous, trivial band of Christians". Here was one way of trying to redress old injustices.' (p. 300). Many critics lauded the production. For the poet and critic A. Alvarez, reviewing the performance in the *New Statesman* (23 April 1960), O'Toole transformed Shylock 'into a major tragic hero' (p. 586). One articulate dissenting voice was that of Nigel Dennis, a gifted novelist, satirist, and theatrical observer, who put the production's success down to the fact that 'it confirmed the critics and the audience in a sense of their own virtuosity. The director had seen it as his duty

first to assume that Shakespeare was on Shylock's side and, second, to create, in support of this assumption, whatever 'business' is needed to put it over. Antisemitism, as we know it today, must somehow be projected creatively backwards nearly four hundred years, in order that Shakespeare may be brought seriously forward over the same period. Anything in the text that hinders this recreation must be so played as to make it innocuous.

The ladies of Belmont, for example, had to be 'chickens and kittens, all fluff and chatter: even a little dignity might steal some of Shylock's thunder' (Gross, pp. 300–1). As for Peter O'Toole, 'he was "so absolutely right by modern standards" that the audience was ravished, as though by its own reflection: "It was with admiration that we watched him putting a fine cutting edge on his knife and testing it on a handkerchief held up by

## The Merchant of Venice

Tubal: whatever might happen to Antonio's heart, our own was in the right, contemporary, compassionate place.” (ibid., p. 301).

O'Toole's Shylock was eclipsed a decade later by Laurence Olivier's performance at the National Theatre, directed by Jonathan Miller, which had an impact comparable to that of Irving's Lyceum production ninety years earlier. For Miller the roots of anti-Semitism lay neither in the crucifixion of Christ, nor in the concept of usury as a sin, but in capitalism and politics. Olivier had suggested setting the play in 1880, so Miller decided, as he put it, to place Shylock 'within the context of the Rothschild's Banking House', and to make him 'scarcely distinguishable from' the other businessmen. Miller argued that this updating 'made sense of [Shylock's] claim that, apart from his customs, a Jew is like everyone else', and he believed that the resulting homogeneity of dress and behaviour 'highlights and emphasises the absurdity of the racial prejudice'.<sup>23</sup> Olivier presented Shylock as the outsider striving to integrate himself into respectable society, formally dressed (black frock coat, black striped trousers, a silver-topped walking stick and a golden pince-nez), with only the yarmulka beneath his top hat to mark his Jewishness. Olivier recorded that Jonathan Miller, drawing on his own Jewish background, told him that the marriage of a daughter to a Christian is 'the very most appalling disaster that can happen in an orthodox Jewish family', who 'in such circumstances hold a funeral service for the errant girl' and treat her as having died.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, Jessica's elopement became the main cause of Shylock's vengefulness – a curious echo of Sir Israel Gollancz's interpretation a half-century earlier – and the scene of Shylock's outburst ('Hath not a Jew eyes?') formed the production's climax. The trial scene was played down both by Olivier's muted acting and by its small, unelaborated setting in a domestic room rather than in a grandiose court of justice. However, Olivier treated Shylock's setbacks as body-blows that led to his being physically supported when he said 'I am content' [4.1.390] in desperate tones.

The Olivier-Miller *Merchant* sparked off a critical debate that raged in the leading London daily newspapers such as *The Times* (Irving Wardle), the weeklies such as *Time* and *Plays and Players*, journals such as *Encounter* (John Weightman), *The Nation* (New York – Harold Clurman), and elsewhere. The debate raised several important questions, as to how much interpretative licence a director should be granted, the effect of Miller's ahistorical perspective, and his tampering with the text. Peter Anson, writing in *Plays and Players* (June 1970) judged that the play's setting might be 'appropriate in accommodating the life-style and leisurely reflection of a nineteenth-century novelist. It doesn't easily absorb the violent, quick-changing rhythm of the Elizabethan drama.' For Anson these rhythms 'were designed to portray human experience in an *open* context, as opposed to the *closed*, private world of the nineteenth-century novel.' John Weightman, writing in *Encounter*, deplored the minimizing of lyricism in the Belmont scenes.<sup>25</sup> For the distinguished British scholar-critic Kenneth Muir, writing in *Essays and Studies* (1973), Shylock emerged 'as the baffled hero of the play. It need hardly be said', Muir added, 'that this interpretation runs counter to the text' (p. 25).

British stagings of interest after Jonathan Miller included a notable production by John Barton, first at the Other Place, Stratford, in 1978 (with Patrick Stewart as Shylock), and three years later in London. Barton's intention, perhaps in reaction against the Olivier-Miller production, was to reduce Shylock's importance and his ethnic dimension, in

## Introduction

order 'to restore an equal balance of interest between Bassanio, Shylock, and Portia' (Mahood, p. 52). In his *Playing Shakespeare* (1984) Barton declared that 'the play is about true and false value and not about race' (p. 171), echoing G. Wilson Knight's reading (No. 70). Patrick Stewart was a non-charismatic, understated Shylock whose central prop was a tray of cigarette stubs. These he dropped at the end of the court scene, to be suggestively picked up by Portia, who was shown as an intellectual and sympathetic character, but revealing tormented feelings at Belmont.<sup>26</sup> In his full-scale 1981 production Barton had the Jewish actor David Suchet as Shylock, whose conception of the role, given in an interview in the *Jewish Chronicle*, was that 'Shylock is a very professional and successful money lender, but off duty he becomes, in a crazy way, rather childish which can be both endearing and irritating. It is this domestic side that I align with.' (cit. Overton, p. 53). Suchet used an accent to emphasize Shylock's Jewishness.

Another Jewish actor, Anthony Sher, performed the role of Shylock in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre 1987 production, directed by Bill Alexander. Sher's Shylock was far removed from, indeed the antithesis of Olivier's, socially unassimilated, an oriental Jew, and so costumed. In a deliberately controversial interpretation, swastikas and other offensive graffiti were daubed on the walls near his house. Sher's South African origins suggested that he wanted the production to spotlight the evil of racism in general. Indeed, during the trial scene, Shylock was accompanied by a black attendant. The play was set in 1630, because the director thought that at this time it would be credible that Shylock would want to remove Antonio's heart. In an interview Sher described Shylock as a figure who 'sticks out like a sore thumb in society.' Sher disclosed that he and the director chose to present Shylock as 'a Turkish Jew using a Turkish accent,' for by 'making him a very unassimilated foreigner, very foreign, rather than very Jewish, we hoped to slightly broaden the theme of racism.' Sher added: 'we also wanted to make the racism as explicit and as brutal as described in the text, but never normally done. You don't normally see Christians spitting at him or kicking him or doing all the things that he says they do.'<sup>27</sup>

Before turning to non-theatrical critical reactions, two highly individual responses to the play should be mentioned. In *The Marowitz Shakespeare* (1978), Charles Marowitz declared that 'what had always angered' him about the play was the 'contemptible trial scene in which Shylock is progressively humiliated, stripped of all property and dignity and sent packing from the court room a forced convert, a disreputable father, an unmasked villain.' Consequently, Marowitz explained, 'it was to try to redress the balance that I decided to reorder *Merchant* and "vary" its moral implications' (p. 22). Marowitz truncated scenes, moved them around freely, and included extracts from Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. Marowitz located the action in British-controlled Palestine in 1948. Antonio was transformed into a British diplomat responsible for immigration control, while Shylock is a respected communal leader whose daughter marries Lorenzo, a British official, under instructions to further the Zionist cause. Portia, on the other hand, is an overweight, spoilt heiress. Shylock's motive was to deceive the British and to help the cause of independence. Marowitz's version concluded with the trial scene.<sup>28</sup>

For the prolific playwright Arnold Wesker, the Olivier-Miller production reinforced his idea of the drama's 'irredeemable anti-semitism'.<sup>29</sup> This provoked Wesker into

## The Merchant of Venice

writing his own version, in which Shylock would be presented in an entirely different context. Wesker's Venetian ghetto is one of culture: Shylock is obsessed with books. He is also compassionate and moral. Only by exacting the bond is he able to defend and sustain the Venetian laws upon which his own and his communities' survival depends. Wesker's *The Merchant*, first performed in 1976, was performed on Broadway in 1977, directed by John Dexter, and with Zero Mostel playing the leading role. Mostel died shortly after the performance opened. In his *The Birth of Shylock and the Death of Zero Mostel* (1997), Wesker provides a powerful account of Mostel in the role, its mercurial director John Dexter, and his own vision of the play.<sup>30</sup>

The twentieth century experienced *The Merchant of Venice* not only on the stage but on film and television. According to a survey by Luke McKernan and Olwen Terris, *Walking Shadows: Shakespeare in the National Film and Television Archive*, fifteen screen versions existed by 1994, beginning with an Italian silent film of 1910. The archive concludes with a British independent television arts documentary of 1989, based on Sir Peter Hall's London stage production, in which Dustin Hoffman played Shylock as a tragic, persecuted victim, with Geraldine James as Portia. The archive will doubtless continue to grow. In the live theatre, in 1998, *The Merchant of Venice* returned to the boards of the reconstructed New Globe, directed by Richard Olivier, the son of Laurence Olivier and Joan Plowright. The German actor Norbert Kentrup played Shylock, while Portia (Kathryn Pogson) was given more prominence than she often receives.<sup>31</sup> Trevor Nunn's 1999 National Theatre production, by contrast, explored the play's serious elements, especially Shylock's psychology and perceptions of Jewishness.<sup>32</sup>

To survey critical reactions to *The Merchant of Venice* since 1938 would need another volume, such has been the outpouring of Shakespeare commentary in the intervening years. In general, critics can be divided into those who are content to focus on Shylock, approvingly or not, and those who address the play as a whole. There is only space to indicate some specimen reactions in both categories. C. S. Lewis, in his 1942 British Academy Shakespeare lecture (devoted mainly to *Hamlet*), made one trenchant observation on *The Merchant of Venice*, criticizing those writers who dwell 'on Shylock's wrongs [and] turn him into a tragic figure.' The play is 'not so much about men as about metals', for it juxtaposes two value systems, those of Bassanio and Shylock. 'The whole contrast is between the crimson and organic wealth in his [Bassanio's] veins, the medium of nobility and fecundity, and the cold, mineral wealth in Shylock's counting-house.'<sup>33</sup> Neville Coghill, discussing 'The Basis of Shakespearian Comedy' in *Essays and Studies*, 3 (1950), also treated the play as opposing two value systems, 'Justice' against 'Mercy,' or the ancient 'Law' against the new 'Law' (pp. 21–3). In an article in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 3 (1952), J. W. Lever also contrasted a human positive, love, comprehending 'the generous give and take of emotion, the free spending of nature's bounty, and the increase of progeny through marriage', with its opposite, usury being the 'negation of friendship and community' (p. 383). John Russell Brown, in the new 'Arden' edition of the play (1955), as in his book *Shakespeare and his Comedies* (1957), used a similar antithesis, 'Shakespeare's ideal of love's wealth' being 'contrasted with a frankly commercial wealth'. For C. L. Barber, in his influential study *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959), the play 'dramatizes the conflict between the mechanisms of wealth and the masterful, social use of it' (p. 170), the crucial value being 'its concern for the grace of

## Introduction

the community' (p. 191). Such thematic approaches remain popular. In *The Harmonies of The Merchant of Venice* (1978) Lawrence Danson offered his 'traditional liberal humanist' readings as 'part of a long tradition of allegorical or semi-Christian interpretations which see the play in terms of love and law, Old and New Testament, and which seek to establish the text more as myth or parable than as a site of conflicting changes in the early modern period.'<sup>34</sup>

Standing outside the critical tradition which directly addresses the play as a theatrical or reading experience, an increasing number of commentators in recent years have taken Shakespeare's works as vehicles for interpretation according to some extraneous agenda.<sup>35</sup> Christianizing or allegorical readings, however well intended, reduce the play's complexity to a single theme. A valuable annotated bibliography by Bruce Sajdak, covering the period 1959 to 1983, gives an overview of these readings, among others.<sup>36</sup> In 1962 Barbara Lewalski read the play as a 'Christian allegory' in the manner of Dante, which deployed the traditional oppositions (Justice vs. Mercy, Old Law vs. New), and saw Belmont as the Heavenly City (# 30). For Thomas Fujimura Belmont represented Eden, Venice the natural world after the Fall (# 62), while Antonio experienced regeneration through mercy from an original state of pride (# 68); his interpretation was promptly rejected by L. W. Hyman (# 74-5). Allan Holaday saw the play as an allegory depicting man's salvation in the court of God (# 72, 80). R. C. Hassel, conceiving of Antonio as 'the archetypal Christ' in this play, accused Shylock of having 'taken Antonio's Christ-likeness so literally that he pursues a frustrated communion upon his literal body and blood' (# 118). Both M. L. Gnero (# 155) and G. R. Grund (# 213) read the play as a ritual corresponding to the Easter liturgy. Most critics have accepted the play's distinction between Shylock's Jewishness and the Venetians' Christianity, but S. Schoenfeld (an Israeli Shakespeare enthusiast whose views were reported posthumously) held that 'the play's Christian characters are actually Jews while Portia is Solomon and Shylock the devil' (# 116). For Edna Krane the play is a satire on Christianity in which Shylock 'is ultimately proved to be the saint, while Portia, who embodies Christianity, is transformed into the personification of vengeance and death' (# 179).

The problem with extra-literary approaches is that, since they locate their origin and authority elsewhere, they are immune to any counter-arguments based on the text. The same may be said of psychoanalytical readings, in which the validity of Freud, Jung, Adler, or whoever's system is being used, remains absolute. An unquestioning acceptance of authority can be seen in two early examples of such criticism included in this collection, I. S. Coriat's discovery in 1921 of Shylock's 'anal-erotic tendencies' (No. 60), and T. A. Ross's identification in 1934 of Antonio as a depressive homosexual (No. 67). Neither analyst doubts for a moment that Freudian readings will yield anything other than the truth, nor does an awareness of anachronism ever cross their mind. Unaware of the importance in classical and Renaissance thought of friendship as a virtue, many modern critics seize on the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio as unacknowledged homosexuality. W. H. Auden, in his essay 'Brothers and Others', included in *The Dyer's Hand* (1948), had no doubts as to Antonio's homosexuality, and many subsequent commentators have treated this interpretation as self-evident. The motif of the three caskets inspired Freud himself to attempt an interpretation of its symbolism,<sup>37</sup> and the other two plots (the bond; the rings) have exercised his followers. Vera M. Jiji,

## The Merchant of Venice

offering a psychoanalytical interpretation of the play's 'sexual imagery' (# 129), concluded that 'Portia, Shylock and Bassanio are bound by an Oedipal relationship in which the latter is threatened by castration'. (This seems an unusual reading, since it is usually Antonio who 'goes under the knife'.) Writing in the *Journal of Homosexuality* for 1983, Seymour Kleinberg attempted a wider theme, '*The Merchant of Venice: The Homosexual as Anti-Semite in Nascent Capitalism*' (# 214). According to the author's own summary, Shylock and Antonio are psychic doubles, and the play's happy ending in marriage signifies 'the promise of generation over the romantic but sterile infatuation of homoeroticism'. Despite its apparent differences, Belmont is really the same world as Venice, 'but here Jews like Jessica are welcome converts and sodomites like Antonio brief guests'. Finally, 'Antonio of Venice is the symbol of the corruption of erotic feeling under nascent mercantile capitalism, a world where melancholia is romance and sexual guilt is translated into ethnic hatred'.

Diversity of interpretation is, of course, one of the hallmarks of Shakespeare criticism in our time, but nowhere is it more marked than in the debate that continues to divide readings of *The Merchant of Venice*, whether or not the play is anti-Semitic. In the period covered by Sajdak's anthology the two sides frontally oppose each other, even within the world of Jewish publications. In *Jewish Currents* for 1962, Morris Schappes argued that the play 'is blatantly and undeniably anti-Semitic and should be suppressed' (# 37), a charge he repeated elsewhere (# 43, 58), and which was echoed by F. J. Paul (# 201). Herbert Bronstein twice found Shakespeare guilty of using anti-Jewish stereotypes (# 55, 82), while Hyam Maccoby described the play as 'profoundly anti-Jewish', Shylock being 'an unsympathetic, anti-Semitic portrayal in Nazi-like fashion, far worse than even Barabas in the *Jew of Malta*' (# 91). David Klein however, who published two articles in *National Jewish Monthly*, argued that 'Shakespeare participates in the anti-semitism of his culture while at the same time demonstrating a unique sympathy toward and understanding of the plight of the Jews' (# 28, 29). Other essays defending the play from the charge of anti-Semitism appeared in *Jewish Digest* (# 46), *Jewish Quarterly* (# 63), *Jewish Spectator* (# 90), and the *Jewish Chronicle Literary Supplement* (# 185), among others. The simple division into Shakespeare's guilt or innocence on this issue was challenged by Warren D. Smith in 1964, who argued that 'through Shylock Shakespeare is really not satirizing Jews as such but is attempting to depict a usurer, by vocation a villain, who hypocritically conceals his evil design behind the mask of a religion he himself does not believe in' (# 53). William Babula was one of the few critics in this period to consider Shylock as a character having a function in a play, namely a negative one, 'to block the play's four movements towards love: charity, friendship, marriage, and "playful lust"' (# 105).

If we were to follow criticism of *The Merchant of Venice* down to the present day – a task made possible by the magnificent *World Shakespeare Bibliography* published by *Shakespeare Quarterly* and now available online<sup>38</sup> – we would find the same divisions of opinion. For one final example of this ongoing debate, in 1996 James Shapiro published *Shakespeare and the Jews*, which unites historical scholarship and less disciplined speculation.<sup>39</sup> Shapiro offers a historical survey of English attitudes to the Jews, rather than a close reading of the play, but he still describes *The Merchant of Venice* as 'anti-Jewish' (p. 216). In *Shylock and the Jewish Question* (1997), Martin D. Yaffe disputes this

## Introduction

judgement, for he can 'find no evidence to indicate that Shakespeare himself endorses the prejudices articulated by his characters who are unfriendly to Jews and much to indicate that he understands those prejudices fully for what they are, namely, as dubious and damaging opinions' (p. 23). Through a close analysis of Shylock's utterances and motives, Yaffe establishes 'Shylock's ambivalence vis-à-vis Jewish law', for he invokes its 'moral strictness' when making demands of others but allows himself 'the permissiveness that accompanies Venice's openness to commerce' (p. 62). Shylock can invoke Jewish dietary laws to distinguish his world from that of the Christians, while exempting himself from Jewish law in order to 'feed on the prodigal'. When justifying lending money at interest, Shakespeare does not make Shylock 'appeal to any of the relevant legal passages of the Hebrew Bible', but to 'rather loose and self-serving readings of a biblical text' (p. 62): in Yaffe's judgement, 'Shylock seems to take the Bible rather as a sourcebook for the creative businessman' (p. 63). And in the celebrated 'I am a Jew' speech, according to Yaffe, Shylock argues that Jews and Christians are alike in a low but undeniable respect', sharing 'not the high moral demands of the Hebrew Bible' but 'their common animal characteristics' (pp. 63–4). Shakespeare may be anti-Shylock but not anti-Jewish.

It is unlikely that differences of interpretation such as these between James Shapiro and Martin Yaffe could ever be resolved. *The Merchant of Venice* polarizes opinion perhaps more than any other Shakespeare play.

The texts collected in this volume show that this polarization has been fruitful, in that the play's conflict has stimulated commentators to argue their viewpoint with more personal involvement than is usually shown in discussing *As You Like It*, say. As Georg Gottfried Gervinus wrote, a hundred and fifty years ago:

For the understanding of Shakespeare nothing is perhaps so instructive as at times, when striking occasions offer, to place by the side of our own reflections upon his works, the explanation of other interpreters, in order that by comparing a series of double expositions, we may penetrate closer and closer to the substance of the Shakespearian poetry. We shall by this means perceive how very different are the points of view from which these poems may be apprehended, and how, not without a certain degree and appearance of justice, various opinions upon the same piece may be advanced: which is only a proof of the richness and many-sidedness of these works. (No. 20)

## NOTES

- 1 See Brian Vickers (ed.), *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage Vol. 2, 1693–1733* (London and Boston, 1974), p. 150, and Gross, *Shylock*, pp. 91–3.
- 2 Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
- 3 Vickers, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
- 4 Harold Child, 'The Stage-History of *The Merchant of Venice*', in the 'New Cambridge' edition by A. Quiller-Couch and J. D. Wilson (1926), pp. 178–86, at p.185.



## The Merchant of Venice

- 5 Linda Rozmovits, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Culture in Late Victorian England* (Baltimore and London, 1998), p. 48.
- 6 Theodore Martin, '[The Character of Shylock]', *Theatre* (December 1879), pp. 253–4.
- 7 See Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London, 2004), and Robert Sawyer, *Victorian Appropriations of Shakespeare: George Eliot, A. C. Swinburne, Robert Browning, and Charles Dickens* (Madison, NJ and London, 2003). For George Eliot see Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (eds), *The Journals of George Eliot* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 438, and William Baker (ed.), *Some George Eliot Notebooks: An Edition of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library's George Eliot Holograph Notebooks, Mss 707–711, vol. IV, 709, 710* (Salzburg, 1985), p. 159.
- 8 M. M. Mahood, in her edition of *The Merchant of Venice* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 7, citing Gustav Ungerer, *Anglo-Spanish Relations in Tudor England* (London, 1956), pp. 81–174.
- 9 Theodore Martin '[Ellen Terry's Portia]', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 126 (December 1879), pp. 641–56, at p. 650.
- 10 For an account of these developments see Alan Bacon (ed.), *The Nineteenth-Century History of English Studies* (Aldershot, Hants., 1998).
- 11 For Halliwell-Phillipps see Marvin Spevack, *James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps: The Life and Works of the Shakespearian Scholar and Bookman* (New Castle, Delaware and London, 2001), pp. 243–96, and Richard Maxwell, 'James Orchard Halliwell-Phillips (1820–1889)' in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 184, *Nineteenth-Century Book-Collectors and Bibliographers* (Detroit, 1997), pp. 202–18. For Furnivall see Sandra M. Naiman, 'Frederick James Furnivall (1825–1910)', in *ibid.*, pp. 121–37.
- 12 See Robert Speaight, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (London, 1954).
- 13 Cit. Gross, p. 170.
- 14 Jay L. Halio (ed.), *The Merchant of Venice* (Oxford, 1993), p. 72.
- 15 Review in the *Observer*, cit. Gross, p. 172.
- 16 Cit. Gross, pp. 173–4.
- 17 Cf. Gross, pp. 179–80, and Toby Lelyveld, *Shylock on the Stage* (Cleveland, OH, 1960), p. 112.
- 18 Ronald Harwood, *Sir Donald Wolfitt* (London, 1971), p. 155; cit. Gross, p. 347.
- 19 Gross, p. 300.
- 20 Kenneth Tynan, *A View of the English Stage* (London, 1976), p. 130; cit. Charles Edelman, (ed.), *The Merchant of Venice*, in the 'Shakespeare in Performance' series (Cambridge, 2002), p. 55.
- 21 Mahood, *ed. cit.*, pp. 48–50.
- 22 Halio, *ed. cit.*, p. 73.
- 23 See Bulman, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–7, 88–9, citing an interview between Peter Anson and Miller in *Plays and Players*, 17 (1970), pp. 52–3, 59, and Jonathan Miller, *Subsequent Performances* (London, 1986).
- 24 *Confessions of an Actor* (London, 1982), p. 235.
- 25 'Dr. Miller's Transplant', *Encounter*, 35 (July 1970), pp. 54–6. For a collection of texts documenting reactions to Miller's production see Sandra L. Williamson and James E. Person, Jr. (eds), *Shakespearean Criticism*, 12 (Detroit, 1991), pp. 72–90.
- 26 See Bill Overton, *The Merchant of Venice: Text and Performance* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1987), pp. 45–6.
- 27 In *Theater Week*, 5 September 1988; cit. Edelman, p. 69.
- 28 Overton, pp. 70–1.
- 29 *Guardian*, 28 August 1981; cit. Overton, p. 71.
- 30 See also Arnold Wesker, *The Merchant with Commentary and Notes by Glenda Leeming*, (London, 1983).

## Introduction

- 31 See Lois Potter, 'A Stage Where Every Man Must Play a Part?' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 50 (1999), pp. 79–81.
- 32 See Matt Wolf, *Variety*, 375, no. 11 (2 August 1999), p. 40.
- 33 'Hamlet: the Prince or the Poem', in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 28 (London, 1943), pp. 139–54, at p. 146.
- 34 Martin Coyle, 'Introduction,' *New Casebooks: The Merchant of Venice* (New York, 1998), pp. 10–11.
- 35 For a vigorous account of critical fashions and their impact upon Shakespearean criticism, see Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (New Haven, CT, 1993).
- 36 Bruce T. Sajak (ed.), *Shakespeare Index. An Annotated Bibliography of Critical Articles on the Plays 1959–1983*, 2 vols. (Millwood, NY, 1992). The essays concerning *The Merchant of Venice* are indexed in vol. 1, pp. 529–51, with the prefix 'GG 1'–'GG 220'. Here they will be referred to with the number alone, e.g. '# 37'.
- 37 See Sigmund Freud, 'The Theme of The Three Caskets' (1913), reprinted (e.g.) in John Wilders (ed.), *The Merchant of Venice: A Casebook* (London, 1969).
- 38 See <http://worldshakesbib.org>. For recent surveys of criticism see, in this Bibliography, Coyle 1998, Malon 2002.
- 39 As Martin Yaffe pointed out, Shapiro, drawing on Renaissance theological discussions of Paul's allusion to 'circumcision of the heart' in Romans 2:24–9, speculates 'that Shylock's insistence on a pound of Antonio's flesh might be a metonym for genital circumcision or even castration' (*op. cit.*, p. 18).

# 1 Georg Lichtenberg, on Macklin's Shylock

1775

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From G. C. Lichtenberg, *Vermischte Schriften* (Göttingen, 1867), III, p. 266.

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–99), German aphorist and scientist, visited London in 1775. He went to see Charles Macklin (1697[?]-1797) perform Shylock at Drury Lane. In 1741 Macklin persuaded the Drury Lane management to replace George Granville's adaptation and to restore Shakespeare's text of *The Merchant of Venice*. It was Macklin's performance as Shylock that attracted audiences and attention until May 1789, when his memory failed. In a letter dated 2 December 1775 Lichtenberg remarks upon Macklin's ferocity in the role of Shylock. I use the translation in Furness's New Variorum Edition of *The Merchant of Venice* (Philadelphia, 1888).

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I have seen the Shylock of Macklin, so well known for his high deserts, his lawsuit,<sup>[1]</sup> and his physiognomy. You know that the announcement of Macklin as Shylock sounds as attractively on the play-bill as Garrick in *Hamlet*. It was the evening on which he appeared for the first time after his suit was decided. When he appeared, he was received with great applause, thrice given, each time lasting a quarter of a minute. It is not to be denied that the sight of this Jew suffices to awaken at once, in the best-regulated mind, all the prejudices of childhood against this people. Shylock is none of your petty cheaters, who can talk for an hour over the excellence of a pinchbeck watch-chain. He is slow, calm in his impenetrable cunning, and when he has the law on his side he is unflinching, even to the extreme of malice. Picture to yourself a somewhat strong man, with a sallow, harsh face and a nose which is by no means lacking in any one of the three dimensions, a long double chin or dewlap; and in making his mouth, Nature's knife seems to have slipped and gone all the way to his ears, at least on one side, so it seemed to me. His cloak is black and long, his pantaloons are also long and broad, and his hat three-corner and red, probably in accordance with the style of the Italian Jews. The first words which he utters are spoken slowly and deliberately: 'Three thousand ducats' [1.3.1]. The 'th' and 's' twice occurring and the last 's' after the 't' have a lickerish sound from Macklin's lips, as if he were tasting the ducats and all that they can buy; this speech creates for the man, upon his first appearance, a prepossession which is sustained throughout. Three such words, thus spoken and at the very first, reveal a whole character. In the Scene in which he first misses his daughter, he appears hatless, with hair all flying, some of it standing up straight, a hands breadth high, just as if it had been lifted

*on Macklin's Shylock, 1775*

up by a breeze from the gallows. Both hands are doubled up, and his gestures are quick and convulsive. To see a man thus moved, who had been hitherto a calm, determined villain, is fearful. (374–5)

## 2 Richard Hole, an ‘apology’ for Shylock

1796

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From ‘An Apology for the Character and Conduct of Shylock’, in *Essays by a Society of Gentlemen at Exeter* (Exeter, 1796), pp. 552–73.

In 1796 in Exeter ‘a Society of Gentlemen’ printed and sold through various London booksellers a collection of twenty-six anonymous essays including poems on diverse subjects. The essays and poems include ‘An Apology for the Character and Conduct of Iago’ and ‘An Apology for the Character and Conduct of Shylock’. Both were written by Richard Hole (1746–1803), poet, antiquary, and local clergyman. Educated at Exeter Grammar School, the son of a Canon of Exeter Cathedral, ‘Hole was known for his dry humour and for his skill in acting.’<sup>1</sup> He matriculated from Exeter College, Oxford in 1764 and in 1771 received his divinity degree. After ordination he held several rectorships in the Exeter district. Hole produced various poetic translations from Ossian, Homer, and others, was involved in several literary controversies, and wrote for London journals, including the *Monthly Review* and the *London Magazine*. H. H. Furness described Hole’s essay as ‘Chronologically, the earliest voice . . . raised in defence of Shylock and in denunciation of the ill equality of his defeat.’<sup>2</sup> However, given Hole’s ironic apology for Iago, one may wonder whether it was meant seriously.

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The vindication of injured innocence is commonly reckoned among the superior order of virtues; and to defend a *blemished character* in those points where it has suffered unjust censure, or even to extenuate its imputed errors, must deserve some praise. Justice would authorise, and humanity applaud us for rescuing a culprit from the gallows, who merely deserved a whipping.

Impressed with this idea, I lately stepped forward in defence of the injured Iago,<sup>[3]</sup> and impelled by the same sentiments, will now undertake the cause of Shylock, who has likewise met with much unmerited ill treatment; being commonly looked upon, in subordination perhaps to Iago alone, with the most unqualified aversion entertained for any character in Shakespeare’s Dramas – possibly for any at this time exhibited on the British Stage. [On anti-Jewish prejudice and insults.]

Would Antonio, had he instantaneously avenged himself for such gross insults, have incurred any severity of censure? Yet that precept of forbearance, which few Christians in a similar situation would have complied with, is here exemplified by a Jew [Quotes 1.3.109–11]. It must be allowed that this forbearance is to be considered rather as

political than moral. Yet, had a similar sentiment been uttered by the follower of the gospel in the same situation. . . . And had his insulting enemy replied like the merchant in the play 'I am like to call thee dog again, / To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too' [1.3.128–9]. Whose bosom would not have melted with compassion for the former character, and burnt with indignation against his insolent oppressor?

It may be asserted in return, that if a Christian were an usurer, as rapacious as Shylock, he would have merited the same treatment. This argument, however, is by no means conclusive. We ought not to try Shylock by our laws, but by those of the community to which he belonged. To determine on the propriety of this behaviour in this respect, we must place ourselves in his situation. Usury is generally considered by Christians as a disgraceful traffick, but not so by the Jews. Having been long debarred from every other mode of improving their temporal property, usury has been their hereditary profession from the capture of Jerusalem to the present time; and the [1.3] defence Shylock makes in its favour, however inconclusive it may appear to a Christian moralist, will, I doubt not, in the opinion of those, to whom STOCK is *terra firma*, and quarterly interest and dividends ('a breed from barren metal') [1.3.134] its living produce, be unanswerable: they will admit the full force of his observation, that 'thrift is blessing, if men steal it not' [1.3.90]. Nay farther, the Divine permission to 'take usury of a stranger,'<sup>[4]</sup> has in latter times been pretty generally understood by the Jews as an injunction to do so. Men's inclinations are commonly admirable casuists in their own favour; and that they should strain a precept to over-reach those who cruelly oppressed them, cannot be thought highly criminal by the most rigid moralist; for at the time when the most enlightened nations of Europe were putting Jews, infidels, and heretics to the sword, for the glory of God, the more tolerant disciples of Moses were content to pillage the purse, without taking the lives of those whom they conceived to be misbelievers. – It is in fact no less absurd to condemn a Jew for usury, than a Mohammedan for polygamy.

It may be alledged likewise that Shylock was vindictive and cruel. But those who condemn him for his stern unforgiving disposition, do not consider that he has suffered the most intolerable injuries from Antonio – that he had been publicly insulted, been spurned and spit upon by him, been deprived by his means 'of his well-won thrift,' and been robbed of his daughter and property by one of his associates. Who can reflect on this, and not make great allowance for his meditating so severe a retaliation! Besides, in this instance also, he ought not to be tried by the mild precepts of Christianity, but by the less perfect laws of Moses. 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' was, with his followers, legal reparation and sound morality. This accorded with their ideas of retributive justice: they had a right to expect it, and for that right could plead divine prescription.

The account which Salarino gives of Shylock's distress on his daughter's elopement with Lorenzo, always excites, as was intended, laughter. But to place this circumstance in a fair point of view, to consider it impartially, let us again reverse the case: let us suppose that a dissipated young Israelite stole an only child from a Christian parent, with a considerable treasure, either acquired by his own industry, or derived to him through the frugality of his ancestors, together with some valuable memorials of former love or friendship. Let us suppose such a character introduced on the stage, bewailing, in broken sentences and pathetic exclamation, his loss of fortune, his daughter's ingratitude, and his

## Richard Hole

own desolated state. . . . Can we entertain the least doubt, but that our hearts would sympathise with the injured father, and secretly wish that some signal punishment might be inflicted on the unnatural daughter, and her abandoned seducer? The same ideas as those which Shakespeare attributes to Shylock, and he certainly did not mean to interest us in his favour, with little alteration, with a few tender expressions interspersed, would in all probability have that effect. It is incredible how much the manner of a discourse affects us more than the matter; and how much less things depend on themselves, than on the mode in which they are related! [Hole rewrites the scene between Shylock and Tubal, 3.1.79–130.]

Notwithstanding the homeliness of the garb in which the father's sentiments are clothed, I do not conceive that any reader, impressed with the idea of his being a Christian and a man of integrity, would smile at his intemperate passion, or allow that his wrongs did not greatly palliate the severity of his intended vengeance. And yet many arguments that might be urged in favour of the Jew, strongly militate against the Christian. The former, under the idea of strict retribution, acts in conformity to the Mosaic law, the other violates one of the most positive precepts of the gospel. Shylock's feelings are certainly neither laudable, nor consonant to the purity of *our* religion; yet they are not unnatural to any one in *his* situation. He does not appear, knowingly, to violate any divine or human law, but boldly avows, in conscious integrity, before a Court of Judicature, that 'he dreads no judgement doing no wrong' [4.1.89].

We are in general sufficiently candid with regard to the civil or religious prejudices of dramatic characters. When a Cato or a Brutus stabs himself, we allow for the manners and opinions of the times; for the imperfect state of morality when they existed; we sympathise with *their* distresses, and yet we exult over those of Shylock. But if we reasoned impartially, we should no more condemn a Jew for usury and revenge, than a Greek or a Roman for suicide, a crime, according to Christian precepts, of a much deeper dye. We commiserate Cato in spite of his stoic pride and invincible obstinacy. We love Brutus notwithstanding his ingratitude. But in Shylock, the insulted and injured old man, the deceived and plundered father make not the least impression on us. Nay, so engrossed are our minds with the detestation of him, that no one who peruses, or sees *The Merchant of Venice* represented, ever conceives an unfavourable opinion of the undutiful Jessica, or the prodigal Lorenzo: – And why? because the person whom he robs of his wealth, and of his daughter, is a JEW. A most exquisite reason! on the same admirable principle he is supposed to have been persecuted by Antonio, who [Quotes 3.1.54–64].

Were any of Shylock's countrymen poets, I am convinced they would represent him in a very different light, and indeed a much fairer one, than that in which he appears to us. They would most probably convert his story into a deep tragedy, and by giving it a different catastrophe, softning some harsh expressions, and introducing others of a pathetic kind, interest every sentimental and tenderhearted descendant of Abraham in his favour.

Let us, and the supposition will cost nothing, conceive the Jews to be again settled in their former territories, or any where else you please; dramatic entertainments to be a fashionable amusement, and the story of Shylock brought forward on their theatre. In such a case it might be easily imagined that some Jewish stage-enamoured critic, a

an 'apology' for *Shylock*, 1796

correspondent of the *Jebusite Morning Post*, or the *Jerusalem Daily Advertiser*, would communicate his opinion in terms not unlike the following.

'On the fourth day of the first week in the month of Nisan was represented the tragedy of "Shylock," written by Nathan Ben Boaz. The plot is borrowed from an old British bard, who flourished about the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century of their æra; and who composed it under the influence of the spirit of inveterate malice against our nation, for which, in that and many preceding ages, the Europeans were notorious. The scene is laid in Venice. Shylock, the hero of the drama, is represented as an exemplary follower of the law, and as having acquired a considerable property by adhering to that precept, which enjoins *lending to the stranger upon usury*. He excites, a case too common in those days, the envy and hatred of the Christians among whom he dwells. He is more particularly injured and insulted by a Merchant, named Antonio, and meditates a plan of retaliation, which he pursues with address, perseverance, and resolution. He carries, indeed, his resentment so far, that some persons of weak minds and tender dispositions, particularly several of the fair sex, who did not properly reflect on his various and complicated sufferings, looked upon him at first as rather too violent and obdurate. Those, however, who possessed a stronger understanding and listened with deep attention to the story, neither wondered at his warmth, nor censured his inflexibility, for he is not only grievously wronged by the Merchant, but his only child, the daughter of his bosom, whom he most dearly loves, is stolen from him, together with an immense treasure, by a young profligate companion of the Merchant, and, like him, a scoffer at our law and our religion. When Shylock complains of this double robbery, he is ridiculed [2.9, 3.1] by his other libertine associates, and derided by the city at large. These scenes, in which the father's different sensations are delineated, his rage, grief, paternal tenderness and indignation, are peculiarly interesting,<sup>[5]</sup> and produced repeated plaudits from the audience. We must conclude that he would have sunk under those distresses, but for the consolation he received from Antonio's having forfeited his bond; which was, to repay Shylock 3000 ducats within a limited time, or allow him, in case of failure, to cut off a pound of flesh nearest his heart. The money not being repaid at the time appointed, Shylock expects to obtain a signal and glorious revenge upon his own and his people's enemy; to shew the world an example, that a son of Abraham was not to be wronged and trampled on with impunity. His firmness and patriotic sentiments on this occasion deserve the highest commendation. His resentment, though severe, is just: he had endured irreparable wrongs, and had a right to expect the most exemplary vengeance for their atonement. The law, however, on which he founds his claim, is evaded by shameful sophistry. Shylock is permitted to take the pound of flesh, but is warned at the same time, that if he sheds "one drop of Christian blood in cutting it, his lands and goods are confiscate to the state, by laws of Venice" [4.1.310–11]. But how can we suppose its legislators could have foreseen and obviated the fulfilling of so singular a contract as that between the Merchant and Shylock? that, in their great wisdom, they should enact a decree, by which a man is allowed to take his creditor's forfeiture, yet punished for not performing an impossibility in taking it? can we imagine that Shylock's notary could have drawn, or himself have signed a bond, that *fairly* admitted such an interpretation, or incurred such a penalty? yet on this absurd, perverted, construction of a plain contract is Shylock condemned!'



## Richard Hole

‘Another quibble of equal weight is urged against him; that having a right to cut from the merchant’s breast a pound of flesh, and a pound *only*, if he took more or less than that – even the minutest particle – he should suffer death; as if the spirit of the bond did not clearly imply that he was limited to take no more than a pound! Shylock is found guilty of death by this curious exposition of the Venetian laws; but Antonio, not satisfied unless insult was added to injustice, requests the Duke that his life might be spared, if he would make over his remaining fortune to his unnatural daughter and profligate son-in-law, now reduced to penury by their extravagance; with this trifling addition, that he renounce his faith, and embrace Christianity. These conditions he complies with in the British drama; but at the inhuman proposal mentioned above, not an eye was seen unmoistened with tears in our theatre. The sensations of the audience corresponded with those of Shylock.’

‘It may not be unworthy notice that such a character as Shylock’s, in the same situation as here represented, from the address of the Christian poet, and the prepossession of the audience, never appeared on the English stage but as an object of abhorrence, instead of that commiseration which was so generally excited by this performance. It appears, likewise, on examining Shakespeare’s numerous commentators, and other records of the times, that no censure was ever cast, no unfavourable sentiment entertained of the unjust judge, the injurious merchant, the undutiful daughter, and prodigal lover. Nay, ’tis recorded that the following profligate speech of the latter has not unfrequently been received with applause, never with disapprobation, on the British stage’ [Quotes 2.4.29–37].

‘By this extraordinary declaration we are first to understand, that robbery, ingratitude, and a want of filial affection towards a Jewish parent, are such supererogatory virtues in a daughter, as will not only atone for her own faults, but most probably for his also, and entitle him to a happy immortality. In the second place we learn, that the same *meritorious demerits* (if I may so denominate them) will even preserve her from the common calamities and casualties of life, unless the untoward circumstances of her *faithless father’s* being descended from “the father of the faithful” should counteract their effect. What an idea does this give of the English nation when such sentiments could be applauded! What a striking instance does it afford of the lax state of morality, and the domination of religious prejudices in the darker ages!’

‘The sudden yet natural death of the malevolent merchant, is well imagined. The turbulent frenzy of the judge, brought on by the recollection of his corrupt decision, and the tender melancholy of the daughter, who bewails her misconduct too late, are equally affecting and demonstrate the author’s perfect knowledge of the human heart. The moral sense may be awhile suppressed or perverted, but conscience some time or other, will resume its dominion, and severely punish the violators of her laws.’ (552–8, 563–73)

### 3 August Wilhelm von Schlegel, 'one of Shakespeare's most perfect works'

1815

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From *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, 2 vols., translated by John Black (London, 1815), revised edn (in one volume) by A. J. W. Morrison (London, 1846).

August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767–1845) was a distinguished exponent of early German Romanticism, poet, literary critic, and translator. His pioneering German translation of Shakespeare, published in an incomplete 9-volume version (Berlin, 1797–1810), was completed by Ludwig Tieck, his daughter Dorothea and her husband Wolf Heinrich Graf von Baudissin (9 vols., Berlin, 1825–33). Schlegel's best-known critical commentary on Shakespeare were the lectures he delivered in Vienna in 1808, published as *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur* (2 vols., Heidelberg, 1809–11). John Black's English translation had an important influence upon Coleridge and his contemporaries. Schlegel treated *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Merchant of Venice* 'as a group of plays that resemble each other in dealing with serious issues affecting the well-being of people and that impress us in the moral sense'.<sup>1</sup> *The Merchant of Venice* seems to have been a favourite of his.

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*The Merchant of Venice* is one of Shakspeare's most perfect works: popular to an extraordinary degree, and calculated to produce the most powerful effect on the stage, and at the same time a wonder of ingenuity and art for the reflecting critic. Shylock, the Jew, is one of the inimitable masterpieces of characterization which are to be found only in Shakspeare. It is easy for both poet and player to exhibit a caricature of national sentiments, modes of speaking, and gestures. Shylock, however, is everything but a common Jew: he possesses a strongly-marked and original individuality, and yet we perceive a light touch of Judaism in everything he says or does. We almost fancy we can hear a light whisper of the Jewish accent even in the written words, such as we sometimes still find in the higher classes, notwithstanding their social refinement. In tranquil moments, all that is foreign to the European blood and Christian sentiments is less perceptible, but in passion the national stamp comes out more strongly marked. All these inimitable niceties the finished art of a great actor can alone properly express. Shylock is a man of information, in his own way, even a thinker, only he has not discovered the region where human feelings dwell; his morality is founded on the disbelief in goodness and magnanimity. The desire to avenge the wrongs and indignities

## August Wilhelm von Schlegel

heaped upon his nation is, after avarice, his strongest spring of action. His hate is naturally directed chiefly against those Christians who are actuated by truly Christian sentiments: a disinterested love of our neighbour seems to him the most unrelenting persecution of the Jews. The letter of the law is his idol; he refuses to lend an ear to the voice of mercy, which, from the mouth of Portia, speaks to him with heavenly eloquence: he insists on rigid and inflexible justice, and at last it recoils on his own head. Thus he becomes a symbol of the general history of his unfortunate nation. The melancholy and self-sacrificing magnanimity of Antonio is affectingly sublime. Like a princely merchant, he is surrounded with a whole train of noble friends. The contrast which this forms to the selfish cruelty of the usurer Shylock was necessary to redeem the honour of human nature.

The danger which almost to the close of the fourth act, hangs over Antonio, and which the imagination is almost afraid to approach, would fill the mind with too painful anxiety, if the poet did not also provide for its recreation and diversion. This is effected in an especial manner by the scenes at Portia's country-seat, which transport the spectator into quite another world. And yet they are closely connected with the main business by the chain of cause and effect. Bassanio's preparations for his courtship are the cause of Antonio's subscribing the dangerous bond; and Portia again, by the counsel and advice of her uncle, a famous lawyer, effects the safety of her lover's friend. But the relations of the dramatic composition are the while admirably observed in yet another respect. The trial between Shylock and Antonio is indeed recorded as being a real event, still, for all that, it must ever remain an unheard-of and singular case. Shakspeare has therefore associated it with a love intrigue not less extraordinary: the one consequently is rendered natural and probable by means of the other. A rich, beautiful and clever heiress, who can only be won by the solving of the riddle – the locked caskets – the foreign princes, who come to try the venture – all this powerfully excites the imagination with the splendour of an olden tale of marvels. The two scenes in which, first the Prince of Morocco, in the language of Eastern hyperbole, and then the self-conceited Prince of Arragon, make their choice among the caskets, serve merely to raise our curiosity, and give employment to our wits; but on the third, where the two lovers stand trembling before the inevitable choice, which in one moment must unite or separate them for ever, Shakspeare has lavished all the charms of feeling – all the magic of poesy. We share in the rapture of Portia and Bassanio at the fortunate choice: we easily conceive why they are so fond of each other, for they are both most deserving of love.

The judgment scene, with which the fourth act is occupied, is in itself a perfect drama, concentrating in itself the interest of the whole. The knot is now untied, and according to the common ideas of theatrical satisfaction, the curtain ought to drop. But the poet was unwilling to dismiss his audience with the gloomy impressions which Antonio's acquittal, effected with so much difficulty, and contrary to all expectation, and the condemnation of Shylock, were calculated to leave behind them; he has therefore added the fifth act by way of a musical afterlude in the piece itself. The episode of Jessica, the fugitive daughter of the Jew, in whom Shakspeare has contrived to throw a veil of sweetness over the national features, and the artifice by which Portia and her companion are enabled to rally their newly-married husbands, supply him with the necessary materials. The scene opens with the playful prattling of two lovers in a summer evening;

*'one of Shakespeare's most perfect works'*, 1815

it is followed by soft music, and a rapturous eulogy on this powerful disposer of the human mind and the world; the principal characters then make their appearance, and after a simulated quarrel, which is gracefully maintained, the whole ends with the most exhilarating mirth. (388–90)

## 4 William Hazlitt, Kean's debut as Shylock

1816

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From 'The Merchant of Venice', *The Morning Chronicle*, 7 April 1816; reprinted in Hazlitt's *A View of the English Stage; or, a Series of Dramatic Criticisms* (London, 1821).

William Hazlitt (1778–1830) turned to journalism after trying his hand at the ministry, philosophy, and painting. He produced parliamentary and theatrical reports for the *Morning Chronicle*, discussed general matters for *The Times*, and wrote many reviews for John and Leigh Hunt's *The Examiner*, for which he was the theatre critic. In this extract Hazlitt begins by citing his own reactions to the opening night performance at the Drury Lane Theatre, 26 January 1814, first printed in the *Morning Chronicle*, and then adds some second thoughts. The text below is taken from the standard edition by P. P. Howe, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt* (21 vols., London, 1930), V, 295–6.

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Shylock was the part in which Mr. Kean first sought the favour of the town, and in which perhaps he chose for that reason to be reconciled to it, after the first slight misunderstanding. We were a little curious on this occasion to see the progress he has made in public opinion since that time; and on turning to our theatrical common-place book (there is nothing like a common-place book after all) found the following account of his first reception, copied from the most respectable of the Morning Papers:

Mr. Kean (of whom report has spoken so highly) made his appearance at Drury-Lane in the character of Shylock. For *voice*, eye, action, and expression, no actor has come out for many years at all equal to him. The applause, from the first scene to the last, was general, loud, and uninterrupted. Indeed, the very first scene in which he comes on with Bassanio and Antonio, shewed the master in his art, and at once decided the opinion of the audience. Perhaps it was the most perfect of any. Notwithstanding the complete success of Mr. Kean in Shylock, we question whether he will not become a greater favourite in other parts. There was a lightness and vigour in his tread, a buoyancy and elasticity of spirit, a fire and animation, which would accord better with almost any other character than with the morose, sullen, inward, inveterate, inflexible, malignity of Shylock. The character of Shylock is that of a man brooding over one idea, that of its wrongs, and bent on an unalterable purpose, that of revenge. In conveying a profound

### *Kean's debut as Shylock, 1816*

impression of this feeling, or in embodying the general conception of rigid and uncontrollable self-will, equally proof against every sentiment of humanity or prejudice of opinion, we have seen actors more successful than Mr. Kean. But in giving effect to the conflict of passions arising out of the contrast of situation, in varied vehemence of declamation, in keenness of sarcasm, in the rapidity of his transitions from one tone or feeling to another, in propriety and novelty of action, presenting a succession of striking pictures, and giving perpetually fresh shocks of delight and surprise, it would be difficult to single out a competitor. The fault of his acting was (if we may hazard an objection), an over display of the resources of the art, which gave too much relief to the hard, impenetrable, dark ground-work of the character of Shylock. It would be needless to point out individual beauties, where almost every passage was received with equal and deserved applause. His style of acting is, if we may use the expression, more significant, more pregnant with meaning, more varied and alive in every part, than any we have almost ever witnessed. The character never stands still, there is no vacant pause in the action: the eye is never silent. It is not saying too much of Mr. Kean, though it is saying a great deal, that he has all the Mr. Kemble *wants* of perfection.

The accounts in the other papers were not to be sure so favourable; and in the above criticism there are several errors. His voice, which is here praised, is very bad, though it must be confessed its defect appears less in Shylock than in most of his other characters. The critic appears also to have formed an overstrained ideal of the gloomy character of Shylock, probably more from seeing other players perform it than from the text of Shakespear. Mr. Kean's manner is much nearer the mark. Shakespear could not easily divest his characters of their entire humanity: his Jew is more than half a Christian. Certainly, our sympathies are much oftener with him than with his enemies. He is honest in his vices; they are hypocrites in their virtues. In all his arguments and replies he has the advantage over them, by taking them on their own ground. Shylock (however some persons may suppose him bowed down by age, or deformed with malignity) never, that we can find, loses his elasticity and presence of mind. There is wonderful grace and ease in all the speeches in this play. 'I would not have parted with it (the jewel that he gave to Leah) for a *wilderness* of monkeys!' [3.1.123]. What a fine Hebraism! The character of Shylock is another instance of Shakespear's power of identifying himself with the thoughts of men, their prejudices, and almost instincts.

## 5 William Hazlitt, sympathy for Shylock, but not for Portia

1817

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From *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, 1817. Hazlitt refers to the popular success of the play by Richard Cumberland (1732–1811), *The Jew* (1794), concerning a philanthropic Jewish moneylender.

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### *The Merchant of Venice*

This is a play that in spite of the change of manners and prejudices still holds undisputed possession of the stage. Shakespear's malignant has outlived Mr. Cumberland's benevolent Jew. In proportion as Shylock has ceased to be a popular bugbear, 'baited with the rabble's curse,' he becomes a half-favourite with the philosophical part of the audience, who are disposed to think that Jewish revenge is at least as good as Christian injuries. Shylock is a good hater; 'a man no less sinned against than sinning.' If he carries his revenge too far, yet he has strong grounds for 'the lodged hate he bears Antonio,' which he explains with equal force of eloquence and reason. He seems the depository of the vengeance of his race; and though the long habit of brooding over daily insults and injuries has crusted over his temper with inveterate misanthropy, and hardened him against the contempt of mankind, this adds but little to the triumphant pretensions of his enemies. There is a strong, quick and deep sense of justice mixed up with the gall and bitterness of his resentment. The constant apprehension of being burnt alive, plundered, banished, reviled, and trampled on, might be supposed to sour the most forbearing nature, and to take something from that 'milk of human kindness,' with which the persecutors contemplated his indignities. The desire of revenge is almost inseparable from the sense of wrong; and we can hardly help sympathizing with the proud spirit, hid beneath his 'Jewish gaberdine,' stung to madness by repeated undeserved provocations, and labouring to throw off the load of obloquy and oppression heaped upon him and all his tribe by one desperate act of 'lawful' revenge, till the ferociousness of the means by which he is to execute his purpose, and the pertinacity with which he adheres to it, turn us against him; but even at last, when disappointed of the sanguinary revenge with which he had glutted his hopes, and exposed to beggary and contempt by the letter of the law on which he had insisted with so little remorse, we pity him, and think him hardly dealt with by his judges. In all his answers and retorts upon his adversaries, he has the best not only of the argument but of the question, reasoning on their own principles and practice. They are so far from allowing of any measure of equal dealing, of common

*sympathy for Shylock, but not for Portia, 1817*

justice or humanity between themselves and the Jew, that even when they come to ask a favour of him, and Shylock reminds them that 'on such a day they spat upon him, another spurned him, another called him dog, and for these curtesies request he'll lend them so much monies' [1.3.111–26]. Antonio, his old enemy, instead of any acknowledgement of the shrewdness and justice of his remonstrance, which would have been preposterous in a respectable Catholic merchant in those times, threatens him with a repetition of the same treatment –

I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too. [1.3.130–1]

After this, the appeal to the Jew's mercy, as if there were any common principle of right and wrong between them, is the rankest hypocrisy, or the blindest prejudice; and the Jew's answer to one of Antonio's friends, who asks him what his pound of forfeit flesh is good for, is irresistible –

To bait fish withal; if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge.  
[Quotes 3.1.53–73.]

The whole of the trial-scene, both before and after the entrance of Portia, is a masterpiece of dramatic skill. The legal acuteness, the passionate declamations, the sound maxims of jurisprudence, the wit and irony interspersed in it, the fluctuations of hope and fear in the different persons, and the completeness and suddenness of the catastrophe, cannot be surpassed. Shylock, who is his own counsel, defends himself well, and is triumphant on all the general topics that are urged against him, and only fails through a legal flaw. Take the following as an instance: –

*Shylock.* What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?  
You have among you many a purchas'd slave,  
Which like your asses, and your dogs, and mules,  
You use in abject and in slavish part,  
Because you bought them: – shall I say to you,  
Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?  
Why sweat they under burdens? let their beds  
Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates  
Be season'd with such viands? you will answer,  
The slaves are ours: – so do I answer you:  
The pound of flesh, which I demand of him,  
Is dearly bought, is mine, and I will have it:  
If you deny me, fie upon your law!  
There is no force in the decrees of Venice;  
I stand for judgment; answer; shall I have it? [4.1.89–103]

The keenness of his revenge awakes all his faculties; and he beats back all opposition to his purpose, whether grave or gay, whether of wit or argument, with an equal degree of earnestness and self-possession. . . .



## William Hazlitt

Portia is not a very great favourite with us; neither are we in love with her maid, Nerissa. Portia has a certain degree of affectation and pedantry about her, which is very unusual in Shakespear's women, but which perhaps was a proper qualification for the office of a 'civil doctor,' which she undertakes and executes so successfully. The speech about Mercy is very well; but there are a thousand finer ones in Shakespear. We do not admire the scene of the caskets: and object entirely to the Black Prince, Morocchius. We should like Jessica better if she had not deceived and robbed her father, and Lorenzo, if he had not married a Jewess, though he thinks he has a right to wrong a Jew. The dialogue between this newly-married couple by moonlight, beginning 'On such a night,' etc., [5.1.1-22] is a collection of classical elegancies. The graceful winding up of this play in the fifth act, after the tragic business is dispatched, is one of the happiest instances of Shakespear's knowledge of the principles of the drama. We do not mean the pretended quarrel between Portia and Nerissa and their husbands about the rings, which is amusing enough, but the conversation just before and after the return of Portia to her own house, beginning 'How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank,' and ending 'Peace! how the moon sleeps with Endymion, and would not be awaked.' [5.1.54-110] There is a number of beautiful thoughts crowded into that short space, and linked together by the most natural transitions.

When we first went to see Mr. Kean in Shylock, we expected to see, what we had been used to see, a decrepit old man, bent with age and ugly with mental deformity, grinning with deadly malice, with the venom of his heart congealed in the expression of his countenance, sullen, morose, gloomy, inflexible, brooding over one idea, that of his hatred, and fixed on one unalterable purpose, that of his revenge. We were disappointed, because we had taken our idea from other actors, not from the play. There is no proof there that Shylock is old, but a single line, 'Bassanio and *old* Shylock, both stand forth,' [4.1.175] – which does not imply that he is infirm with age – and the circumstance that he has a daughter marriageable, which does not imply that he is old at all. It would be too much to say that his body should be made crooked and deformed to answer to his mind, which is bowed down and warped with prejudice and passion. That he has but one idea, is not true; he has more ideas than any other person in the piece; and if he is intense and inveterate in the pursuit of his purpose, he shews the utmost elasticity, vigour, and presence of mind, in the means of attaining it. But so rooted was our habitual impression of the part from seeing it caricatured in the representation, that it was only from a careful perusal of the play itself that we saw our error.<sup>[1]</sup> The stage is not in general the best place to study our author's characters in. It is too often filled with traditional commonplace conceptions of the part, handed down from sire to son, and suited to the taste of the *great vulgar and the small*. – 'Tis an unweeded garden: things rank and gross do merely gender in it!' If a man of genius comes once in an age to clear away the rubbish, to make it fruitful and wholesome, they cry, 'Tis a bad school: it may be like nature, it may be like Shakespear, but it is not like us.' Admirable critics!

## 6 Augustine Skottowe, the major sources

1824

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From *The Life of Shakespeare; Enquiries into the Originality of his Dramatic Plots and Characters; and Essays on the Ancient Theatres and Theatrical Usages*. By Augustine Skottowe (2 vols., London, 1824), I, pp. 323–6.

Augustine Skottowe (1785–1851), chiefly known today for his work on Shakespeare, worked for forty-three years for the Navy Pay Office and then the Paymaster General's Office. Skottowe dedicated his *Life of Shakespeare*<sup>1</sup> to his friend the historian, Charles Mills (1788–1826); his memoir of Mills was published in 1828.

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The plot of *The Merchant of Venice* comprises the main incident of the bond, the auxiliary circumstance of the caskets, and the episode of the loves of Lorenzo and Jessica; all unconnected by any natural association and deducible from entirely separate sources.

The story of the bond bears every stamp of oriental origin, and is still extant in the Persian language. So early as the fourteenth century it made its appearance in Europe in a work called *Il Pecorone*, by Ser Giovanni, a Florentine novelist; and before the close of the sixteenth century it had found its way into various collections of romantic tales. The dramatist, however, derived his materials, though probably indirectly, from the *Pecorone*, of which the story is as follows. [Recounts the *Il Pecorone* story.]

The similarity between the novel and the play is striking. In both, the money engaged for by the bond is borrowed, not for the use of the borrower, but to enable a young man to obtain the hand of a wealthy lady resident at Belmont. The forfeiture of the same portion of flesh is stipulated on failure of payment, and the flesh, in both instances, is to be taken from what part of the merchant's body pleased the Jew [Quotes 1.3.150–1]; who, in each case, is offered ten times the amount of his debt by the person for whom it was contracted. The bride, in both cases, arrives at Venice disguised as a lawyer, and interposes the same insurmountable obstacles to the exaction of the bloody penalty. Both the fair judges refuse pecuniary recompence; both request from the fingers of their husbands rings which they themselves had given to them, and the same species of *badinage* is the consequence of compliance when the ladies resume their own characters at Belmont.

The incident of the caskets, in the seventh scene of the second act, is borrowed from the English *Gesta Romanorum*, a collection of tales in the highest estimation with our story-loving ancestors. Three vessels were placed before the daughter of the king of

## Augustine Skottowe

Apulia for her choice, to prove whether she was worthy to receive the hand of the son of Anselmus, Emperor of Rome. The first was of pure gold, and filled with dead men's bones; on it was this inscription: 'who chuses me shall find what he deserves.' The second was of silver, filled with earth, and thus inscribed: 'who chuses me shall find what nature covets.' The third vessel was of lead, but filled with precious stones; it had this inscription: 'who chuses me shall find what God hath placed.' The princess, after praying to God for assistance, preferred the leaden vessel. The Emperor informed her she had chosen as he wished, and immediately united her with his son.

The third plot in the drama, – the love of Jessica and Lorenzo, – bears a great resemblance to the fourteenth tale of Masuccio de Salerno, who flourished about 1470. In that tale we have an avaricious father, a daughter carefully shut up, her elopement with her lover by the intervention of a servant, her robbing her father of his money, and his grief on the discovery of his misfortunes; – his grief also is divided equally between the loss of his daughter and the loss of his ducats.

The widow at Belmont, Giannetto, Ansaldo, and the Jew in the *Pecorone*, are the prototypes of Portia, Bassanio, Antonio, and Shylock in the play. Portia resembles the lady in the novel, only in those particulars already noticed. She neither 'ruins many gentlemen,' nor, like her fair original, admits them to her bed under the delicate security of a sleeping potion skilfully and secretly administered. The scene of the caskets was wisely substituted for an incident which would have accorded ill with the character of a lady 'of wond'rous virtues' [Quotes 1.1.162–3].

In the novel, the improbability of a lady possessing so large a portion of legal acumen as the judgment on the Jew's case implies, is not disguised by any artifice. In the play, the objection is skilfully removed, by making Portia consult an eminent lawyer, Bellario, and act under his advice.

To cut a pound of flesh from the breast of a living fellow-creature, is a circumstance so abhorrent from the mind, that the strongest motives are necessary to give it the colour of credibility. In the *Pecorone*, the Jew's reasons for his conduct are very unintelligible, but in the play, the defect is abundantly supplied. The rapacious cravings of senseless avarice, and the ferocious malignity of religious animosity, are causes adequate to the production of the most atrocious crimes. With consummate judgment, therefore, has Shakespeare ascribed Shylock's actions to this powerful combination of malignant passions, making their union the basis of that 'lodged hate, and certain loathing' which he bears to the person of Antonio. Avarice and religious animosity are the ruling passions of the monster's mind, and darling crimes of his black bosom, the sins which, thwarted in their indulgence, rouse and hurry into action with frightful energy and desperate inflexibility of spirit [Quotes *Romeo and Juliet* 5.3.38–9].

Such are the actuating motives which render Shylock's ferocity natural, and his deafness to the strongest pleadings of nature credible [Quotes 3.1.47–8]. Here is the answer to the inquiry, why, under the semblance of 'a merry bond,' did he treacherously entrap Antonio into his power? And here, the avouchment for the truth of his asseveration, 'I will have the heart of him, if he forfeit, for were he out of Venice, I can make what merchandise I will.'

Shylock is abhorred and execrated; but the skill of the poet has endued him with qualities which preserve him from contempt. His fierceness, cruelty, and relentlessness

are dignified by intellectual vigour. His actions are deliberate, they are the emanations of his bold and masculine understanding. Let the art with which he negotiates his bond be contemplated; consider his coolness, his plausible exaggeration of the dangers to which Antonio's property is subjected; his bitter sarcasms and insulting gibes; all efforts of the mind to induce a belief of his indifference, and to disguise his real design: follow him into court, behold him maintaining his superiority in argument, unmoved by insult and unawed by power, till disappointment leaves him nothing to contend for, and anguish stops his speech, and then let his claims to intellectual distinction be decided on.

Fertile, and apparently inexhaustible, as were the powers of Shakespeare's own imagination, no presumptuous confidence in his facility of drawing on them, precluded him from gleaning such hints from other sources as were calculated to contribute to the perfection of his Jewish portrait. In a work, called the *Orator*, which was printed in 1596, and is a translation from the French of Alexander Silvain, is the Declaration 'of a Jew, who would for his debt have a pound of the flesh of a Christian,' which appears to have suggested several hints for the conduct of Shylock before the court. 'It is impossible,' urges the Jew, 'to break the credit of traffick amongst men without great detriment to the commonwealth' [Quotes 4.1.38-9].

The Declaration of the Jew justifies his cruel exaction by the example set him of greater cruelties by Christians; 'as to bind all the body unto a most loathsome prison, or unto an intolerable slavery.' Shylock resorts to the same argument: [Quotes 4.1.91-3].

The Jew is anxious in his Declaration, to anticipate objections against the unreasonableness of his demand: 'A man may ask why I would not rather take silver of this man, than his flesh.' Shylock similarly anticipates the argument of his adversaries: [Quotes 4.1.94-5].

The Jew's rejoinder to his own question is substantially the same in the Declaration and in the play: 'But I will only say, that by his obligation he oweth it me' [Quotes 4.1.98-100] . . . [Skottowe discusses some possible sources for Shylock].

A more perfect contrast to the Jew could not have been framed than Antonio. He is open, candid, unsuspecting; the purest spirit of friendship glows within his breast, and he freely dispenses his riches, and places his life in peril, for the benefit of him he loves, requiring no recommendation of Bassanio's enterprise to his patronage beyond the assurance of its strict conformity to the standard of integrity [Quotes 1.1.135-9].<sup>2</sup> In the terrific hour, when he is about to fall a prey to the ferocity of a mortal enemy, his manly resignation is admirable. From first to last Antonio is the man who held 'the world but as the world,' [Quotes 1.1.77] and piously acknowledged, that all its strange mutations were 'sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven,' [1.3.93]. This elegant, rather than brilliant, portrait, is an expansion of the indulgent goodness and disinterested affection displayed by Ansaldo in the novel [*Il Pecorone*].

Gratiano and Launcelot are the only prominent characters which appear in the scenes of *The Merchant of Venice* that are not to be met within the authorities already mentioned. Nor is Shakespeare's title even to those characters perfectly indisputable, since it is certain that a play on the same subject was exhibited long before our dramatist commenced his career. The loss of this performance is justly a subject of regret, for as it combined within its plot the two incidents of the bond and the caskets,<sup>3</sup> it would, in all probability, have thrown much additional light on Shakespeare's progress in the

### Augustine Skottowe

composition of his highly finished comedy. At present we have no resource left but a reference to the novelists, who relate the stories which the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* combines; and the result of their comparison with the drama is, that Shakespeare directed his attention to the improvement of the materials before him, and imposed not on himself the labour of originating any thing entirely new. Gobbo and Gratiano seem exceptions to this remark. Both characters are unnecessary to the progress of the plot, and have every appearance of being introduced with a view to relief and variety, a practice so common with Shakespeare, that it is not unfair to assign Gobbo and Gratiano to him as his own. But the discovery of the old play may hereafter prove the fallacy of this conclusion. (323–6)

## 7 George Farren, in defence of Shylock

1833

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From *An Essay on Shakespeare's Character of Shylock* (London, 1833), pp. [1]–51.

George Farren (fl. 1830–50) was a prolific writer, an authority on financial institutions, the law, and a pioneer in life insurance policies. His works range from *A Treatise on Life Assurance* (London, 1823) to *Joint Stock Banks* (London, 1833), and *Observations on the Laws of Mortality and Disease and on the Principles of Life Insurance, with Illustrations of the Progress of Mania, as Displayed in the Characters of Lear, Edgar, Hamlet and Ophelia* (London, 1829). Farren's *Handbook of Judges, Barristers, etc.* (1839), and his position as the 'Resident Director of the Asylum Life Office', reveal that he achieved some stature in early Victorian London. His defence of Shylock, together with his knowledge of the scriptures, may reveal Farren's own possibly Jewish origins.

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### ACT I. SCENE III.

Of the many splendid Essays on the vices and frailties springing from human passions, which Shakespeare has furnished in the course of his plays, the character of Shylock, in *The Merchant of Venice*, may be considered as the masterpiece. [Describes perceptions of Shylock and Shakespeare's possible sources.]

The first entrance of Shylock, is marked by consummate skill, and his introductory speeches fully develop his purpose to the audience. He enters, making Bassanio reiterate his proposals, – not that Shylock had forgotten them, but that he wants confirmation of what he can scarcely bring himself to believe. [1.3.1–5] As much to say, 'that is the music for my ear, which I was leading you to repeat. – It is ANTONIO shall become BOUND, and to me, – It is WELL, i'faith! and as I originally understood it.'

Then Shylock, who has instantly determined to lend the money at all events, provided Antonio will put himself even within reach 'of his danger' by signing a bond, turns round to Bassanio, and to make assurance doubly sure, and to prevent the possibility of a retraction or mistake, repeats [Quotes 1.3.9–10].

Having determined to lend the money, but fearing to show himself too eager, Shylock now coquets, and begins to question the security. [Quotes 1.3.11–16, 'he is a good man'.] That is – he is a *solvent* man; and Shylock immediately goes on to show that although the *man*, as he calls him, is *sufficient*, still, that his means are in supposition, and most improvidently, or as he would say prodigally, *squandered* all over the world: a fact

## George Farren

proved by the result, as Antonio suddenly loses all his property as if by magic. He concludes the speech, which is replete with the cunning of a man well versed in bargain-making, by saying 'I think I may take his bond' [1.3.25]. The coquetry of which is admirable, and only to be exceeded by the contemptuous chuckle with which he replies to Bassanio's 'Be *assured* you may,' by saying [Quotes 1.3.26–34, 'Yes, to smell pork, to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjur'd the devil into'...].

This last speech is certainly one of the finest bursts in the play; and seems to have been altogether misunderstood by the actors, who have, uniformly, uttered it with solemnity, as if Jews were deterred from eating pork by a belief in the fact of Jesus having driven the devils into the herd of swine, as related in the eighth chapter of St. Luke: whereas, it is expressly commanded by the 11<sup>th</sup> of Leviticus, v. 7, that the flesh of the swine is unclean and not to be eaten, and Shylock intends to cast ridicule both on the Prophet and the relation of what passed in the country of the Gadarenes, over against Galilee. [Discusses interpretations of these Biblical passages.]

The next enthusiastic burst, which marks the pride of the descendant of Jacob, will be found in the following [Quotes 1.3.71–4].

Again the actors have misunderstood one of the finest allusions in the play. The reader will remember the part taken by Rebecca, the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob, to obtain his father's blessing for him, in preference to Esau, the elder son (Genesis, chap. xxvii.). It was by this act of hers that Jacob *became* the *third* possessor; and for this deceit, Shylock thinks her entitled to great praise, not only as it shewed the superior cunning of the woman on behalf of her favourite son, but as it was the means through which the greatness of the Israelites was accomplished, for it drove Jacob to Laban, and from Jacob the whole of the tribes were descended. Shylock therefore says with great exultation, 'Aye, he was the third,' whereas the actors have uttered the line as if Shylock doubted whether Jacob were the third, or a subsequent possessor, – a point of genealogy, not only thoroughly well known to Shylock, but to every Jew who has lived from the time of Jacob to the present hour. The justification of taking breed of metal, under the name of interest, follows, by Shylock's referring to what passed with Laban, as recorded in Genesis, chap. xxx. and he concludes a speech of exquisite subtlety by saying, '*This thrift is blessing, if men steal it not.*' [1.3.90] alluding to the commandment first quoted, which speaks of laying *usury* on a stranger, and says, 'That God may *bless* thee in all thou settest thine hand to, in the land whither thou goest to possess it.'

Shylock being now satisfied of the serious purpose of the parties to borrow from him, and that the *terms* alone remain to be discussed, determines to tell the Christian a little of his mind; and accordingly, in answer to Antonio's – 'Well, Shylock – shall we be beholden to you?' says

Signior Antonio, many a time and oft  
In the Rialto you have rated me  
About my money and my usances ... [Quotes 1.3.106–29].

Thus taunted, Antonio with great bitterness says [Quotes 1.3.130–7].

This one speech shows the strength of Antonio's own prejudices, and his little forbearance towards the prejudices of others. – He speaks of the *breed of barren metal*; by

*in defence of Shylock, 1833*

which it is clear he means *interest of money*: and either intends to scoff at the distinction between brothers and strangers raised by the law of Moses before alluded to, and which Shylock regards as a religious obligation, or he *himself* adopts the *same* distinction, by admitting the justice of putting friends and foes on a different footing, – a doctrine quite at variance with the code of a Christian.

The reply of Shylock is perfectly beautiful – *so* beautiful, that judging from the words themselves, without reference to an ultimate design, a hearer would at once proclaim *Shylock* to have been the disciple of *Jesus* uttering a Christian reproof to a descendant of Barabbas:

Why, look you how you storm!  
I would be friends with you, and have your love.  
This is kind I offer [1.3.137–42].

It seems impossible that anything can be better conceived or expressed than the above speech. Shakespeare constantly uses the word *KIND* as applied to *kindred* (a whole page of instances might be quoted.) – Antonio, whilst most outrageously violating not only good manners, but common decency, by the adoption of language wounding in the extreme to Shylock, has used the words *Friends* and *Enemies*. Shylock in his dealings only knows *Brothers* and *Strangers*, and tenders a return of good for evil by offering to forget his wrongs and treat with Antonio as with a *Brother*. [Quotes 1.3.143–79.]

Those who know these speeches merely from having heard them delivered on the stage, would find it difficult to catch the author's meaning. Every Shylock who has held his place in the London Theatres for the last 50 years has proposed the terms of the bond in a manner, not only at variance with the open professions of Shylock, and the received impressions of Antonio, but also certainly destructive of the accomplishment of Shylock's secret object. Antonio himself would at once have seen the malicious intention; nay, Bassanio, for whose benefit alone the bond was to be given, instead of merely coquetting with his maudlin – 'Oh I can't suffer you to do this on my account,' – would have been bound to say at once 'I see by this rascal's manner, which is directly at variance with his words, that he seeks your *life* – let us *go* to some other usurer, and I'll pay a thumping rate of interest. – Your security is known to be as good as that of any man in Venice, it is only a question of *rate* of usance, and my object can afford great liberality.' – The consummate skill of the Poet has not been done justice to by the Actor. Shylock is approaching the extreme point of management: – he has paved the way by professing, in deference to Antonio's strong aversion to usury, to treat him *substantially* as a *Brother*. – He says – 'Give me your *single* bond, – that is to say, for the single sum I lend you, not *increased* in any way, – but as the form of security for loans usually gives a penalty, and as I cannot, without imputation of violating our law, openly deal with you except as a *Stranger*, why we *must* have a FORFEITURE; – I therefore, in a *merry sport* and to prove the *spirit* in which I deal, will fix the most ridiculous condition that can well be conceived, – namely, that if – to use the common jargon of the law, *you repay me not – on such a day – in such a place* – such *sum* or *sums* as are *expressed in the condition* – I shall receive in place of my 3000 ducats an equal pound of your fair flesh, with the *advantage* of taking it from what *PART* of your body pleaseth me, A most *usurious* advantage truly!!'



## George Farren

– And what says Antonio to this? – Why, – ‘Content, i’faith, I enter into the spirit of your design, – and this *is* treating me like a *Brother*, as far as your laws will allow.’ Antonio’s reply to Bassanio is as much as to say, ‘Let him alone, – every man has his own way of *showing* kindness, and this is Shylock’s way.’ Nay, after the objection has been urged by Bassanio, and his maudlin interference exposed and properly rebuked, by Shylock, and when Shylock is no longer present, Antonio says, ‘Hie thee, *gentle Jew*; this Hebrew will turn *Christian* – He grows *kind*.’ [1.3.177–8]

The prompt and conclusive manner in which Shylock silences the objection which might interfere with his purpose, is worthy of admiration: as is the dignity with which he says to Bassanio, ‘If your Christian suspicions of the thoughts of others should still drive him to reject my preferred friendship, do not in return for my love be mean enough to impute to me improper motives in making the offer.’ The effect of this is heightened by Shylock’s leaving it to Antonio HIMSELF to *give proper instructions* to the Notary for the MERRY BOND, whilst Shylock goes to purse the Ducats. The last line spoken by Shylock in this matchless scene, displays the whole state of his feeling: — ‘And presently I will be with you.’ [1.3.176–7]

The specious smile to Antonio, blended with the chuckle of inward exultation at the success of the finely-concerted scheme for revenge, are quite conclusive of Shylock’s intention to ‘*presently be with them* to COMPLETE the much-desired and very *sportive* bargain.’

### ACT II. SCENE III.

The second scene of Shylock exhibits him with his late servant and his daughter; and in this, as in every other, he has been vilely misrepresented by the actors. The servant (Launcelot) has just engaged with Bassanio, with whom he flatters himself he shall find a better place than with the Jew. To Shylock’s good offices he was certainly indebted in *getting* the place, as Bassanio says to him [Quotes 2.2.144–8, 154–5; 2.5.1–57].

There is nothing of acerbity in this scene towards Launcelot nor Jessica – he is kind to each, and both betray him. Still every word is consistent. He has now a much stronger inducement to *go forth*, than he had to *dine* with *Antonio*, – he goes to help to *waste* the *borrowed* money – to *aid* the profligacy of the *prodigal*, – that he may thereby be the less able to furnish at maturity, the three thousand ducats, for which *Antonio* is now BOUND. Every feeling is sacrificed to the prosecution of his main design. Shylock’s faith in dreams glances exquisitely at the dreams of Jacob and Joseph, and at the expositions of those types of waking thoughts given by many of the Jewish prophets. The allusion to HAGAR’S *offspring* is very appropriate to the departure of his servant; Hagar having been *bondswoman* to Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and having quitted her, as Launcelot does Shylock, under the supposed grievance of too little indulgence. (Genesis, chap. xvi.)

### ACT III. SCENE I.

The third scene of Shylock seems to have been considered by the actors as the most difficult of any in the play, merely because it is thought to require the exercise of a superior degree of physical force; as if violence were the test of strength, and noise bespoke intensity of passion. An attentive reader would at once declare it to be the most easy of any, although probably the most productive of applause to the actor.

The general bearing of Shylock throughout this scene *could not* be mistaken, as the author himself has described how it should be acted. The more delicate and masterly allusions which it contains have, however, been overlooked in the representation. Jessica, the daughter of Shylock, has eloped with a Christian, robbing her father of gold and jewels. Salanio and Salarino say [Quotes 2.8.4–22; 3.1.1–4, 16–17, 26–33].

This brutal speech of Salarino's (the boon companion of Bassanio and Antonio) provokes no retort from the suffering Jew, who in great grief, and with a humiliated spirit, says [Quotes 3.1.43–73].

This is certainly a touching speech, – exhibiting the feelings of an old man tossed about between the loss of wealth, and the loss of the Being who ought to have been the prop of his age, – the injuries being rendered doubly acute from the fact of the *daughter* being the *thief*. A protracted display of his misery would have been tedious to the audience, Shakespeare therefore, with admirable skill, diverts Shylock's thoughts; and henceforth, during the scene, *revenge* and tenderness alternate in his mind. [Quotes 3.1.83–107.]

How admirably the train of thought is again diverted to the ducats! [Quotes 3.1.108–112.]

Again the thoughts of the distracted man fly off as directed by the last words addressed to him. [Quotes 3.1.116–17.]

How exquisitely is the passion of rage here, not only depicted, but, as it were, dissected! – Shylock who would not put a *brute* to unnecessary *pain* in killing him, here, in the overboiling of his rage, and stung to madness by his wrongs, – talks of TORTURING his victim: – This is weak human nature, when it has lost the mastery of passion, and cannot 'sway it to the mood of what it likes or loathes.' – The next speech of Tubal again diverts the unhappy father's thoughts to a more tender subject, and calls forth one of the most touching bursts in the play. [Quotes 3.1.118–23.]

All the actors in this have snarled at Tubal – and spoken of the turquoise as a ring, bought by Shylock of some one during his Bachelorship, of so high a money value as to be worth more than the accumulated prices of as many monkeys as would stock a wilderness. – The author intended a very different reading. – In the course of this fine scene, Shylock has been agitated by affection, avarice, rage, and revenge, – and now a flood of *tenderness* pours on him. – It is evident that Leah was his *wife*, the *mother* of the ingrate who has robbed and deserted him. – He has scarcely uttered the words 'I'll *torture* him,' in the preceding speech, when as if by a visitation, he is *himself* TORTURED by Tubal. The turquoise is said to be a precious stone found in the veins of the mountains on the Eastern confines of Persia – indicating, by its change of colour, variations in the *health* of the wearer, and acting as a charm for the promotion of happiness between a married couple. The Poet has chosen the name of *Leah*, evidently because the despised wife of Jacob was so called (Genesis, xxix). With this explanation, the reader will at once see the author's meaning. – At the mention of the turquoise, the desolate old man thinks of his boyish days in which it was given to him, by the first object of his love, to serve as a charm for their future happiness, and as the means by which she might watch his health: – That wife bore him a daughter and they were happy – How altered now is his situation? he is carried away by the recollection, and in a burst of tears and tenderness,

## George Farren

declares he would not have parted with it, for all the monkeys in the world. TUBAL. 'But Antonio is certainly *undone*.' [1.3.124]

Again poor Shylock is dashed by his well-meaning, but injudicious friend, upon another of the rocks which have wrecked his peace, and he says [Quotes 1.3.125–30].

### ACT IV. SCENE I.

The fourth and last, like the three preceding scenes of Shylock, abounds in Scriptural allusions, none of which have ever been noticed on the stage.

The three thousand ducats not having been forthcoming on the day fixed for the payment, the *forfeit* has become the *due* of the bond. And Shylock has sworn to *have* the forfeit. He says, 'I have an oath in heaven: shall I lay perjury upon my soul? / No, not for Venice.' [4.1.228–9] It is certainly repugnant to the feelings of any human being, in the present day, whether Jew or Christian, that a man should seek a justification for an act of atrocity, by alleging, that as he had *sworn* to do it, he was bound to its commission. In a religious point of view, the *contemplation* of the act is nearly as culpable as its performance. It is not intended here to discuss metaphysical distinctions between the will and the power to do wrong. Before an earthly tribunal, man can only be tried by his actions. If it were otherwise, the judge on the bench might be found as guilty as the prisoner at the bar. Dr. Haslam,<sup>[1]</sup> (whose splendid lectures on the human mind must hand down his name to posterity as one of the most extraordinary persons that ever lived,) was once asked by an advocate whether a supposed lunatic was of *sound* mind, – to which he replied, 'In my opinion, the *Deity* alone can be of *sound* mind; for a being of sound mind would be free from the weaknesses, frailties, infirmities, and vices of human nature.' So Shakespeare, in displaying the passion of revenge in the person of his Jew, has made the *oath* almost an inevitable weakness consequent on, and arising out of his imperfect nature, or, as Haslam would say, his unsound mind, in misconstruing the laws of Moses, which he was enthusiastically bent on obeying. . . .

The conduct of Shylock after his defeat shows great consistency, and, if properly acted, much of true dignity. – By the trickish construction of the terms, the bond having become a mere nullity – he says, 'I'll *take* this offer then, *pay* the money thrice – and *let* the Christian go.' [4.1.318–19] The actors, consistently enough with their own portrait of the character, have made the Jew lay emphasis on the word *thrice*, as if Shylock were griping at *gain* when defeated of *revenge*. It is no such thing – Bassanio has never offered to pay the money thrice – he says 'For thy *three* thousand ducats here are *six*,' [4.1.84] and afterwards repeats the same offer by tendering '*twice* the sum,' – nay to be *bound* to pay it '*ten* time o'er.' [4.1.208–10] – If therefore Shylock had condescended to *bargain* he had the option of 6000 ducats in ready money – or Bassanio's bond for 30,000 ducats – Both these he had refused. – The notion that the money should be paid *thrice*, comes from Portia *the Judge* – who finding the other offers had been declined, tries if *trebling* the sum will tempt the Jew, whom she afterwards endeavours to persuade to take the sum which *the Judge*, and the Judge alone has pronounced to be an equitable compromise. 'Take thrice thy money, bid me *tear* the bond,' [4.1.234] – What Shylock means is this – 'As the Judge is the Expounder of the law, so he has become the Assessor of satisfaction – and as I was before ready to execute the *sentence* he pronounced, so am I now willing to abide by his suggestion of a compromise,' – and in this Shylock was *right*, for the Judge

knew the law quite as well *before* as *after* he had suggested the compensation; and Shylock's conduct when he was in *ignorance* of the law, ought not to have prejudiced him, when he was informed of it – Shylock was therefore *right* in saying,<sup>[2]</sup> 'Pay the money thrice, and *tear* the bond.' [4.1.318–9]

Finding that he will not be allowed the forfeiture nor the compromise *on the bond*, he says 'Well, it can't be denied, even though the bond is annulled, that you have had three thousand ducats of my money – pay them to me!' 'Give me my principal, and let me go.' [4.1.336] There is nothing *gripping* in this, it is the plain sense of the thing, arising out of circumstances as they occur. The 'unkindest cut of all' comes direct from the mild and unsophisticated Antonio, who is far from returning good for evil, and who seems to have known the *use* of money to the full as well, if not better than the Jew himself; for he stipulates that instead of a moiety of Shylock's property, which if taken *absolutely* would have gone to the *creditors* of Antonio, he will be content with the *use* of it for his own peculiar benefit during the Jew's life, to stand at his death as Trustee for the gentleman that lately stole his daughter, exacting as the price of so much *courtesy* that 'He presently become a Christian.' [4.1.387] On the Duke's pronouncing 'He shall do this,' Shylock is *quite* struck down. His ideas are, as it were, paralysed with horror at the thought of turning Christian, – and thenceforth he speaks and acts as if perfectly reckless of what is passing. All the stage tricks of first looking contemptuously at Gratiano, then maliciously at Antonio, and finally grinning to the audience, as he rushes out of the Court, are perfectly foreign to the author's intentions.

Throughout the whole of this well-wrought character, there is nothing in word or action to show that Shakespeare intended to mark the Jew for the public execration, which has been so profusely and uncharitably poured out against him. On the contrary, he has clothed him with every attribute which could deprecate censure. His general deportment is dignified, although mixed with the humility derived from a knowledge that sufferance is the badge of a persecuted people. To his servant he is kind, – to his friend, sincere. He is affectionate to his daughter, and cherishes the memory of a much-loved wife. He displays very quick perception of the remarks of others, and a great store of knowledge in his own conversation. With all these qualities he is still, as Haslam says, not free from the weaknesses and infirmities of poor human nature; and having suffered, in his aged person, the indignities of being kicked and spit upon, by a man who knew that by law he might kick and spit on a Jew with impunity, in a moment of human depravity he vows to sacrifice his persecutor; and having registered his offering by an oath in Heaven, he with the mistaken zeal of an Enthusiast, considers that 'he must do according to that which has proceeded out of his mouth, and according to the vow which he had vowed.' ([1], 5–20, 22, 24–6, 28–31, 49–51).

## 8 Anna Brownell Jameson, Portia

1833

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From *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical and Historical* (second edn, 2 vols., London, 1833).

Anna Brownell Jameson, née Murphy (1794–1860), born in Dublin, was educated in England. A prolific writer on literary, historical, and artistic subjects and travel, she included among her many influential friends Otilie von Goethe and Lady Byron. *Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical and Historical* (2 vols., London 1832), her best-known work, was reissued in a revised format a year later and frequently republished, often under the title *Shakespeare's Heroines: Moral, Poetical and Historical*. The following selection is taken from the 1897 reprint of the second edition.

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### *Characters of intellect: Portia*

We hear it asserted, not seldom by way of compliment to us women, that intellect is of no sex. If this means that the same faculties of mind are common to men and women, it is true; in any other signification it appears to me false, and the reverse of a compliment. The intellect of woman bears the same relation to that of man as her physical organization; – it is inferior in power, and different in kind. That certain women have surpassed certain men in bodily strength or intellectual energy, does not contradict the general principle founded in nature. The essential and invariable distinction appears to me this: in men the intellectual faculties exist more self-poised and self-directed – more independent of the rest of the character, than we ever find them in women, with whom talent, however predominant, is in a much greater degree modified by the sympathies and moral qualities. . . .

Portia, Isabella, Beatrice, and Rosalind, may be classed together as characters of intellect, because, when compared with others, they are at once distinguished by their mental superiority. In Portia it is intellect, kindled into romance by a poetical imagination; in Isabella, it is intellect elevated by religious principle; in Beatrice, intellect animated by spirit; in Rosalind, intellect softened by sensibility. The wit which is lavished on each is profound, or pointed, or sparkling, or playful – but always feminine; like spirits distilled from flowers, it always reminds us of its origin . . . as women and individuals, as breathing realities, clothed in flesh and blood, I believe we must assign the

first rank to Portia, as uniting in herself in a more eminent degree than the others, all the noblest and most loveable qualities that ever met together in woman. . . .

It is singular, that hitherto no critical justice has been done to the character of Portia: it is yet more wonderful, that one of the finest writers on the eternal subject of Shakspeare and his perfections, should accuse Portia of pedantry and affectation, and confess she is not a great favourite of his, — a confession quite worthy of him who avers his predilection for servant maids.<sup>[1]</sup> . . .

Portia is endued with her own share of those delightful qualities which Shakspeare has lavished on many of his female characters; but, besides the dignity, the sweetness, and tenderness which should distinguish her sex generally, she is individualized by qualities peculiar to herself; by her high mental powers, her enthusiasm of temperament, her decision of purpose, and her buoyancy of spirit. These are innate; she has other distinguishing qualities more external, and which are the result of the circumstances in which she is placed. Thus she is the heiress of a princely name and countless wealth; a train of obedient pleasures have ever waited round her; and from infancy she has breathed an atmosphere redolent of perfume and blandishment. Accordingly, there is a commanding grace, a high-bred, airy elegance, a spirit of magnificence in all that she says and does, as one to whom splendour had been familiar from her very birth. She treads as though her footsteps had been among marble palaces, beneath roofs of fretted gold, o'er cedar floors and pavements of jasper and porphyry — amid gardens full of statues, and flowers, and fountains, and haunting music. She is full of penetrative wisdom, and genuine tenderness, and lively wit; but as she has never known want, or grief, or fear, or disappointment, her wisdom is without a touch of the sombre or the sad; her affections are all mixed up with faith, hope, and joy; and her wit has not a particle of malevolence or causticity. Critics have been apparently so dazzled and engrossed by the amazing character of Shylock, that Portia has received less than justice at their hands; while the fact is, that Shylock is not a finer or more finished character in his way, than Portia is in hers. These two splendid figures are worthy of each other; worthy of being placed together within the same rich framework of enchanting poetry, and glorious and graceful forms. She hangs beside the terrible, inexorable Jew, the brilliant lights of her character set off by the shadowy power of his, like a magnificent beauty-breathing Titian by the side of a gorgeous Rembrandt. . . .

It is well known that the *Merchant of Venice* is founded on two different tales; and in weaving together his double plot in so masterly a manner, Shakspeare has rejected altogether the character of the astutious lady of Belmont with her magic potions, who figures in the Italian novel. With yet more refinement, he has thrown out all the licentious part of the story, which some of his contemporary dramatists would have seized on with avidity, and made the best or the worst of it possible; and he has substituted the trial of the caskets from another source. We are not told expressly where Belmont is situated; but as Bassanio takes ship to go thither from Venice, and as we find them afterwards ordering horses from Belmont to Padua, we will imagine Portia's hereditary palace as standing on some lovely promontory between Venice and Trieste, overlooking the blue Adriatic, with the Friuli mountains or the Euganean hills for its background, such as we often see in one of Claude's or Poussin's elysian landscapes. In a scene, in a home like this, Shakspeare, having first exorcised the original possessor, has

Anna Brownell Jameson

placed his Portia: and so endowed her, that all the wild, strange, and moving circumstances of the story, become natural, probable, and necessary in connection with her. That such a woman should be chosen by the solving of an enigma, is not surprising: herself and all around her, the scene, the country, the age in which she is placed, breathe of poetry, romance and enchantment. . . .

The sudden plan which she forms for the release of her husband's friend, her disguise, and her deportment as the young and learned doctor, would appear forced and improbable in any other woman; but in Portia are the simple and natural result of her character.<sup>2</sup> The quickness with which she perceives the legal advantage which may be taken of the circumstances; the spirit of adventure with which she engages in the masquerading, and the decision, firmness, and intelligence with which she executes her generous purpose, are all in perfect keeping, and nothing appears forced – nothing as introduced merely for theatrical effect.

But all the finest parts of Portia's character are brought to bear in the trial scene. There she shines forth all her divine self. Her intellectual powers, her elevated sense of religion, her high honourable principles, her best feelings as a woman, are all displayed. She maintains at first a calm self-command, as one sure of carrying her point in the end; yet the painful, heart-thrilling uncertainty in which she keeps the whole court, until suspense verges upon agony, is not contrived for effect merely; it is necessary and inevitable. She has two objects in view: to deliver her husband's friend, and to maintain her husband's honour by the discharge of his just debt, though paid out of her own wealth ten times over. It is evident that she would owe the safety of Antonio to anything rather than to the legal quibble with which her cousin Bellario has armed her, and which she reserves as a last resource. Thus all the speeches addressed to Shylock in the first instance, are either direct or indirect experiments on his temper and feelings. She must be understood from the beginning to the end, as examining with intense anxiety the effect of her own words on his mind and countenance; as watching for that relenting spirit which she hopes to awaken either by reason or persuasion. She begins by an appeal to his mercy, in that matchless piece of eloquence which falls upon the heart like 'gentle dew [sic] from heaven' [4.1.182], – but in vain; for that blessed dew drops not more fruitless and unfelt on the parched sand of the desert, than do these heavenly words upon the ear of Shylock. She next attacks his avarice:

Shylock, there's *thrice* thy money offered thee! [4.1.227]

Then she appeals, in the same breath, both to his avarice and his pity:

Be merciful!

Take *thrice* thy money. Bid me tear the bond. [4.1.233–4]

All that she says afterwards – her strong expressions, which are calculated to strike a shuddering horror through the nerves – the reflections she interposes – her delays and circumlocution to give time for any latent feeling of commiseration to display itself, – all, all are premeditated and tend in the same manner to the object she has in view. Thus: 'You must prepare your bosom for his knife,' 'Therefore lay bare your bosom' [4.1.245,

252]. These two speeches, though addressed apparently to Antonio, are spoken at Shylock, and are evidently intended to penetrate his bosom. In the same spirit she asks for the balance to weigh the pound of flesh, and entreats of Shylock to have a surgeon ready. [Quotes 4.1.257–61.]

So unwilling is her sanguine and generous spirit to resign all hope, or to believe that humanity is absolutely extinct in the bosom of the Jew, that she calls on Antonio, as a last resource, to speak for himself. His gentle, yet manly resignation – the deep pathos of his farewell, and the affectionate allusion to herself in his last address to Bassanio [Quotes 4.1.273–4] – are well calculated to swell that emotion which, through the whole scene, must have been labouring suppressed within her heart.

At length the crisis arrives, for patience and womanhood can endure no longer, and when Shylock, carrying his savage bent ‘to the last hour of act’ [4.1.19], springs on his victim – ‘A sentence! come, prepare!’ [4.1.304] then the smothered scorn, indignation, and disgust burst forth with an impetuosity which interferes with the judicial solemnity she had at first affected; particularly in the speech:

Therefore, prepare thee to cut off the flesh.  
Shed thou no blood; nor cut thou less, nor more,  
But just the pound of flesh: if thou tak’st more,  
Or less than a just pound, . . .  
Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate. [4.1.324–32]

But she afterwards recovers her propriety, and triumphs with a cooler scorn and a more self-possessed exultation.

It is clear that, to feel the full force and dramatic beauty of this marvellous scene, we must go along with Portia as well as with Shylock; we must understand her concealed purpose, keep in mind her noble motives, and pursue in our fancy the undercurrent of her feeling working in her mind throughout. The terror and the power of Shylock’s character,—his deadly and inexorable malice,—would be too oppressive; the pain and the pity too intolerable, and the horror of the possible issue too overwhelming, but for the intellectual relief afforded by this double source of interest and contemplation.

I come now to that capacity for warm and generous affection, that tenderness of heart, which render Portia not less lovable as a woman than admirable for her mental endowments. The affections are to the intellect what the forge is to the metal; it is they which temper and shape it to all good purposes, and soften, strengthen, and purify it. What an exquisite stroke of judgement in the poet, to make the mutual passion of Portia and Bassanio, though unacknowledged to each other, anterior to the opening of the play! Bassanio’s confession very properly comes first, and prepares us for Portia’s half-betrayed, unconscious election of this most graceful and chivalrous admirer. Our interest is thus awakened for the lovers from the very first; and what shall be said of the Casket Scene with Bassanio, where every line which Portia speaks is so worthy of herself, so full of sentiment and beauty, and poetry, and passion? Too naturally frank for disguise, too modest to confess her depth of love while the issue of the trial remains in suspense, the conflict between love and fear and maidenly dignity causes the most delicious confusion that ever tinged a woman’s cheek, or dropped in broken utterance from her lips.



## Anna Brownell Jameson

A prominent feature in Portia's character is that confiding, buoyant spirit which mingles with all her thoughts and affections. And here let me observe, that I never yet met in real life, nor ever read in tale or history, of any woman, distinguished for intellect of the highest order, who was not also remarkable for this trusting spirit, this hopefulness and cheerfulness of temper. . . . In the Casket Scene she fears indeed the issue of the trial, but while she trembles, her hope is stronger than her fear. [Outlines the casket scene.]

Her subsequent surrender of herself in heart and soul, of her maiden freedom, and her vast possessions, can never be read without deep emotion; for not only all the tenderness and delicacy of a devoted woman is here blended with all the dignity which becomes the princely heiress of Belmont, but the serious, measured self-possession of her address to her lover, when all suspense is over and all concealment superfluous, is most beautifully consistent with the character. It is, in truth, an awful moment, that in which a gifted woman first discovers that, besides talents and powers, she has also passions and affections; when she first begins to suspect their vast importance in the sum of her existence; when she first confesses that her happiness is no longer in her own keeping, but is surrendered for ever and for ever into the dominion of another! [3.2.149–74] The possession of uncommon powers of mind are so far from affording relief or resource in the first intoxicating surprise – I had almost said terror – of such a revelation, that they render it more intense. The sources of thought multiply beyond calculation the sources of feeling; and, mingled, they rush together, a torrent deep as strong. Because Portia is endued with that enlarged comprehension which looks before and after, she does not feel the less, but the more: because from the height of her commanding intellect she can contemplate the force, the tendency, the consequences of her own sentiments, – because she is fully sensible of her own situation, and the value of all she concedes, – the concession is not made with less entireness and devotion of heart, less confidence in the truth and worth of her lover, than when Juliet, in a similar moment, but without any such intrusive reflections, – any check but the instinctive delicacy of her sex, – flings herself and her fortunes at the feet of her lover: 'And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay. And follow thee, my lord, through all the world' [*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.147–8]. In Portia's confession, which is not breathed from a moonlit balcony, but spoken openly in the presence of her attendants and vassals, there is nothing of the passionate self-abandonment of Juliet nor of the artless simplicity of Miranda, but a consciousness and a tender seriousness approaching to solemnity, which are not less touching. [Discusses *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*.]

And in the description of her various suitors in the first scene with Nerrissa, what infinite power, wit, and vivacity! She half checks herself as she is about to give the reins to her sportive humour; 'In truth, I know it is a sin to be a mocker' [1.2.57]. But if it carries her away, it is so perfectly good-natured, so temperately bright, so lady-like, it is ever without offence; and so far, most unlike the satirical poignant, unsparing wit of Beatrice, 'misprising what she looks on' [*Much Ado About Nothing*, 3.1.52]. In fact, I can scarcely conceive a greater contrast than between the vivacity of Portia and the vivacity of Beatrice. Portia, with all her airy brilliance, is supremely soft and dignified; everything she says or does displays her capability for profound thought and feeling as well as her lively and romantic disposition; and as I have seen in an Italian garden a fountain flinging round its wreaths of showery light, while the many-coloured Iris hung brooding above

it, in its calm and soul-felt glory; so in *Portia* the wit is ever kept subordinate to the poetry, and we still feel the tender, the intellectual, and the imaginative part of the character as superior to, and presiding over, its spirit and vivacity.

Many women have possessed many of those qualities which render *Portia* so delightful. She is in herself a piece of reality, in whose possible existence we have no doubt: and yet a human being, in whom the moral, intellectual, and sentient faculties should be so exquisitely blended and proportioned to each other; and these again, in harmony with all outward aspects and influences, probably never existed – certainly could not now exist. A woman constituted like *Portia*, and placed in this age, and in the actual state of society, would find society armed against her; and instead of being like *Portia*, a gracious, happy, beloved, and loving creature, would be a victim, immolated in fire to that multitudinous Moloch termed Opinion. With her, the world without would be at war with the world within: in the perpetual strife, either her nature would ‘be subdued to the element it worked in’;<sup>[3]</sup> and bending to a necessity it could neither escape nor approve, lose at last something of its original brightness; or otherwise – a perpetual spirit of resistance, cherished as a safeguard, might perhaps in the end destroy the equipoise firmness would become pride and self-assurance; and the soft, sweet, feminine texture of the mind, settle into rigidity. Is there then no sanctuary for such a mind? – Where shall it find a refuge from the world? – Where seek for strength against itself? Where but in heaven? (38–45, 47–51, 57–8)

## 9 Thomas Campbell, Shylock 'ill-used'

1838

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From *The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare. With Remarks on His Life and Writings*, by Thomas Campbell (London, 1838), Introduction to Vol. 1.

Thomas Campbell (1777–1844), is chiefly remembered for his poems *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799) and *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809). Friendly with such figures as Byron, Scott, the Kembles, Klopstock, and the Schlegels, he had a high reputation. His *Specimens of the British Poets; with Biographical and Critical Notes, and an Essay on English Poetry* (7 vols., London, 1819) received much critical praise. Later work includes a *Life of Mrs. Siddons* (1834) and, four years later, an edition of Shakespeare's plays. The introductory essay was translated into French and prefixed to Francisque Muhel's French translation of Shakespeare (3 vols., Paris, 1839).

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[From the prefatory 'Remarks on the Life and Writings of William Shakespeare']

In the picture of the Jew there is not the tragic grandeur of Richard III; but there is a similar force of mind, and the same subtlety of intellect, though it is less selfish. In point of courage I would give the palm to Shylock, for he was an ill-used man and the champion of an oppressed race; nor is he a hypocrite, like Richard. In fact, Shakespeare, whilst he lends himself to the prejudices of Christians against Jews, draws so philosophical a picture of the energetic Jewish character, that he traces the blame of its faults to the iniquity of the Christian world. Shylock's arguments are more logical than those of his opponents, and the latter overcome him only by a legal quibble. But he is a usurer and lives on the interest of lent moneys; and what but Christian persecution forced him to live by these means? But he is also inhuman and revengeful. Why? Because they called him dog, and spat upon his Jewish gaberdine. They voided their rheum upon him, and he in return wished to void his revenge upon them. All this is natural, and Shylock has nothing unnatural about him. His daughter Jessica is a very faithful picture of a love-inclined young woman; betraying the Oriental warmth of her race, together with their craftiness. But she is not to be taken as a true sample of a Jewish daughter, for among no people are the ties of domestic life held more sacred than among the Hebrews.

Throughout this whole piece there is a flow of incident and richly-imagined language that bears us, on a spring-tide of interest, to the settlement of the plot in the Trial Scene, which is a drama in itself. Yet there Shakespeare does not forsake us, as a vulgar writer would have done. On the contrary, he prolongs our voluptuous sympathy, in the union

*Shylock 'ill-used', 1838*

of the happy characters, by a little pleasantry about the rings and by a moonlight serenade of music. Our imaginations retire from the play soothed and gratified, and perhaps with more hints to our understanding respecting the charity which we owe to the Jews than Shakespeare has ventured to insinuate. (xxxv)

## 10 Heinrich Heine, Shakespeare justifies ‘an unfortunate race’

1838

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From *Heine on Shakespeare: A Translation of his Notes on Shakespeare's Heroines*, translated by Ida Benecke (London, 1895 reprint), from *Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen* (Paris, Leipzig, 1839).

The great German poet and critic Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) paid one visit to England in 1827, where he saw Edmund Kean perform Shylock at Drury Lane. Heine drew upon the experience for an essay to accompany a commissioned book of steel engravings representing Shakespearean heroines. See S. S. Prawer, *Heine's Shakespeare. A Study in Contexts* (Oxford, 1970).

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JESSICA

When I saw this play acted at Drury Lane a beautiful pale Englishwoman standing beside me burst into tears at the end of the fourth act, crying out several times, ‘the poor man is wronged’. She had a refined classical face and large dark eyes which I could not forget for they had wept for Shylock.

On account of these tears I must place *The Merchant of Venice* among Shakespeare's tragedies although he intended it as a comedy surrounding it by merry masks, satyrs and cupids. Possibly Shakespeare thought it would please the public were he to represent a greedy were-wolf, a dread mythical creature thirsting for blood, thereby losing his daughter and his ducats, besides exciting general ridicule. But the poet's genius, the world-spirit which reigns in him, always supersedes his individual will. Thus it came to pass that notwithstanding the obvious caricature which Shylock presents, Shakespeare has justified in him an unfortunate race whom Providence for some secret cause has burdened with the hatred of the low and high-born populace, and who has not always consented to return love for hate.

But what do I say? Shakespeare's genius rises above the mean quarrels of two parties entertaining opposite beliefs, and his play does not actually represent either Jews or Christians but oppressors and oppressed. We also hear the madly painful shouts of joy whenever the latter are able to pay back with interest the injuries inflicted on them by their proud torturers. There is not the slightest trace of religious differences in this play, and in Shylock, Shakespeare represents a character whose nature it is to hate his enemy. In a similar manner we find that Antonio and his friends are by no means apostles of that divine gospel which commands men to love their enemies. Shylock replies to the man wishing to borrow money of him:

*Shakespeare justifies 'an unfortunate race', 1838*

You spurned me such a day; another time,  
You called me dog; and for these courtesies  
I'll lend you thus much moneys? [1.3.127–29]

And Antonio answers:

I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too. [1.3.130–1]

Have we here an example of Christian love! Christianity would have been satirised had Shakespeare typified it by Shylock's enemies, men who hardly deserved to loosen his shoe-latchets. The bankrupt Antonio is a weak-spirited mortal without energy, without power to hate, and therefore without power to love, a dull worm whose flesh was really not good for much else than to serve as 'bait for fish'. Besides this he certainly does not return the fleeced Jew his three thousand ducats. Neither does Basanio, who according to an English critic is a regular fortune-hunter, return him his money; this man borrows money for the purpose of setting himself up in grand style to marry a wealthy wife and to obtain a rich dowry, for he says to his friend: [Quotes 1.1.122–30].

As to Lorenzo, he is an accomplice in a most infamous robbery by which according to Prussian law he would be condemned to fifteen years' penal servitude after being branded and put in the pillory, although he had a liking for the beauties of nature for moonlight scenes and music as well as for jewels and ducats. The other noble Venetians, Antonio's friends, also seem to regard money with favour and they have naught but words, coined air for their poor friend in the midst of his misfortunes. Our good pietist Franz Horn remarks with perfect truth, though somewhat freely, 'we may well ask the question here, how was it possible for Antonio to be so overwhelmed by his misfortunes?' All Venice knew and valued him, his good friends were informed of the terrible bond and knew besides that the Jew would not retract a word. Yet they let day after day slip by until the three months are gone, and with them every hope of deliverance. It would surely have been comparatively easy for those good friends who appeared to surround the regal merchant in crowds, to collect three thousand ducats in order to save a human life, and such a life! But these things are always rather inconvenient and so the dear good friends do nothing – nothing whatever – because they are only so-called friends, or, if you will, semi or three-quarter friends. They greatly pity the excellent merchant who formerly entertained them so well, but they do this in a calm manner and revile Shylock to their heart's content heaping bitter words on him. This also they can do without incurring any risks, and they then probably all imagine that they have done their duty. Much as we are bound to hate Shylock we can understand even him for somewhat despising these people, which he has every right to do. (125–30)

Indeed with the exception of Portia, the character of Shylock is the most worthy in the play. He loves money and makes no secret of his passion crying it out on the open market place. . . . But something he prizes more than money, namely the easing of his wounded spirit, the just vengeance for inexpressible injuries, and though they offer him ten times the amount of the borrowed sum he refuses it. He will not accept the three

## Heinrich Heine

thousand even ten times three thousand ducats, if instead he can procure a pound of his enemy's flesh. Salarino asks him, 'What wilt thou with this flesh?' and he answers:

To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. [Quotes 3.1.52–73] . . . If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? revenge: if a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? why revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

Yes indeed though Shylock loves his money there are things he prizes infinitely more, among other things his daughter; 'Jessica, my child'. Though he curses her in overwhelming and passionate anger, longing to see her dead at his feet with the jewels in her ears and the ducats in her coffin, he loves her nevertheless more than all his jewels and his ducats. Thrust out of public life and christian society into the narrow limits of household joys, the poor Jew found himself entirely dependent on family ties, and these assume in him pathetically tender proportions. He would not have given away the turquoise ring once given him by his wife Lea for a 'forest of monkeys'. When in the court of justice Bassanio addresses the following words to Antonio:

Antonio, I am married to a wife  
Which is as dear to me as life itself;  
But life itself, my wife, and all the world, . . .  
I would lose all, ay sacrifice them all  
Here to this devil, to deliver you. [4.1.282–7]

And when Gratiano adds:

I have a wife whom I protest I love:  
I would she were in heaven, so she could  
Entreat some power to change this currish Jew. [4.1.290–2]

Then Shylock begins to tremble for the fate of his daughter who has married among people who can sacrifice their wives to their friends, and he says to himself in an aside and not aloud:

These be the Christian husbands! I have a daughter  
Would any of the stock of Barabbas  
Had been her husband rather than a Christian! [4.1.295–7]

This passage, these silent words, are beautiful Jessica's death warrant. It was no loveless father whom she deserted, robbed and betrayed . . . O disgraceful betrayal! She even makes common cause with Shylock's enemies, and when at Belmont they slander him, Jessica does not look down, the colour does not leave her cheeks and she utters base words concerning her father . . . Oh abominable outrage! She has no soul, only the mind of an adventuress. She found the strict honourable home of the embittered Jew tedious,

until it seemed to her a hell. The merry sound of drums and fifes had too great attractions for her frivolous mind! Did Shakespeare mean to depict a Jewess? No indeed, he only describes a daughter of Eve, one of those beautiful birds who finding themselves fledged, flutter away from the parental nest to the beloved mate. Desdemona followed the Moor, Imogen followed Posthumus in like manner! It is the custom of women. (131–4)

PORTIA

[Quotes Mrs. Jameson's estimate of Portia: above, pp. 46–51.] Her words concerning Portia as contrasted with Shylock are as beautiful as they are true. If we consider Shylock in the usual way, as a type of that stern, serious, inartistic Judaea, Portia appears on the other hand as a type of those after-blossoms of Greek intellect which in the sixteenth century spread their beautiful scent from Italy all over the world, and which we now love and revere under the name of the *Renaissance*. Portia also represents bright happiness as contrasted with gloomy misfortune, which we see typified in Shylock. All her thoughts are blooming, rosy, and pure; her speech is penetrated with warm happiness and her similes, which she generally borrows from mythology, are full of beauty. In Shylock's thoughts and words, borrowed only from old testament metaphors, we get a dismal, pungent and ugly contrast. His wit is spasmodic and pungent, he borrows his metaphors from loathsome objects and his very words are compressed discords, shrill and hissing. Men resemble their homes. We perceive how this servant of Jehovah will not suffer either an image of God, or of man made in God's image, to enter his 'honourable house'; he even shuts out every sound from the hearing thereof, namely from the windows, so that sounds of heathen mummerly shall not gain entrance there. . . . In the beautiful palace at Belmont, on the other hand, we find a luxurious and ideal country home surrounded by light and music. Adorned suitors wander about joyfully among pictures, marble statues and high laurels, dreaming of love's mysteries, whilst Signora Portia reigns over them in all her glory, resplendent as a goddess, 'golden hair adorning her temples'.

By force of contrast the two chief figures in the play become so individualized that we positively believe them to be actual human beings, instead of a poet's fantastic creations. To us they appear still more life-like than ordinary mortals, as neither time nor death can alter them and their hearts are quickened by immortal pulsations, by divine poetry. When we visit Venice and wander through the Doge's Palace we know very well that we shall not meet Marino Falieri either in the senators' hall or on the grand staircase; – the arsenal may remind us of old Dandolo, but we shall not seek out the blind hero in any of the golden galleys; – possibly for a moment we may think of proud Carmagnole when at the corner of via Santa we perceive a snake hewn in stone, and at the other corner a winged lion holding in its paw the snake's head. But at Venice we think far more of Shakespeare's immortal Shylock than of these historical personages who have long since lain mouldering in their graves. And when we cross the Rialto, we seek him everywhere and fancy that he must be standing behind some pillar clothed in his long Jewish gabardine, with a distrustful and calculating expression of countenance, and occasionally we imagine we hear him crying out in his husky voice, 'three thousand ducats – well'.



## Heinrich Heine

I at any rate, peripatetic dream-hunter as I am, looked about on the Rialto to see if I could spy out Shylock. . . . (143–6)

I could not see Shylock, though I looked about on every side in the synagogue at Venice. And yet I fancied he must be hiding under one of those white scarves, praying with more fervour than his fellow-believers, and sending up his prayers with wild passion – almost delirium – to the throne of Jehovah, the stern God! I did not see him. But towards evening, when, according to the belief of the Jews, the gates of heaven are closed and no prayer can gain admission, I heard a voice swimming in such tears as are never shed by mortals . . . it was a sobbing which might have moved a stone . . . they were groans such as could only be produced from a heart which had buried away in its depths the martyrdom suffered by an entire persecuted race for the length of eighteen hundred years. . . . It was the death-throe of a soul sinking down in its prostration at heaven's gate . . . and this seemed to me a familiar voice, and I fancied I had heard it before calling out in its agony,

Jessica! my child! [2.5.15]

(324–5, 332–3)

## 11 Hermann Ulrici, *summum jus summa injuria*

1839

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From *Über Shakespeares Dramatische Kunst und sein Verhältnis zu Calderón and Goethe* (Halle, 1839), 2nd English edn, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art. History and Character of Shakespeare's Plays*. By Dr. Hermann Ulrici. Translated from the Third Edition of the German with Additions and Corrections by the Author, By L. Dora Schmitz (2 vols., London, 1876), I.

Hermann Ulrici (1806–84), literary critic and philosophical writer, gave up his law studies on the death of his father in 1829, to focus upon literary, philosophical, and scientific study. His *Über Shakespeares Dramatische Kunst und sein Verhältnis zu Calderón and Goethe* (1839) was initially translated into English by A. J. W. Morrison in *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art: And His Relation to Calderón and Goethe*. Translated from the German of Dr. Hermann Ulrici (London, 1846). L. Dora Schmitz's 1876 translation was based on Ulrici's third, enlarged edition, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1868–9).

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As regards the lawsuit between Antonio and the Jew, there can, as I think, be scarcely any doubt that its meaning and significance coincide with the old legal maxim: *Summum jus summa injuria* [the highest right, the greatest injustice]. Every one who knows the maxim and its legal significance will unconsciously, when witnessing the celebrated Trial Scene, be struck with its applicability here. For the maxim merely maintains that an acknowledged and positive law turns into its opposite and becomes a wrong when carried to the extreme point of its limited nature and one-sided conception, and when driven to its extreme consequence. Shylock holds fast to the law: forbearance, gentleness, kindness, and all the lovely names which greet the happy on the threshold of life and accompany them on their paths, he has never known; injustice, harshness, and contempt stood around his cradle, hate and persecution obstructed every step of his career. With convulsive vehemence, therefore, he clutches hold of the law, the small morsel of justice which cannot be withheld even from the Jew. This legal, formal, external justice Shylock obviously has on his side, but by taking and following it to the letter, in absolute one-sidedness, he falls into the deepest, foulest wrong, which then necessarily recoils ruinously on his own head.

The same view of the dialectic and double-edged nature of justice, which is here set forth in its utmost subtilty, is, however, I think, also exhibited in manifold lights and shades throughout the other parts of the play. The determination of Portia's father, which deprives her of all participation in the choice of a husband, is indeed based upon

paternal right, but this very right – even though justified by the best intentions of anxious affection – is again, at the same time a decided wrong, and Portia has good reason for complaining: ‘O, these naughty times / Put bars between the owners and their rights’ [3.2.18–19]. Who would have cast a stone at her had she broken her vow, and guided her well-beloved, amiable, and worthy lover by hints and intimations in making the right choice? The wrong, which is here again contained within what is in itself right, would have fallen with tragic force, had not accident – in the form of a happy thought, as in the lawsuit – led to a happy result. Jessica’s flight and her marriage in opposition to her father’s will is, according to generally recognized principles, a flagrant wrong. And yet, who would condemn her for withdrawing herself from the power and rights of such a father, of whom she is justly ashamed, and to obey whom truly is a matter of impossibility to her conscience and to her innocent heart? Here, again, therefore, we find a point of right at strife with the demands of morality and asserting itself emphatically; Shakespeare himself brings it forward clearly enough in Act II, Sc. iii, and still more so in Act III, Sc. v, in the conversations between Launcelot and Jessica. The penalty which the Court imposes upon the Jew, and by which he is compelled to sanction the marriage of his daughter with Lorenzo, also neutralizes the conflicting elements more in an external and accidental manner than by true and internal adjustment. Lastly, right and wrong are no less carried to their extreme points, and consequently placed in a balancing state of uncertainty, in the quarrel between the two loving couples about the rings which they had parted with, in violation of their sworn promises – a scene with which the play closes. Here, again, we have a sufficiently distinct reflex of the maxim, *Summum jus summa injuria*; here again right and wrong are brought to such straits, are driven to such extremes, that the two are no longer distinct, but pass over directly one into the other. Thus we see that the meaning and significance of the many, apparently heterogeneous elements are united in one point: they are but variations of the same theme. [Discusses the theme and plot.]

Shakespeare, as I think, has clearly enough intimated that he does not in any way consider Shylock a tragic character. Shylock’s conduct, in general, makes rather a decidedly comic impression, and particularly in the scene of the outburst of his sorrow and rage at the elopement of his daughter and the loss of his ducats, which alternates in the sharpest contrast with his diabolical expressions of joy at the losses experienced by Antonio. His very behaviour at the Trial Scene has somewhat the flavour of comedy, because his whole being, his appearance, his manner of expressing himself in word and gesture, are obviously described intentionally in such a way as always to verge upon caricature. And if the punishment which overtakes him is, nevertheless, offensive to our finer feelings, we must bear in mind that the scene of the play is laid in the sixteenth century, and that Shylock forfeits our pity owing to his inhuman, almost devilish, wickedness and hardness of heart, and has lost all claim to humane treatment. (I, 121, 126)

## 12 Charles Knight, lessons of charity

1849

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From *Studies of Shakspeare: Forming a Companion Volume to Every Edition of the Text* (London, 1849).

Charles Knight (1791–1873) was a popularist. Author, publisher, editor, his concern was the spreading of knowledge to the uneducated and underprivileged. He wrote books and articles on a multitude of subjects ranging from history and topography to politics and biography. His lavishly illustrated *Pictorial Shakespeare* was printed in fifty-five parts (1838–43), and then issued as an eight-volume set. Each play has an ‘Introductory Notice’, with ‘Historical Illustrations’ added to the text of each act. There is a concluding ‘Supplementary Notice’, which is interpretative. In 1843 Knight produced a biography of Shakespeare, and six years later his *Studies of Shakspeare* brought together his interpretative observations on each play. The extracts represented below are taken from this work.

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Antonio is one of the most beautiful of Shakespeare’s characters. He does not take a very prominent part in the drama: he is a sufferer rather than an actor. We view him, in the outset, rich, liberal, surrounded with friends; yet he is unhappy. He has higher aspirations than those which ordinarily belong to one dependent upon the chances of commerce; and this uncertainty, as we think, produces his unhappiness. He will not acknowledge the forebodings of evil which come across his mind. Ulrici<sup>[1]</sup> says, ‘It was the over-great magnitude of his earthly riches, which, although his heart was by no means dependent upon their amount, unconsciously confined the free flight of his soul.’ We doubt if Shakespeare meant this. He has addressed the reproof of that state of mind to Portia, from the lips of Nerissa [Quotes 1.2.3–9].

Antonio may say ‘In sooth, I know why I am so sad’ [1.1.1] but his reasoning denial of the cause of his sadness is a proof to us that the foreboding of losses [Quotes 4.1.42–5] is at the bottom of his sadness. It appears to us a self-delusion, which his secret nature rejects, that he says [Quotes 1.1.41–5]. When he has given the fatal bond, he has a sort of desperate confidence, which to us looks very unlike assured belief [Quotes 1.3.156–9]. And, finally, when his calamity has become a real thing, and not a shadowy notion, his deportment shows that his mind has been long familiar with images of ruin [Quotes 4.1.264–72]. The generosity of Antonio’s nature unfitted him for a contest with the circumstances amid which his lot was cast. The Jew says ‘In low simplicity, / He lends out money gratis’ [1.3.44]. He himself says [Quotes 3.3.22–3]. Bassanio describes him as

## Charles Knight

The kindest man  
The best-condition'd and unwearied spirit  
In doing courtesies [3.2.292-4]

To such a spirit, whose 'means are in supposition' [1.3.17] – whose ventures are 'squander'd abroad' [1.3.21] – the curse of the Jew must have sometimes presented itself to his own prophetic mind: – 'This is the fool that lends out money gratis' [3.3.2]. Antonio and his position are not in harmony. But there is something else discordant in Antonio's mind. This kind friend, this generous benefactor, this gentle spirit, this man 'unwearied in doing courtesies,' can outrage and insult a fellow-creature, because he is of another creed [Quotes 1.3.122-9].

Was it without an object that Shakespeare made this man, so entitled to command our affections and our sympathy, act so unworthy a part, and not be ashamed of the act? Most assuredly the poet did not intend to justify the indignities which were heaped upon Shylock; for in the very strongest way he has made the Jew remember the insult in the progress of his wild revenge [Quotes 3.3.6-7].

Here, to our minds, is the first of the lessons of charity which this play teaches. Antonio is as much to be pitied for his prejudices as the Jew for his. They had both been nurtured in evil opinions. They had both been surrounded by influences which more or less held in subjection their better natures. The honoured Christian is as intolerant as the despised Jew. The one habitually pursues with injustice the subjected man that he has been taught to loathe; the other, in the depths of his subtle obstinacy, seizes upon the occasion to destroy the powerful man that he has been compelled to fear. The companions of Antonio exhibit, more or less, the same reflection of the prejudices which have become to them a second nature. They are not so gross in their prejudices as Launcelot, to whom 'the Jew is the very devil incarnation' [2.2.27-8]. But to Lorenzo, who is about to marry his daughter, Shylock is a 'faithless Jew' [2.4.37]. When the unhappy father is bereft of all that constituted the solace of his home, and before he has manifested that spirit of revenge which might well call for indignation and contempt, he is to the gentlemanly Solanio 'the villain Jew' [2.8.4], and 'the dog Jew' [2.8.14]. When the unhappy man speaks of his daughter's flight, he is met with a brutal jest on the part of Salarino, who, within his own circle, is the pleasantest of men; – 'I, for my part, knew the tailor that made the wings she flew withal' [3.1.26-7]. We can understand the reproaches that are heaped upon Shylock in the trial scene as something that might come out of the depths of any passion-stirred nature: but the habitual contempt with which he is treated by men who in every other respect are gentle and good-humoured and benevolent is a proof to us that Shakespeare meant to represent the struggle that must inevitably ensue, in a condition of society where the innate sense of justice is deadened in the powerful by those hereditary prejudices which make cruelty virtue; and where the powerless, invested by accident with the means of revenge, say with Shylock, 'The villainy you teach me I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction' [3.1.72-3].

The climax of this subjection of our higher and better natures to conventional circumstances is to be found in the character of the Jew's daughter. Young, agreeable, intelligent, formed for happiness, she is shut up by her father in a dreary solitude. One

opposed to her in creed gains her affections; and the ties which bind the father and the child are broken for ever. But they are not broken without compunction [Quotes 2.3.16–17].

This is nature. But when she has fled from him, robbed him, spent fourscore ducats in one night, given his turquoise for a monkey, and, finally, revealed his secrets, with an evasion of the ties that bound them which makes one's flesh creep, – ‘When I was *with him*’ – [3.2.284], we see the poor girl plunged into the most wretched contest between her duties and her pleasures by the force of external circumstances. We grant, then, to all these our compassion; for they commit injustice ignorantly, and through a force which they cannot withstand. Is the Jew himself not to be measured by the same rule? We believe that it was Shakespeare's intention so to measure him.

When Pope exclaimed of Macklin's performance of Shylock, –

This is the Jew  
That Shakespeare drew!<sup>[2]</sup>

the higher philosophy of Shakespeare was little appreciated. Macklin was, no doubt, from all traditionary report of him, perfectly capable of representing the subtlety of the Jew's malice and the energy of his revenge. But it is a question with us whether he perceived, or indeed if any actor ever efficiently represented, the more delicate traits of character that lie beneath these two great passions of the Jew's heart. Look, for example, at the extraordinary mixture of the personal and the national in his dislike of Antonio. He hates him for his gentle manners: – ‘How like a fawning publican he looks!’ [1.3.41]. He hates him, ‘for he is a Christian;’ – he hates him, for that ‘he lends out money gratis;’ – but he hates him more than all, because ‘He hates our sacred nation’ [1.3.48].

It is this national feeling which, when carried in a right direction, makes a patriot and a hero, that assumes in Shylock the aspect of a grovelling and fierce personal revenge. He has borne insult and injury ‘with a patient shrug’ [1.3.109], but even in small matters he has been seeking retribution [Quotes 2.5.13–15].

The mask is at length thrown off – he has the Christian in his power; and his desire of revenge, mean and ferocious as it is rises into sublimity, through the unconquerable energy of the oppressed man's wilfulness [Quotes 3.1.55–64]. It is impossible, after this exposition of his feelings, that we should not feel that he has properly cast the greater portion of the odium which belongs to his actions upon the social circumstances by which he has been hunted into madness. He has been made the thing he is by society. In the extreme wildness of his anger, when he utters the harrowing imprecation, – ‘I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin’ [3.1.89–90], the tenderness that belongs to our common humanity, even in its most passionate forgetfulness of the dearest ties, comes across him in the remembrance of the mother of that execrated child: – ‘Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal: it was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor’ [3.1.120–2].

It is in the conduct of the trial scene that, as it appears to us, is to be sought the concentration of Shakespeare's leading idea in the composition of this drama. The merchant stands before the Jew a better and a wiser man than when he called him ‘dog’ [Quotes 4.1.9–12].

## Charles Knight

Misfortune has corrected the influences which, in happier moments, allowed him to forget the gentleness of his nature, and to heap unmerited abuse upon him whose badge was suffering. The Jew is unchanged. But, if Shakespeare in the early scenes made us entertain some compassion for his wrongs, he has now left him to bear all the indignation which we ought to feel against one 'incapable of pity' [4.1.5]. But we cannot despise the Jew. His intellectual vigour rises supreme over the mere reasonings by which he is opposed. He defends his own injustice by the example of as great an injustice of every-day occurrence – and no one ventures to answer him [Quotes 1.1.89–103].

It would have been exceedingly difficult for the Merchant to have escaped from the power of the obdurate man, so strong in the letter of the law, and so resolute to carry it out by the example of his judges in other matters, had not the law been found here, as in most other cases, capable of being bent to the will of its administrators. Had it been the inflexible thing which Shylock required it to be, a greater injustice would have been committed than the Jew had finally himself to suffer [Quotes from Mrs. Jameson]<sup>[3]</sup>

Had Shylock relented after that most beautiful appeal to his mercy, which Shakespeare has here [Quotes 4.1.184–205] placed as the exponent of the higher principle upon which all law and right are essentially dependent, the real moral of the drama would have been destroyed. The weight of injuries transmitted to Shylock from his forefathers, and still heaped upon him even by the best of those by whom he was surrounded, was not so easily to become light, and to cease to exasperate his nature. Nor would it have been a true picture of society in the sixteenth century had the poet shown the judges of the Jew wholly magnanimous in granting him the mercy which he denied to the Christian. We certainly do not agree with the Duke, in his address to Shylock, that the conditions upon which his life is spared are imposed – 'That thou shall see the difference of our spirit' [4.1.368]. [Reflects upon actions of the strong towards the weak.]

Throughout the whole conduct of the play, what may be called its tragic portion has been relieved by the romance which belongs to the personal fate of Portia. But, after the great business of the drama is wound up, we fall back upon a repose which is truly refreshing and harmonious. From the lips of Lorenzo and Jessica, as they sit in the 'paler day' [5.1.125] of an Italian moon, are breathed the lighter strains of the most playful poetry, mingled with the highest flights of the most elevated. Music and the odours of sweet flowers are around them. Happiness is in their hearts. Their thoughts are lifted by the beauties of the earth above the earth. This delicious scene belongs to what is universal and eternal, and takes us far away from those bitter strifes of our social state which are essentially narrow and temporary. And then come the affectionate welcomes, the pretty, pouting contests, and the happy explanations of Portia and Nerissa with Bassanio and Gratiano. Here again we are removed into a sphere where the calamities of fortune, and the injustice of man warring against man, may be forgotten. The poor Merchant is once more happy. The 'gentle spirit' [3.2.163] of Portia is perhaps the happiest, for she has triumphantly concluded a work as religious as her pretended pilgrimage 'by holy crosses' [5.1.31]. To use the words of Dr. Ulrici, 'the sharp contrarieties of right and unright are played out.' (235–9)

## 13 George Henry Lewes, Shylock's humanity

1850

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From 'Macready's Shylock', *Leader*, 9 November 1850, p. 787. Omitted from Lewes's chapter on William Charles Macready in his *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (London, 1875).

George Henry Lewes (1817–78) is today remembered as the consort of George Eliot rather than as a dramatic critic. Prior to his relationship with her, Lewes tried his hand at many literary ventures: journalist, drama critic, philosopher, literary editor, actor, dramatist, and novelist, were some of his manifold activities. He became editor of the radical *Leader* with Thornton Hunt in 1850, and under the name of 'Vivien' Lewes wrote a series of articles 'On Actors and the Art of Acting' published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1865. These appeared in revised form in his *On Actors and the Art of Acting*.

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Perhaps of all Shakespeare's leading characters, Shylock<sup>[1]</sup> is the easiest of comprehension: drawn with firm bold strokes, it is more *scolpito*<sup>[2]</sup> than the rest, and is not perplexed by the same involved complication of motives which renders Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, Lear, and Leontes so easily misunderstood. Shylock stands as the representative of a persecuted race. Despised and hated by all around him, his religion scorned, his bargains thwarted, his losses mocked at, his friends set against him, his enemies heated, and all because he is a Jew! Even the mild and good Antonio – the pattern man of Venice – likened unto the best of ancient Romans – even he spits upon Shylock's gaberdine, and calls him 'misbeliever, cut-throat dog' [1.3.112]. What is the consequence? Shylock, to hereditary hatred of the Christians, adds his own personal wrongs, and his malignity is the accumulation of years of outrage silently brooding in his soul. Much has he borne 'with a patient shrug' [1.3.109]. 'For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe' [1.3.110].

But as a Jew and as a man the incessant insults have made him lust for vengeance. Hence his exultant cry,

If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him. [1.3.46–7]

He does catch Antonio on the hip. The man who hates the Jew's 'sacred nation,' [1.3.48] and rails at him for his 'usury,' has fallen into his power; and so fierce, so



relentless is his lust for vengeance that it conquers even his passion of avarice, and he refuses thrice the sum of his bond. Observe, in the great anguish of his heart at the loss of his daughter, the lost ducats hold an almost equal share; yet even his ducats he will lose rather than lose his vengeance on Antonio!

Nothing can, I think, be clearer than the malignity of Shakespeare's Jew, and its justification. We may perfectly acquit Shylock of being a 'demon,' though we admit the fierceness of his malignity. I put in this clause for a reason which will soon be apparent. I want to keep Shylock's human nature steadily in view. [Discusses Macready.]

Macready's Shylock is an abject, sordid, irritable, argumentative Jew – not a haughty, passionate, and vindictive man whose vengeance is a retribution of wrongs to his sacred nation and to himself; and yet, although the devilish malignity has been suppressed, there is no restitution of the human affections in this Jewish bosom. Kean played Shylock as the personification of vindictiveness; yet in his ruthless bosom I always missed that affection for his child which even a malignant Jew must be supposed to have felt – in some degree, at least. But the absence in Macready's version is less excusable. Kean took what one may call the obvious view of Shylock, representing all that the plain *text* has given, and not troubling himself about anything lying *involved* in the text; hence, as Shakespeare gives no language of tenderness towards Jessica, Kean represented none. But Macready swerves from the obvious path – drops the ferocious malignity and lust for personal vengeance – yet never seems to have asked himself whether Shylock had the affections of his kind; accordingly, in the single scene with his daughter, he is harsh and irritable, when he might so truly and effectively have thrown in a touch of paternal tenderness. As I said before, we must not keep Shylock's humanity out of view.

Whatever he may be to his oppressors, the Christians, he is a man with a man's affections to his own tribe. He loves the memory of his lost Leah; he loves Jessica. Shakespeare has given the actor an exquisite passage wherein to indicate the husband's tenderness; and I believe that in the scene with Jessica an actor may effectively show paternal tenderness. It is true the actor must *read into* the scene that which is not expressly indicated; but precisely in such interpretations consists the actor's art. I have no hesitation in saying that to omit the paternal tenderness is to alter profoundly the tragic structure of the play; for observe, if Shylock is a savage, blood-thirsty wretch, the whole moral is lost; if his fierceness is *natural* to him, and not brought out by the wrongs of the Christians, all the noble philosophy of the piece is destroyed; and the only way of showing that his fierceness is that of retaliation is to show how to others he is *not* fierce.

It may be objected that when Shylock discovers her flight he raves as much about his ducats as his daughter, which does not speak of great affection on his part. But I do not wish to paint him as an idolizing father – I wish merely to show that he is not without fatherly affection, and even fond fathers might very well utter such fearful imprecations as those which escape Shylock ('I would my daughter were dead at my feet, the ducats in her coffin') [3.1.87–8] on discovering that their daughters had not only fled with lovers of a hated race, but added robbery to elopement. As a set off against these angry words, read the sorrowful exclamation in the fourth act [Quotes 4.1.294–7].

Further, the tragedy is heightened if we suppose Shylock to be fond of his child; for then the rebellion of 'his own flesh and blood' [3.1.33] comes with a tenfold bitterness. To be sure, this makes Jessica more odious; but she is odious; and – I dare to say it –

*Shylock's humanity*, 1850

Shakespeare has committed a serious blunder in art by the mode in which he has represented Jessica, when he might easily have secured all he wanted by throwing more *truth* into the conception. That a Jewess should love a Christian, for him forsake her home, and abjure her religion, is conceivable; but it was for the poet to show how the overmastering passion of *love* conquered all the obstacles, how love conquered religion and filial affection, and made her sacrifice *everything* to her passion. Instead of this, Shakespeare has made her a heartless, frivolous girl, who robs her father, throws away her mother's turquoise for a monkey, speaks of her father in a tone as shocking as it is gratuitous. Were a modern poet so to outrage nature and art, no mercy would be shown him. But I have little doubt that many readers are indignant at my temerity in accusing Shakespeare of such gross errors.

To return, however, to the principal point, I say if Shylock be not represented as having the feelings of our kind, *The Merchant of Venice* becomes a brutal melodrama, not a great tragedy. It is therefore imperative on the actor that he seize every possible occasion to indicate these feelings. No Shylock that I have seen does this; but Macready above all ought to have done so; because his Shylock is less demoniac than the others. (787)

## 14 Henry Norman Hudson, Shakespeare's evenhandedness

1851

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From *The Works of Shakespeare: The Text Carefully Restored According to the First Editions; with Introductions, Notes Original and Selected and a Life of the Poet; by the Rev. H. N. Hudson, A. M. In Eleven Volumes* (11 vols., Boston and Cambridge, 1851–6). Volume III (1851) *The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, All's Well that Ends Well, The Taming of the Shrew*.

Henry Norman Hudson (1814–86) graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont in 1846. Following school teaching in Kentucky and Alabama, he moved to Boston. His influential *Lectures on Shakespeare* (2 vols., New York, 1848) formed the foundations for the introductory sections of his eleven-volume edition of *The Works of Shakespeare*. Ordained an Episcopalian priest in 1849, in 1865 he became a professor at Boston University. His *Shakespeare, His Life, Art and Characters* (2 vols., Boston, 1872) draws upon his introductory section for the eleven-volume edition which he continually revised and reprinted. His editions of Shakespeare, especially the 1870–3 *Harvard Shakespeare*, were standard texts for many years in American schools and universities.

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[From the section of *The Merchant of Venice* in Hudson's *Shakespeare, His Life, Art and Characters* (Boston, 1872), which is essentially a reprint of Hudson's introduction to his 1851 edition of the play.]

In respect of characterization this play is exceedingly rich, and this too both in quantity and quality. The persons naturally fall into three several groups, with each its several plot and action; yet the three are skilfully complotted, each standing out clear and distinct in its place, yet so drawing in with the others, that every thing helps on every thing else; there being neither any confusion nor any appearance of care to avoid it. Of these three groups, Antonio, Shylock, and Portia are respectively the centres; while the part of Lorenzo and Jessica, though strictly an episode, seems nevertheless to grow forth as an element of the original germ; a sort of inherent superfluity, and as such essential to the well-being of the piece. But perhaps it may be better described as a fine romantic undertone accompaniment to the other parts; itself in perfect harmony with them, and therefore perfecting their harmony with each other.

In the first entry at the Stationers', the play is described as '*The Merchant of Venice*, or otherwise called *The Jew of Venice*.' This would seem to infer that the author was then in some doubt whether to name it from Antonio or Shylock. As an individual, Shylock is

*Shakespeare's evenhandedness, 1851*

altogether the character of the play, and exhibits more of mastership than all the others; so that, viewing the persons severally, we should say the piece ought to be named from him. But we have not far to seek for good reasons why it should rather be named as it is. For if the Jew is the more important individually, the Merchant is so dramatically. Antonio is the centre and main-spring of the action: without him, Shylock, however great in himself, had no business there. And the laws of dramatic combination, not any accident of individual prominence, are clearly what ought to govern in the naming of the play.

Not indeed that the Merchant is a small matter in himself; far from it: he is a highly interesting and attractive personage; nor am I sure but there may be timber enough in him for a good dramatic hero, apart from the Jew. Something of a peculiar charm attaches to him, from the state of mind in which we first see him. A dim, mysterious presage of evil weighs down his spirits, as though he felt afar off the coming-on of some great calamity. Yet this unwonted dejection, sweetened as it is with his habitual kindness and good-nature, has the effect of showing how dearly he is held by such whose friendship is the fairest earthly purchase of virtue. And it is considerable that upon tempers like his even the smiles of Fortune often have a strangely saddening effect. For such a man, even because he is good, is apt to be haunted with a sense of having more than he deserves; and this may not unnaturally inspire him with an indefinable dread of some reverse which shall square up the account of his present blessings. Thus his very happiness works, by subtle methods, to charge his heart with certain dark forebodings. . . .

Of, startled and made wise  
By your low-breathed interpretations,  
The simply-meeke foretaste the springs  
Of bitter contraries.<sup>[1]</sup>

Wealth indeed seldom dispenses warnings save to its most virtuous possessors. And such is Antonio. A kind-hearted and sweet-mannered man; of a large and liberal spirit; affable, generous, and magnificent in his dispositions; patient of trial, indulgent to weakness, free where he loves, and frank where he hates; in prosperity modest, in adversity cheerful; craving wealth for the uses of virtue, and as the sinews of friendship; – his character is one which we never weary of contemplating. The only blemish we perceive in him is his treatment of Shylock: in this, though evidently much more the fault of the times than of the man, we cannot help siding against him; than which we need not ask a clearer instance of poetical justice. Yet even this we blame rather as a wrong done to himself than to Shylock; inasmuch as the latter, notwithstanding he has had such provocations, avowedly grounds his hate mainly on those very things which make the strongest title to a good man's love. For the Jew's revenge fastens not so much on the man's abuse of him as on his kindness to others. . . .

[On the interplay between Jessica and Launcelot Gobbo.] For she and the clown are made to reflect each other's choicer parts: we think the better of her for having kindled something of poetry in such a clod, and of him for being raised above himself by such an object. And her conduct is further justified to our feelings by the odd testimony he

## Henry Norman Hudson

furnishes of her father's badness; which testimony, though not of much weight in itself, goes far to confirm that of others. We see that the Jew is much the same at home as in the Rialto; that, let him be where he will, it is his nature to snarl and bite.

Such, in one view of the matter, is the dramatic propriety of this Launcelot. His part, though often faulted by those who can see but one thing at a time, materially aids the completeness of the work, in giving us a fuller view both of Jessica and of her father. But he has also a value in himself irrespective of that use: his own personal rights enter into the purpose of his introduction; and he carries in himself a part of the reason why he is so, and not otherwise: for Shakespeare seldom if ever brings in a person *merely* for the sake of others. A mixture of conceit and drollery, and hugely wrapped up in self, he is by no means a commonplace buffoon, but stands firm in his sufficiency of original stock. His elaborate nonsense, his grasping at a pun without catching it, yet feeling just as grand as if he did, is both ludicrous and natural. His jokes to be sure are mostly failures; nevertheless they are laughable, because he dreams not but they succeed. The poverty of his wit is thus enriched by his complacency in dealing it out. His part indeed amply pays its way, in showing how much of mirth may be caused by feebleness in a great attempt at a small matter. Besides, in him the mother element of the whole piece runs out into broad humour and travesty; his reasons for breaking with his master the Jew being, as it were, a variation in drollery upon the fundamental air of the play. Thus he exhibits under a comic form the general aspect of surrounding humanity; while at the same time his character is an integral part of that varied structure of human life which it belongs to the Gothic Drama to represent. On several accounts indeed he might not be spared.

In Portia Shakespeare seems to have aimed at a perfect scheme of an amiable, intelligent, and accomplished woman. And the result is a fine specimen of beautiful nature enhanced by beautiful art. Eminently practical in her tastes and turn of mind, full of native, homebred sense and virtue, Portia unites therewith something of the ripeness and dignity of a sage, a mellow eloquence, and a large, noble discourse; the whole being tempered with the best grace and sensibility of womanhood. As intelligent as the strongest, she is at the same time as feminine as the weakest of her sex: she talks like a poet and a philosopher, yet, strange to say, she talks, for all the world, just like a woman. She is as full of pleasantry, too, and as merry 'within the limit of becoming mirth' [*Loves Labour's Lost*, 2.1.67], as she is womanly and wise; and, which is more, her arch sportiveness always relishes as the free outcome of perfect moral health. Nothing indeed can be more fitting and well-placed than her demeanour, now bracing her speech with grave maxims of practical wisdom, now unbending her mind in sallies of wit, or of innocent, roguish banter. The sportive element of her composition has its happiest showing in her dialogue with Nerissa about the 'parcel of wooers' [1.2.118], and in her humorous description of the part she imagines herself playing in her purposed disguise. The latter is especially delightful from its harmonious contrast with the solid thoughtfulness which, after all, forms the staple and framework of her character. How charmingly it sets off the divine rapture of eloquence with which she discourses to the Jew of mercy!

Partly from condition, partly from culture, Portia has grown to live more in the understanding than in the affections; for which cause she is a little more self-conscious than I exactly like: yet her character is hardly the less lovely on that account: she talks considerably of herself indeed, but always so becomingly, that we hardly wish her to

choose any other subject; for we are pleasantly surprised that one so well aware of her gifts should still bear them so meekly. Mrs. Jameson, with Portia in her eye, intimates Shakespeare to have been about the only artist, except Nature, who could make women wise without turning them into men.<sup>2</sup> And it is well worth the noting that, honourable as the issue of her course at the trial would be to a man, Portia shows no unwomanly craving to be in the scene of her triumph: as she goes there prompted by the feelings and duties of a wife, and for the saving of her husband's honour and peace of mind, – being resolved that 'never shall he lie by Portia's side with an unquiet soul' [3.2.308]; so she gladly leaves when these causes no longer bear in that direction. Then too, exquisitely cultivated as she is, humanity has not been so refined out of her, but that in such a service she can stoop from her elevation, and hazard a brief departure from the sanctuary of her sex.

Being to act for once the part of a man, it would seem hardly possible for her to go through the undertaking without more of self-confidence than were becoming in a woman: and the student may find plenty of matter for thought in the Poet's so managing as to prevent such an impression. For there is nothing like ostentation or conceit of intellect in Portia. Though knowing enough for any station, still it never once enters her head that she is too wise for the station which Providence or the settled order of society has assigned her. She would therefore neither hide her light under a bushel, that others may not see by it, nor perch it aloft in public, that others may see it; but would simply set it on a candlestick, that it may give light to all in her house. With her noble intellect she has gathered in the sweets of poetry and the solidities of philosophy, all for use, nothing for show; she has fairly domesticated them, has naturalized them in her sphere, and tamed them to her fireside, so that they seem as much at home there as if they had been made for no other place. . . .

yet when I approach  
Her loveliness, so absolute she seems  
And in her self complete, so well to know  
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,  
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;<sup>[3]</sup>

Portia's consciousness of power does indeed render her cool, collected, and firm, but never a whit unfeminine: her smooth command both of herself and of the matter she goes about rather heightens our sense of her modesty than otherwise: so that the impression we take from her is, that these high mental prerogatives are of no sex; that they properly belong to the common freehold of woman and man; and that the ladies of creation have just as good a right to them as the lords. Some of her speeches, especially at the trial, are evidently premeditated; for, as any good lawyer would do, she of course prepares herself in the case beforehand; but I should like to see the masculine lawyer that could premeditate any thing equal to them. It is to be noted withal that she goes about her work without the least misgiving as to the result; having so thoroughly booked herself both in the facts and the law of the case as to feel perfectly sure on that point. Hence the charming ease and serenity with which she moves amid the excitements of the trial. No trepidations of anxiety come in to disturb the preconcerted order and

method of her course. And her solemn appeals to the Jew are made in the earnest hope of inducing him to accept a full and liberal discharge of the debt. When she says to him, 'there's thrice thy money offer'd thee' [4.1.227], it is because she really feels that both the justice of the cause and the honour of her husband would be better served by such a payment than by the more brilliant triumph which awaits her in case the Jew should spurn her offer.

[Portia's] management of the trial, throughout, is a piece of consummate art; though of art in such a sense as presupposes perfect integrity of soul. Hence, notwithstanding her methodical forecast and preparation, she is as eloquent as an angel, and her eloquence, as by an instinctive tact, knows its time perfectly. One of her strains in this kind, her appeal to the Jew on the score of mercy, has been so often quoted, that it would long since have grown stale, if it were possible by any means to crush the freshness of unwithering youth out of it. And I hope it will not be taken as any abatement of the speaker's claim as a wise jurist, that she there carries both the head and the heart of a ripe Christian divine into the management of her cause. Yet her style in that speech is in perfect keeping with her habitual modes of thought and discourse: even in her most spontaneous expressions we have a reflex of the same intellectual physiognomy. For the mental aptitude which she displays in the trial seems to have been the germinal idea out of which her whole part was consistently evolved; as the Poet's method often was, apparently, first to settle what his persons were to do, and then to conceive and work out their characters accordingly.

It has been said that Shakespeare's female characters are inferior to his characters of men. Doubtless in some respects they are so; they would not be female characters if they were not; but then in other respects they are superior. Some people apparently hold it impossible for man and woman to be equal and different at the same time. Hence the false equality of the sexes which has been of late so often and so excruciatingly advocated. On this ground, the Poet could not have made his women equal to his men without unsexing and unsphering them; which he was just as far from doing as Nature is. The alleged inferiority, then, of his women simply means, I suppose, that they are women, as they ought to be, and not men, as he meant they should not be, and as we have cause to rejoice that they are not. He knew very well that in this matter equality and diversity are nowise incompatible, and that the sexes might therefore stand or sit on the same level without standing in the same shoes or sitting in the same seats. If, indeed, he had not known this, he could not have given characters of either sex, but only wretched and disgusting medlies and caricatures of both.

How nicely, on the one hand, Shakespeare discriminates things that really differ, so as to present in all cases the soul of womanhood, without a particle of effeminacy; and how perfectly, on the other hand, he reconciles things that seem most diverse, pouring into his women all the intellectual forces of the other sex, without in the least impairing or obscuring their womanliness; — all this is not more rare in poetry than it is characteristic of his workmanship. Thus Portia is as much superior to her husband in intellect, in learning, and accomplishment, as she is in wealth; but she is none the less womanly for all that. Nor, which is more, does she ever on that account take the least thought of inverting the relation between them. In short, her mental superiority breeds no kind of social displacement, nor any desire of it. Very few indeed of the Poet's men are more highly charged with intellectual power. While she is acting the lawyer in disguise, her

speech and bearing seem to those about her in the noblest style of manliness. In her judge-like gravity and dignity of deportment; in the extent and accuracy of her legal knowledge; in the depth and appropriateness of her moral reflections; in the luminous order, the logical coherence, and the beautiful transparency of her thoughts, she almost rivals our Chief Justice Marshall.<sup>[4]</sup> Yet to us, who are in the secret of her sex, all the proprieties, all the inward harmonies, of her character are exquisitely preserved; and the essential grace of womanhood seems to irradiate and consecrate the dress in which she is disguised.

Nor is it any drawback on her strength and substantial dignity of character, that her nature is all overflowing with romance: rather, this it is that glorifies her, and breathes enchantment about her; it adds that precious seeing to the eye which conducts her to such winning beauty and sweetness of deportment, and makes her the 'rich-souled creature' that Schlegel describes her to be.<sup>[5]</sup> Therewithal she may be aptly quoted as a mark-worthy instance how the Poet makes the several parts and persons of a drama cohere not only with one another but with the general circumstances wherein they occur. For so in Portia's character the splendour of Italian skies and scenery and art is reproduced; their spirit lives in her imagination, and is complicated with all she does and says.

If Portia is the beauty of this play, Shylock is its strength. He is a standing marvel of power and scope in the dramatic art; at the same time appearing so much a man of Nature's making, that we can hardly think of him as a creation of art. In the delineation Shakespeare had no less a task than to fill with individual life and peculiarity the broad, strong outlines of national character in its most revolting form. Accordingly Shylock is a true representative of his nation; wherein we have a pride which for ages never ceased to provoke hostility, but which no hostility could ever subdue; a thrift which still invited rapacity, but which no rapacity could ever exhaust; and a weakness which, while it exposed the subjects to wrong, only deepened their hate, because it kept them without the means or the hope of redress. Thus Shylock is a type of national sufferings, national sympathies, national antipathies. Himself an object of bitter insult and scorn to those about him; surrounded by enemies whom he is at once too proud to conciliate and too weak to oppose; he can have no life among them but money; no hold on them but interest; no feeling towards them but hate; no indemnity out of them but revenge. Such being the case, what wonder that the elements of national greatness became congealed and petrified into malignity? As avarice was the passion in which he mainly lived, the Christian virtues that thwarted this naturally seemed to him the greatest of wrongs.

With these strong national traits are interwoven personal traits equally strong. Thoroughly and intensely Jewish, he is not more a Jew than he is Shylock. In his hard, icy intellectuality, and his dry, mummy-like tenacity of purpose, with a dash now and then of biting sarcastic humour, we see the remains of a great and noble nature, out of which all the genial sap of humanity has been pressed by accumulated injuries. With as much elasticity of mind as stiffness of neck, every step he takes but the last is as firm as the earth he treads upon. Nothing can daunt, nothing disconcert him; remonstrance cannot move, ridicule cannot touch, obloquy cannot exasperate him: when he has not provoked them, he has been forced to bear them; and now that he does provoke them, he is hardened against them. In a word, he may be broken; he cannot be bent.



## Henry Norman Hudson

Shylock is great in every scene where he appears, yet each later scene exhibits him in a new element or aspect of greatness. For as soon as the Poet has set forth one side or phase of his character, he forthwith dismisses that, and proceeds to another. For example, the Jew's cold and penetrating sagacity, as also his malignant and remorseless guile, are finely delivered in the scene with Antonio and Bassanio, where he is first solicited for the loan. And the strength and vehemence of passion, which underlies these qualities, is still better displayed, if possible, in the scene with Antonio's two friends, Solanio and Salarino, where he first avows his purpose of exacting the forfeiture. One passage of this scene has always seemed to me a peculiarly idiomatic strain of eloquence, steeped in a mixture of gall and pathos; and I the rather notice it, because of the wholesome lesson which Christians may gather from it. Of course the Jew is referring to Antonio [Quotes 3.1.52–73].

I have spoken of the mixture of national and individual traits in Shylock. It should be observed further, that these several elements of character are so attempered and fused together, that we cannot distinguish their respective influence. Even his avarice has a smack of patriotism. Money is the only defence of his brethren as well as of himself, and he craves it for their sake as well as his own; feels indeed that wrongs are offered to them in him, and to him in them. Antonio has scorned his religion, balked him of usurious gains, insulted his person: therefore he hates him as a Christian, himself a Jew; hates him as a lender of money gratis, himself a griping usurer; hates him as Antonio, himself Shylock. Moreover, who but a Christian, one of Antonio's faith and fellowship, has stolen away his daughter's heart, and drawn her into revolt, loaded with his ducats and his precious, precious jewels? Thus his religion, his patriotism, his avarice, his affection, all concur to stimulate his enmity; and his personal hate thus reinforced overcomes for once his greed, and he grows generous in the prosecution of his aim. The only reason he will vouchsafe for taking the pound of flesh is, 'if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge' [3.1.53–4]; a reason all the more satisfactory to him, forasmuch as those to whom he gives it can neither allow it nor refute it: and until they can rail the seal from off his bond, all their railings are but a foretaste of the revenge he seeks. In his eagerness to taste that morsel sweeter to him than all the luxuries of Italy, his recent afflictions, the loss of his daughter, his ducats, his jewels, and even the precious ring given him by his departed wife, all fade from his mind. In his inexorable and imperturbable hardness at the trial there is something that makes the blood to tingle. It is the sublimity of malice. We feel that the yearnings of revenge have silenced all other cares and all other thoughts. In his rapture of hate the man has grown superhuman, and his eyes seem all aglow with preternatural malignity. Fearful, however, as is his passion, he comes not off without moving our pity. In the very act whereby he thinks to avenge his own and his brethren's wrongs, the national curse overtakes him. In standing up for the letter of the law against all the pleadings of mercy, he has strengthened his enemies' hands, and sharpened their weapons, against himself; and the terrible Jew sinks at last into the poor, pitiable, heart-broken Shylock.

The inward strain and wrenching of his nature, caused by the revulsion which comes so suddenly upon him, is all told in one brief sentence, which may well be quoted as an apt instance how Shakespeare reaches the heart by a few plain words, when another writer would most likely pummel the ears with a high-strung oration. When it turns out

that the Jew's only chance of life stands in the very mercy which he has but a moment before abjured; and when, as the condition of that mercy, he is required to become a Christian, and also to sign a deed conveying to his daughter and her husband all his remaining wealth; we have the following from him [Quotes 4.1.395–7].

Early in the play, when Shylock is bid forth to Bassanio's supper, and Launcelot urges him to go, because 'my young master doth expect your reproach,' Shylock replies, 'So do I his' [2.5.20–1]. Of course he expects that reproach through the bankruptcy of Antonio. This would seem to infer that Shylock has some hand in getting up the reports of Antonio's 'loss[es] at sea' [3.1.40]; which reports, at least some of them, turn out false in the end. Further than this, the Poet leaves us in the dark as to how those reports grew into being and gained belief. Did he mean to have it understood that the Jew exercised his cunning and malice in plotting and preparing them? It appears, at all events, that Shylock knew they were coming, before they came. Yet I suppose the natural impression from the play is, that he lent the ducats and took the bond, on a mere chance of coming at his wish. But he would hardly grasp so eagerly at a bare possibility of revenge, without using means to turn it into something more. This would mark him with much deeper lines of guilt. Why, then, did not Shakespeare bring the matter forward more prominently? Perhaps it was because the doing so would have made Shylock appear too steep a criminal for the degree of interest which his part was meant to carry in the play. In other words, the health of the drama as a work of comic art required his criminality to be kept in the background. He comes very near overshadowing the other characters too much, as it is. And Shylock's character is essentially tragic; there is none of the proper timber of comedy in him.

*The Merchant of Venice* is justly distinguished among Shakespeare's dramas, not only for the general felicity of the language, but also for the beauty of particular scenes and passages. For descriptive power, the opening scene of Antonio and his friends is not easily rivalled, and can hardly fail to live in the memory of any one having an eye for such things. Equally fine in its way is the scene of Tubal and Shylock, where the latter is so torn with the struggle of conflicting passions; his heart now sinking with grief at the account of his fugitive daughter's expenses, now leaping with malignant joy at the report of Antonio's losses. The trial-scene, with its tugging vicissitudes of passion, and its hush of terrible expectation, – now ringing with the Jew's sharp, spiteful snaps of malice, now made musical with Portia's strains of eloquence, now holy with Antonio's tender breathings of friendship, and dashed, from time to time, with Gratiano's fierce jets of wrath, and fiercer jets of mirth, – is hardly surpassed in tragic power anywhere; and as it forms the catastrophe proper, so it concentrates the interest of the whole play. Scarcely inferior in its kind is the night-scene of Lorenzo and Jessica, bathed as it is in love, moonlight, 'touches of sweet harmony' [5.1.57], and soul-lifting discourse, followed by the grave moral reflections of Portia, as she approaches her home, and sees its lights, and hears its music. The bringing in of this passage of ravishing lyrical sweetness, so replete with the most soothing and tranquillizing effect, close upon the intense dramatic excitement of the trial-scene, is such a transition as we shall hardly meet with but in Shakespeare, and aptly shows his unequalled mastery of the mind's capacities of delight. The affair of the rings, with the harmless perplexities growing out of it, is a well-managed device for letting the mind down from the tragic height whereon it lately

## Henry Norman Hudson

stood, to the merry conclusion which the play requires. Critics, indeed, may easily quarrel with this sportive after-piece; but it stands approved by the tribunal to which Criticism itself must bow, – the spontaneous feelings of such as are willing to be made cheerful and healthy, without beating their brains about the *how* and *wherefore*. . . .

I ought not to close without remarking what a wide diversity of materials this play reconciles and combines. One can hardly realize how many things are here brought together, they are ordered in such perfect concert and harmony. The greatness of the work is thus hidden in its fine proportions. In many of the Poet's dramas we are surprised at the great variety of character: here, besides this, we have a remarkable variety of plot. And, admirable as may be the skill displayed in the characters individually considered, the interweaving of so many several plots, without the least confusion or embarrassment, evinces a still higher mastership. For, many and various as are the forms and aspects of life here shown, they all emphatically live together, as if they all had but one vital circulation. (282–6, 288–9, 291–6)

## 15 James O. Halliwell-Phillipps, human rights and religious belief

1856

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From *The Works of William Shakespeare: The Text Formed from a New Collation of the Early Editions, to which are Added All the Original Novels and Tales on which the Plays are Founded, Copious Archaeological Annotations on Each Play, an Essay on the Formation of the Text, and a Life of the Poet* (16 vols., London, 1853–65). Volume V, 1856.

James Orchard Halliwell (1820–89) – later (in 1874) Halliwell-Phillipps – was the foremost Victorian discoverer and explicator of primary and secondary materials relating to Shakespeare. A prolific author, book collector, and dealer in manuscripts, he produced more than six hundred publications. The son of a London businessman, he was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge from where he was expelled, being accused of removing library materials. He completed his Cambridge education at Jesus College, and in 1839, before his nineteenth birthday, was elected a Fellow of both the Society of Antiquaries and of the Royal Society. His career included several controversies, notably a dispute concerning the course of literary studies with F. J. Furnivall (See No. 23) and the New Shakspeare Society. Halliwell-Phillipps was a firm advocate for Stratford-upon-Avon as the memorial for Shakespeare, purchasing New Place and promoting its library and museum. He wrote much on Shakespeare from 1841 on, moving from editorial to biographical topics. His *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare* went through five editions between 1881 and 1887. The present extract is from the introduction to *The Merchant of Venice* in his extensively annotated and well-illustrated *Works of William Shakespeare*, published in a limited edition of one hundred and fifty copies between 1853 and 1865.

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[In his ‘Introduction’ Halliwell-Phillipps presents and discusses the sources of *The Merchant of Venice*. He then moves to general reflections on the difficulties facing Shakespeare in its construction.]

In the composition of *The Merchant of Venice*, it was necessary for the author to accomplish the difficult task of constructing a work of the highest literary art out of the most discordant materials, comprised in two narratives each of which involved the greatest improbabilities, one of them, in its original form, even including the inconsistency of presuming that the utmost expansion of revenge and concentrated malignity could find a place in the heart of any individual, when it was unaccompanied with the

James O. Halliwell-Phillipps

slightest predisposing cause for its existence. The form taken by the revenge of Shylock is equally appalling with that assigned to the Jew in the older tale, but, in the comedy, the indignities and persecution with which he is assailed in every direction, and which are artistically impressed most deeply on the reader previously to the termination of the trial, present so vividly the extreme oppression he encounters on account of his creed, that our sympathies would have turned towards him, had the nature of his retaliation been less terrible. He is represented as a Jew, not in any degree as the type of an entire race, but because it was requisite, in carrying out the design of the play, to introduce a character belonging to a people towards whom the attribution of the most violent persecution would have been accepted by an audience as intelligible, and within the limits of high probability. Otherwise, the character of Shylock might have been assigned to an individual belonging to any creed; for most nations occasionally afford the spectacle of men of high intellectual vigour, uncontrolled by the restraining influence of religion, accepting in their own persons the office of avenger, and carrying out their vindictiveness in forms of their own invention. Shylock had been trampled upon until his desire for retaliation triumphed over his love for money, and resolved itself into that one feeling which it appears to have been the object of the poet to illustrate in the play. Shakespeare has almost imperceptibly so arranged the course of his arguments, that, while they appear to and do actually arise perfectly naturally out of his desire for revenge, they are made the medium of inculcating the liberal doctrine, that a man cannot justly be deprived of his rights on account of his religious belief. (289–90)

## 16 William Watkiss Lloyd, sympathetic liberality versus murderous avarice

1856

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From *The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare. The Text Carefully Revised with Notes by Samuel Weller Singer F. S. A. The Life of the Poet and Critical Essays on the Plays by William Watkiss Lloyd F. R. S. L., etc. etc.* (10 vols., London, 1856). Volume II.

William Watkiss Lloyd (1813–93), after attending Newcastle-under-Lyme grammar school in Staffordshire, entered a cousin's tobacco-producing business at the age of fifteen. He worked in the firm for thirty-six years, devoting his spare time to classical study, modern languages, and art and classical archaeology. He was a prolific author, his Shakespeare essays being contributed to the second edition of Samuel Singer's *Dramatic Works*. Lloyd's contributions were reprinted two years later as *Essays on the Life and Plays of Shakespeare*, from which this excerpt is taken.

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[After a detailed discussion of the play's sources, including the *Gesta Romanorum* and *Il Pecorone*, Lloyd discusses the play.]

From these and other sources, from observation and his own mind, Shakespeare bodied forth a conception of friendship, but deeper and more mutual than that produced by the winning manners of the universal favourite in the novel, and depicted the tastes, pursuits, and sensibilities that were compatible with mercantile pursuits, at any rate among the frequenters of the Rialto. . . .

Shakespeare has given emphasis to the alliance between Antonio and Bassanio, not merely by removing all secondary solicitations, but by giving depth and definition to the contrast of their characters, and moreover, by exhibiting the truth of the attachment at a time when that contrast was still further enhanced by the current of accidents. Portia, it is true, assumes that between dear friends 'There must be needs a like proportion / Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit' [3.4.14–15], and truly, no doubt, in respect of certain essentials, but it is precisely in the pair she adverts to, that we are shown to how great an extent, of two dear friends one may be unlike another, and how the proofs of attachment may be most absolute when this unlikeness is at its height. Perhaps we may suspect in the violences of Antonio towards Shylock, perhaps in some indications of imprudence in ['squandering adventures forth']<sup>1</sup> [1.3.20–1], a chord of sympathy with the vivacious and sanguine Bassanio. . . .

. . . Bassanio himself has need of and receives like indulgence for the faults which are his own belonging; by living at a more noble rate than faint means warranted he has

William Watkiss Lloyd

embarrassed himself with debts; he declares however that this is over, that his only concern is to satisfy all claims, and Antonio does not hesitate to recognize that he still stands 'within the eye of honour' [1.1.137], and to accept the sincerity with which he proposes to free all ultimately by means of a present addition to his obligations. In coarser terms, from a less favourable point of view, Bassanio has lived like a prodigal, run in debt with his friends, and now coolly proposes to his chief creditor to make a serious addition to his debt, on the speculation that it will give him a chance to pay all by that very precarious as well as undignified resort of making up to an heiress. How is it that in reading the play we never withdraw our sympathies from the hero of transactions that affect us in common life with the unpleasant associations of dissipation, imprudence, impudence and meanness? The reason, I apprehend, is partly because as I said before, we are reading a romance and we accept the compatibility of whatever phenomena the poet chooses to group in the moral as in the material world. Portia has faith that the lottery of the caskets will give her infallibly the husband who deserves her, and we are not disposed to check agreeable sympathy with the generous liberality, in mind and purse, of the Merchant of Venice by any mistrust, shabby it would seem to us of the desert of his friends or the co-operation of natural chances with his free intentions. Character gives confidence; truth is bondsman for troth. We believe Bassanio on the same ground that Antonio does; we approve of the consent of Antonio on the same grounds that made Bassanio think it not wrong to ask it. The character of an act or a proceeding founds at last on the motive, and the motive is the man, and poetry and romance are allowed to invent perfections of humanity that may yet be unattainable, and thus in a poetic drama we admire and sympathize with a debt-burdened suitor to a wealthy lady, because there is no moral impossibility in the nature of things, of such a suit, even when the contingencies of dowry are recognized, being in truth unsordid – though, practically speaking, it will usually be a fool who allows himself, or herself, to think it can be otherwise.

In brief, we look on with unhesitating, unalarmed confidence in the power of a pure spirit of unselfishness to pass untainted through the very dens and haunts of selfishness, and to vindicate its purity in a transaction which only selfishness makes wrong. Soundness at heart in a recipient makes imprudence prudent, and our faith is made happy when Bassanio, who has nothing either to give or hazard, chooses the casket of least promising exterior, which neither flatters the self-glory, the noble infirmity of Morocco, of being an object of envy to mankind, nor appeals to the self-complacency, that betrayed the Prince of Arragon, by referring the chooser to the measure of his deserts; but repelling rather than inviting demands the resolution of self-sacrifice – 'Who chooses me must give and hazard all he hath' [2.7.9]. Even in setting forth his project to Antonio, – 'In Belmont is a lady richly left' – the leading tone of his description makes her wealth but one accessory of her attractions, and, as a lover should, he passes on with more fervour to observe – 'and she is fair,' and yet again to the crowning praise which no lover of Portia could overlook and be worthy – 'and fairer than that word, of wondrous virtues' [1.1.161–3].

Hence we confide most absolutely in the ingenuousness of Bassanio, and if he appears to engage his friend somewhat inconsiderately to a bond, or even to the merest transaction with Shylock, we are prepared to ascribe this to the eagerness of a lover who has

such cause to love as encouragement from Portia. His is a spirit of that rare stamp which fortunate persons even now meet with in the world, to conciliate good will, to attract kindness, and excite among those around a very rivalry of liberalities and good offices, and yet not to grow selfish, unsympathetic and heartlessly incapable of conceiving, much less of returning the affection it is proper to them to inspire. He is struck to the heart when he reads the sadly tender letter of his benefactor announcing his peril, and so clearly do the operations of his spirit look through his outward man that Portia not only notes the stages of his agitation but reads at once the very class and title of his trouble [Quotes 3.2.243–9]. She proposes his instant departure even on his marriage morning, and he hurries away with such anxiety that we perceive that he is not merely content with but grateful for the permission. Antonio taking leave of him as the moment of forfeiture seems to be arrived alludes to his wife; at this moment his two ruling affections, friendship and love, meet in conflict, and we cannot be surprised under the circumstances of the moment and with the thought that his happy days were purchased at such a price, he should break forth with the declaration that to rescue his friend he would sacrifice life, wife and all the world. The touch is true to nature and was not to be avoided . . . and we shall mistake greatly if we suppose it was introduced simply to provoke a laugh out of harmony with the main purpose of the play then going forward. Both Portia and Nerissa put away the interjections more sensibly, and we may observe that neither of them in the last Act – not even Nerissa, who is reminiscent of the ‘scrubbed boy’ [5.1.162], takes the pains to remember or advert to the seemingly unconjugal wishes of ransom at their expense. For the rest the piquant interruption gives lively force to the situation, and prepares for the change of tone in the scene in the contemptuous confounding of the baffled Jew.

Writers of fiction have never been backward in exhibiting a picture of errors of character in the direction of excessive cheerfulness, liberality, sociability and spirit, as contrasted with the less engaging type of saturnine, morose, unfeeling, or sneaking misdeeds and short comings. Selfishness, however, is ultimately the root of vice of every class, and the question is merely relative – and this is too often forgotten, at what point the dashing becomes as mean as the crawling sinner. Hence too frequently the high-spirited hero is as contemptible as his mean-spirited antagonist, or we are called on to assent to combinations of amiability and mischievousness that revolt the sense. It is of course the privilege of romance to strain all possibilities to the uttermost when the effect demands it; still there are gradations of dignity in the romantic ideal, and those forms are the most dignified that exhibit an elevated type of mental qualifications and moral constitutions, faulty it may be and defective, but clearly possessed of such an internal germ of healthiness and vitality as to warrant reliance on self-control within certain limits, and on ultimate self-recovery. These are conditions of the character of Bassanio, and it is on these grounds that we admit and approve Antonio in admitting, that he still stands within the eye of honour, that his errors have been external to the nobler parts of his nature, and that liberal reliance on these in defiance of appearances will ultimately justify itself. That there should be uncertainty how far these grounds of reliance exist is one of the most painful difficulties of life, and hence the delightfulness of a fiction that flatters us with the possibility that it is not insuperable but may yield to calm sagacity, if not to simple sympathy of souls. All the conditions however are present in Antonio and



Bassanio, and in their mutual confidence we see honourable disposition discerned amidst imprudent expense, and warm affection below a staid if not habitually depressed demeanour.

The power however of distinguishing the essential from the accidental in action, intention and character, is incomplete unless it can not only discern the valuable below unpromising hull and binding, but also detect the mischievous that lurks behind alluring shows. In this respect Antonio appears less perfect even with a warning. Shylock exhibits the fault in its most besotted form when with the tenacity of the written letter so fatal to his race, he quotes a Scriptural precedent for the blessing of embezzlement – of thrift gained not actually but certainly potentially by theft. Here Antonio can speak distinctly enough [Quotes 1.3.91–5]. And yet the moment after, melted by a profession of kindness from the same Jew, he can say [Quotes 1.3.177–8]. The thoughtful rejoinder of Bassanio marks apprehension – ‘I like not fair terms and a villain’s mind’ [1.3.179]; and this is the very cautiousness that besteads him in his venture on the caskets, when he comments on the deceptiveness of ornament [Quotes 3.2.100–01].

The aptest recrimination does not justify villainy, and a sound conclusion is not impugned by the justest objections to the grounds it is incautiously rested on, or the process by which it is illogically deduced. Shylock might well smile at Antonio’s reply to his citation of the frauds of Rachel and her son, but as long as neither was capable of rising to a true apprehension of the premises, at least it was better – and this has been the history of the development of Judaism into its Christian manifestation, to misinterpret the text to accommodate it to a just and sympathetic conclusion, than to hold hard by its strictness, to whatever injustice and selfish restriction it conducts. The usury of Shylock is not so vile a sin as the slave-trading of Antonio, but who can doubt that Antonio, with his principles and disposition, will sooner arrive at a sense of the wrong, though textual authorities are abundant to aid and sustain the injury in its most definite terms, than Shylock, with only an analogy to bear him out, will give up his avarice and fraudulent exaction.

In the case of Bassanio, as we have seen and said, the mind glides pretty easily over extravagance by confidence in his nature and motives, but many have been staggered, by what is only another enunciation of the same principle, in the flight of Jessica with her father’s ducats and jewels. A chief difficulty has arisen from the maudlin sentimentality that has been bestowed on the doings of the murderous Jew, and this involves a statement of the quarrel between him and Antonio [Quotes 3.2.81–2] and Shylock is ready to impute his disgraces to antipathy to his race and envy of his gains, but the poet leaves us in no uncertainty that his gains were those of a usurer, in the sense which, under any dispensation of political economy, involves at least dishonesty, dishonour, cruelty, and fraud. The arts by which a victim is enmeshed and ruined by a usurer are even now not obsolete, and, under defective laws, might have flourished tenfold. Antonio declines interest from a friend, on the reasonable ground to one so sensitive of friendship, of generosity; otherwise his objection simply lies to the taking or giving of excess, and the main offence he had given, even beyond personal insult, was the timely aid that enabled the debtors of Shylock to clear themselves from his claims. Shylock was played by Burbadge, in Shakespeare’s time, with the outward signs of hatefulness, a long nose and red beard; and these, with the notoriety of his practices, and the contempt of

Antonio, sufficiently marked the character from the beginning. The impression is enforced by glimpses of his domestic life; his very servant declares him a 'devil incarnation' [2.2.27–8], he makes his house a hell to his daughter, he joins a social feast to feed on the prodigal Christian, gloats over the idea that Launcelot's appetite will hasten his ruin, and forced to leave his daughter in charge of his house, relies for her attention on the hint, 'perhaps I may return immediately'. He goes with the words on his lips [Quotes 2.5.51–2, 54] in mistaken preference of material to moral securities, at the very moment that both were about to fail him.

The Jew is thus the very impersonation of avarice, meanness, and cruelty, as Antonio of generous and sympathetic liberality, and the hellish intention of his treacherous bond is already patent. The same principle which Shakespeare sanctions in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, of the limitable nature of filial subordination, here applies with tenfold force; the pretty and enamoured Jessica, whatever may be the restrictedness of the wisdom her lover gives her credit for, is ashamed and justly of being her father's child, and a daughter of his blood is revolted at his manners. Elopement in such a case, it must be said, is a virtue; and the elation at exchanging freedom for degraded oppression, explains and excuses the dry eyes – nay, laughing lips, with which she departs. If we care to apologize for the casket she carried off, we may say she helped herself perhaps not exorbitantly to her dowry; but we shall do better to mark the incident as the last seal of the truth worth laying to heart, how utterly unkindness, cruelty, sordidness, and distrust can at last erase the faintest tracks of natural duty and affection, in hearts that by nature are disposed to be their hallowed home.

Launcelot Gobbo's questioning of the fiend and his conscience as to running from his master the Jew, and the exhibition of his very peculiar but not in reality unkind pranks with his father, bring before the mind, in an immediately preceding scene, all the ideas and considerations that we have to deal with, when the relation between Jessica and her father is brought before us.

The trespass of Jessica against the letter of the law of filial duty is justified, no less than Bassanio's infringement of the fair requirements of friendliness by essential rectitude and good faith, the same principle that guides the true lover to the happy decipherment of the riddle of the caskets. The grand incident of the forfeiture of the bond and its cancelment by the simple exhibition of the spirit of the law and the essence of justice solving a difficulty at once that seemed inextricable when only the letter was regarded, is thus prepared and led up to; while in the last, the epilogue act, the bewilderment of the missing and restored rings is a comic parody of the preceding action; again an engagement is broken, a bond is forfeit, and yet the spirit of the original compact is not infringed, and gay explanation reunites and reconciles all.

The plea of the Jew, in exacting forfeiture of the bond, is the epitome of the very history and genius of Judaism regarded from its most unfavourable side, bigoted reliance on the fulfilment of precept by the letter, and disregard of spirit and purpose, and obstinate claim of privilege by interpretation of terms in covenant or bond, to the neglect of the foregone intention of the bond, in subjection to which alone it can be reasonably valid. All are familiar with the spirit of Pharisaism to claim privilege by natural descent from the favoured Abraham, and to disallow in others the value of the very qualities to which the favour of Abraham was ascribed; to cleanse the outside of the

## William Watkiss Lloyd

platter and to be scrupulous of days and meats, but take little thought of the impurities of the heart. Those only, however, can have full conception of the degradation of the human mind by slavery to written text, who have had some glimpses of the Rabbinical literature that is a monument of a tyranny, in comparison with which Egyptian bondage was enfranchisement. The iron of this slavery has entered into the very soul of Shylock, and his appeal to his bond, as identified with justice, embodies the very soul and being of ceremonialism. The bond is signed, is sealed, is admitted, and he rests upon it as on a rock; borne out by this he fears no judgment, as doing no wrong. The word of law is to him sanctity, and he has no sense of the ends for which law was framed. So he has an oath in heaven, he has sworn by the sacred Sabbath; bonds and obligations again invalid, by incongruity of purport, with all the ends for which oaths are sacred. Such oaths are air, such bonds are waste paper; even the very rights of nature and paternity are dissolved by cruelty and malice, and no amount of wealth can purchase the happiness or power of which the moral conditions are forfeit; the ark of his trust and veneration is, like the gilded casket, but a painted sepulchre, and within are dead men's bones.

Portia appears to owe her name to the sympathetic alacrity with which, like the wife of Brutus, she advances her claim to share whatever agitates her husband's mind [Quotes 3.2.247-9].

In some respects, this character has always appeared to me the most wonderful of all Shakespeare's feminine creations. The part she was to play in the scene of the trial gave the leading condition of her character, the possession of the highest intellectual endowments that are compatible in woman, with the age and the susceptibilities for tender and romantic love. The power of the poet, however, is less wonderful, even in the wondrous trial scene, than in the exhibition of the blending of the logical and intellectual element in the very web of rapture and passion, when Bassanio stands before the caskets. A spirit of inference, a sequence of deduction, run through the very confusion of her agitated hopes, and govern and correct by apprehensive standards the comparisons that crowd upon her imagination. In her meet and adjust themselves all the perfections of all the other less perfect characters of the play. She is as sympathetic as Antonio, but, with equal abhorrence of cruelty, she avoids an outbreak of vituperation against the Jew, and zealously gives him every chance of retiring, appealing first to the finer chords of humanity and, when those fail to respond, to the coarser motives of lucre; and when the Duke, with precipitateness which he has afterwards to qualify, remits part of the fine, she reserves the rights of Antonio, 'Ay for the state, not for Antonio' [4.1.374], not merely by way of sustaining her assumed character of legal accuracy, but to allow him the opportunity, which he only employs when she still more directly furnishes him the cue, to render some proportion of mercy. Nay, I may here add, in her first declaration of the consequences of shedding a drop of Christian blood, she only names the forfeiture of lands and goods. Whenever again the play is worthily represented, I believe that, during the intermediate speeches, the changing demeanour of Shylock would give reason to apprehend that, as he had already subjected avarice to revenge, he would even have risked all to glut his cruel purpose, and that it is therefore that Portia now adds other consequences, 'thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate' [4.1.332], and so pursues his sentence to the end. In the novel the Jew's defeat turns entirely upon the matter of the bloodshedding, which in itself is little better than a

quibble; Shakespeare wisely retained and put this first to degrade the literal principle of the Jew to the uttermost, by exhibiting him foiled at the weapons of his own cunning, when wielded with simplicity and straightforwardness; but the dignity of the moral, which is that of Portia's character, required and supplied the more substantial reference to criminality of murderous intent.

In the house, servants, and magnificence of Portia, we cannot but recognize the same appreciation of noble state that adorns rather than disgraces Bassanio, but in her it is associated with all the self-control and steadfastness of manage and husbandry. The intermediate authority of Lorenzo and Jessica, whom she leaves in charge without according them the confidence of her proceedings, which from their slighter characters was not called for, displays these habits of administration. The youthful substitutes have no dignity to conserve in a colloquy with Launcelot Gobbo, who certainly attends at last to their instructions to cause dinner to be served, but after full assertions of his free will by bantering misconstructions. The scene is a parody of that which precedes, in which Portia's commission to Balthazar is delivered in terms that are a model of injunction, strict and urgent, but cheerful withal, and engaging zealous obedience, and contrasting with her equally appropriate tone to Lorenzo and Jessica on the one hand and on the other to the confidential companion Nerissa.

The moonlight scene of Jessica and Lorenzo follows after the trial at Venice, with soothing and romantic sweetness bringing back the tone of the play to harmony with the associations of Belmont. It is worth giving a note to the hints the act contains of the stage management of what is so apt to be tedious, a long darkened scene. In the first speech we have 'The moon shines bright' [5.1.1], and again, 'How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon yon bank' [5.1.54], but by the time that Portia enters to converse for some time in front, unobserved by Lorenzo and his wife, the moon is overcast. . . .

When Bassanio approaches, however, the cloud again withdraws [Quotes 5.1.124–6]; and Bassanio accordingly, unlike Lorenzo shortly before, recognizes Portia by sight, and not by voice alone, and the stage remains fully moonlit to the end.

Portia has made good a claim abundantly to a poetical and imaginative element in her character, but it is the fact that it is subordinated that gives a stateliness to her being, when placed in opposition to such creatures of instinct rather than impulse, and sentiment rather than imagination, as her housekeepers Lorenzo and Jessica, and in the words of her own characteristic reflection [Quotes 5.1.93–7].

The impressibility of Jessica appears in her observing, 'I am never merry when I hear sweet music' [5.1.69], and to make an ungallant use of her husband's reply, we may observe that sensibility in this form is no more than is shared by a race of youthful and unhandled colts; how much he is misled by the tendency of his nature in the not very obvious syllogism, that a man whom music, that affects everything, however hard, stockish, and full of rage, does not affect, is not to be trusted, appears from the effect of music on the approaching Portia. She does not recognize, until advertised by Nerissa, her own music of the house, and then it suggests the moralization [Quotes 5.1.100–6]. (541–3, 545–6)

## 17 Henrietta Palmer, in praise of Portia

1859

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From *The Stratford Gallery; or the Shakespeare Sisterhood: Comparing Forty-Five Ideal Portraits* (New York, 1859).

Henrietta Lee Palmer (1834–1908) was born and educated in Maryland. In 1855 she married John Williamson Palmer, war correspondent for the *New York Tribune*. A frequent contributor to East Coast journals and papers, she also published a version of Molière's *Tartuffe*. According to Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts in *Women Reading Shakespeare 1600–1900* (Manchester, 1997), '*The Stratford Gallery* is an early American example of a book devoted entirely to character studies of Shakespeare's women.' (p. 110). Palmer judges Shakespeare's women, she writes in her Preface, 'not with sophisticated research or oracular criticism, but simply, naturally, sympathetically, as she may regard her fellow-women whom she meets from day to day' (*ibid.*). The extract is taken from that reproduced in Thompson and Roberts, pp. 112–13.

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[Palmer gives scene-by-scene plot summaries of individual plays. These are followed by character analysis of the heroine.]

Portia is distinguished by a patrician elegance of person and presence, which is so innately her own that it depends but little for its effect on the aristocratic pretension of her surroundings. Although far from popular – her reputation for extraordinary mental endowments being sufficient to constitute a formidable obstacle to public favor – she is one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's women. Her intellectual quality is indeed marked; but that can never render a woman less lovable, when, as in Portia's case, it is subordinate to the affections. Schlegel,<sup>[1]</sup> regarding her from a purely critical point of view, pronounces her 'clever;' and although Mrs. Jameson protests against the application of so dubious an epithet to this 'heavenly compound of talent, feeling, wisdom, beauty, and gentleness,'<sup>[2]</sup> we must confess that to us it seems well chosen. 'Clever' does not, indeed, imply the possession of illustrious powers; but it does signify that nice 'dexterity in the adaptation of certain faculties to a certain end or aim' which is eminently graceful and feminine, and exactly describes the mental characteristics of Portia, as most conspicuously displayed in the trial scene, wherein her success is achieved, not by the exercise of inherent wisdom, or an educated judgement, but by the merely clever discovery of a legal quibble. That the word has fallen into disrepute, from unworthy associations, should not impair its legitimate value. True, it does 'suggest the idea of

*in praise of Portia, 1859*

something we should distrust and shrink from, if not allied to a higher nature;' [*ibid.*], but we contend that, in Portia, cleverness is allied to a higher nature – to qualities which are, indeed, scarcely less perfect than her fair panegyrist has portrayed them – in a woman whose 'plenteous wit' [*Othello*, 4.1.190] and excelling accomplishments are more than equalled by her tenderness, her magnanimity, her graceful dignity, and her lofty honor. (112–13)

## 18 Friedrich Kreyssig, 'a just estimate of things'

1862

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From *Vorlesungen über Shakespeare, seine Zeit und seine Werke*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1862), Volume 3, translated by Rev. Dr. Furness in *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice*, ed. H. H. Furness (Philadelphia, 1888).

In his Shakespeare lectures the German literary critic Friedrich Kreyssig (1818–79), unlike Hermann Ulrici [No. 11] and G. G. Gervinus [No. 20], was less concerned with moral ideas or friendship than with plot, complexity of character, and aesthetic beauty. In addition to his three-volume analysis of Shakespeare and his times, Kreyssig compiled an influential German anthology of Shakespeare (Leipzig, 1864).

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[Kreyssig begins by considering Shakespeare's sources and paraphrases the action before focusing on the characters themselves.]

At the conclusion of Bassanio's choice the finely balanced character of Portia is fully shown in her exquisite address to her lover. Shakespeare here portrays the ideal woman, made for practical life, for lasting happiness, material and spiritual. She is neither the ethereal original of a higher, lost humanity, nor the alluring, deceitful form behind which a malignant fate lurks for its victim. Equally removed from the lofty beauty of a Urania and from the treacherous charm of a Pandora, Portia dwells in the happy medium, where spiritual and sensuous life unite in health, strength, and beauty. Juliet's enthusiastic heroism would be foreign to her. We may imagine that she would have cut short the Balcony Scene with some sharp witticism, unless, perhaps, she would have declined altogether to enjoy the night air except in congenial company. Wherein an Othello was lacking she would very soon have discovered, and Cassio might have relied upon a calm hearing. Even Shakespeare's choice heroes, Henry and Percy, would have had to mend their manners somewhat to stand before her refined taste. She is the personification of the fact that the finest ornament of social and domestic life, and its nobler moral well-being, are in the hands of woman, as it is hers, when she is not equal to that office, to destroy its bloom irrevocably. Portia tells the secret of woman's true, happy influence in the marriage state when she, the prudent, the cultivated, the much-wooded, gives herself up to the fortunate suitor with these words; 'but the full sum of me / Is sum of nothing, which to term in gross, / Is an unlessoned girl' [3.2.157–9]. And these words immediately find their full confirmation. Far removed from the false demand for exclusive devotion, her love keeps open eye and ear for duty, even though

its summons should come at the most unseasonable hour. Her whole behaviour is a protest against that comfortless idea of domestic virtue which sacrifices the respectability of husband and father, according to the degree of selfishness with which it postpones the claims of friendship and fatherland to the only business of increasing the *res familiaris*. Not for a moment does she hold back the husband she has just won from the duty he owes to his friend. She does even more. Exalted above all trivial considerations by the gravity of the occasion, she ventures to test her woman's wit in this deadly crisis. In her noble speech upon the blessedness of mercy the earnestness and tenderness of her woman's nature are profoundly impressive. But with her sound, practical sense she does not expect, by this poesy, to gain the victory in the hard world. As wise and keen as she is tender-hearted, she does not hesitate to fight the foe with his own weapons. And then, – surest sign of a sound understanding, – in the jubilee of success all excitement is toned down to the quiet grace of a genial, arch humour. A due sense of proportion is the groundwork of her character. This appears most emphatically in the conversation with Nerissa, in which, without any apparent necessity for it, Shakespeare engages her as she returns home from her successful enterprise: 'Nothing is good, I see, without respect' [5.1.99]. And again: 'How many things by season season'd are / To their right praise and true perfection!' [5.1.107–8] This is a way of thinking essential to a healthy view of practical life. It completes here one of the most beautiful pictures of womanhood which the Poet has created, not exactly for its poetical and ideal charm, but for its true and harmonious development. [Discourses on women in literature.]

In Lorenzo and Jessica we descend a step still lower. Here the humour breaks out into reckless excess. The whole relation between them could not but have appeared immoral and repulsive, if the Poet had not reconciled us to it aesthetically by two equally effective means which justify to our feelings the happy ending. First of all, this hot love, athirst only for pleasure, certainly violates the law. But it violates it by disregarding a blood-relationship which stands out in sharp contrast to the majesty of the law; Jessica has good reasons for feeling ashamed of being her father's child, and for calling herself a daughter of his blood, not of his heart. Her father's house has been a hell to her; later on, it becomes evident enough that she was a mere addition to the old man's money and wealth, perhaps only a burdensome addition. So, without scruple, she takes from that hell the stones with which to pave the way to her heaven. Only one trait has she inherited from her forefather, Jacob – practical sense. She knows excellently well that one cannot live on love alone, and she has evidently not been brought up to practise any extraordinary generosity. It is not without significance that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Lorenzo, the bold child of fortune and pleasure, that fine praise of music, that sweet language of the heart, the mysterious tie binding together the world of thought and the world of feeling. Thus the haughty levity of the cavalier receives the consecration of Beauty, and the success which circumstances accord to his bold adventure is made poetically possible, although it is strictly without moral grounds. [Reflects on beauty.]

*The Merchant of Venice*, in our opinion, was written neither to glorify friendship, nor to condemn the usurer, nor, finally to represent any moral idea, rich and manifold as are the moral allusions which the thoughtful reader carries away with him, together with the aesthetic enjoyment of this work of Art. The essential and definite aspect of life here



## Friedrich Kreyssig

illustrated admonishes us that lasting success, sure, practical results can be secured only by a just estimate of things, by prudent use and calm endurance of given circumstances, equally far removed from violent resistance and cowardly concession. Strong feeling and clear, good sense hold the scales in the pervading character of the whole Drama; fortune helps the honest in so far as they boldly and wisely woo its favour; but rigid Idealism, although infinitely more amiable and estimable, shows itself as scarcely less dangerous than hard-hearted selfishness. (367, 374, 381)

## 19 Charles Cowden Clarke, Shakespeare's love of justice

1863

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From *Shakespeare – Characters; Chiefly Those Subordinate* (London, 1863).

Charles Cowden Clarke (1787–1877) grew up in Enfield, Middlesex where his father was a schoolmaster. His circle of friends included Keats, Charles and Mary Lamb, Shelley, Hazlitt, and Coleridge. In 1828 Clarke married Mary Victoria Novello, and they collaborated on several books and editions, including *Cassell's Illustrated Shakespeare* (London, 1864–8), *Recollections of Writers* (London, 1878), and *The Shakespeare Key* (London, 1879). Clarke achieved popularity with his lectures on Shakespeare, some of which are reprinted in his *Shakespeare – Characters; Chiefly Those Subordinate*, which consists of twenty chapters each devoted to a single play. The work reflects his 'particular obligation to champion the neglected', and his aim of redressing the balance concerning what he took to be a critical neglect of 'subordinate characters'. It is also replete with a sense of 'Victorian self-satisfaction'.<sup>1</sup> His chapter on *The Merchant of Venice*, in addition to Portia and Shylock, discusses Nerissa, Gratiano, Launcelot, and Jessica.

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[From Chapter XVI, on the animosity towards Jews in Shakespeare's age.]

This is strong 'lex talionis,' or tooth-for-tooth argument; and strong extenuation for that age; ay, and even for our own very Christian age.

But who shall say that this very play has not been instrumental in breaking down the barriers and mounds of intolerance and persecution for faith's sake? This noble production has, I believe, among other philosophical appeals, tended to assuage the fury of class and party prejudice, and persecution. Its course through those deep and savage ravines, wherein the stream of class-opinion was confined, and amid which it brawled and raved, tearing and wasting all before it, is gradually becoming diverted; and if it still exist, (which, alas! we all can sadly answer,) it has, nevertheless, mainly expended its force, and is slowly spreading in an inert ooze over the social champaign. The age of Diabolism is passing away; and a spirit of bearing and forbearing – the 'doing unto others as we would be done by' – is becoming recognised and largely debated; and only let a question be brought to the debating point, its settlement is at no very remote distance. It is now the few only who hold fast by the integrity of the 'right of might;' and the 'might' is changing with the many into a calm principle of equitable adjustment.

So much is the leading principle of Christianity doing for us; gradually, but as surely as the progress of matter: and so much, in the pure spirit of its principle, did our

Charles Cowden Clarke

Shakespeare anticipate and provide nearly three centuries ago. [Provides examples of 'progress'.]

Having thus briefly introduced the subject of the play, and alluded to its most important character; before turning to those of second and third rank, I would say a few words on behalf of Portia; and because she has been strangely accused of 'pedantry,' the conceit of learning, the antipodes of modesty; and because I think I can prove that there is hardly one of the poet's female impersonations more richly endowed with the crowning feminine attribute, 'modesty,' than this very lovely specimen of a womanly woman. [Disagrees with Hazlitt's view of Portia as 'not a very great favourite with us' (see No. 5).]

Now,

Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal'd by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? (3.1.59–66)

But, after all, who does not sympathise with Shylock? Who, with the most ordinary notions of right and wrong, derives any gratification from the merchant Antonio's being brought off by a quirk of law, and that law an unjust one, which decreed the demolition of the Jew's whole wealth and estate? Shakespeare has made out a strong case for Shylock, – startling, indeed, it must have been to the commonalty in his time. Shylock says the finest things in the play, and he has the advantage in the argument throughout. If the notion of revenge *be* justifiable, (and his own moral code, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' bear him out,) he has all the odds against his adversaries.

How the lady of Belmont comes to be thus versed in a subject not usual for women to study, the dramatist has accounted for by her connexion and consultation with her kinsman the 'learned Doctor Bellario'. . . . And Portia's knowledge not only makes her own happiness, for she is one of the very happiest, the cheerfullest, the most pleasant-spirited of all Shakespeare's women, but it helps to form the happiness of her friends. By her knowledge of law, by her courage in using that knowledge at the right moment, by her intelligence, by her ready wit and presence of mind, she is enabled to save the life of her husband's dearest friend. [Discusses various attitudes towards women.]

Had Portia of Belmont known only how to 'shine in a sick-room,' and to shrink from being talked of, she would never have been able to preserve a human life by her knowledge and eloquence, or to use these qualifications when the emergency needed their public display. Shakespeare knew that women might be made available for greater ornament and utility than mixing effervescent draughts in a sick-room, and sitting in company as dumb as the candelabra on the sideboard. Behold, in his mind, how modest is Portia's behaviour in her own domestic circle. She is the well-bred lady, – accustomed to command, to rank and station, and to dispose of her household, her wealth, her time, herself, as best seems to her; but she bears her faculties meekly, and is dignified, without

pride or haughtiness. Her habit of speech is perceptibly un-vain, even in her casual words of course. . . .

For still more pointed examples of the perfectly womanly modesty of Portia, note the speech she makes to Bassanio, when he is about to make the trial of the caskets [Quotes 3.2.1–11].

This is the bashfulness of a new-born passion, struggling equally to express itself and to restrain the too-bold betrayal of its strength. And the speech she makes to him, when he has rightly chosen the casket, modestly tendering herself to his acceptance, is surely the very poetry of prodigality in diffidence [Quotes 3.2.149–65].

Is there either 'affectation' or 'pedantry' in that speech? Is it not rather the exaggerated timidity and self-doubt that spring from the heart's dread of being less than worthy of its chosen object; and which, in its eagerness to become so, commits itself and its conscious imperfections to the loving guidance of the superiority it sincerely acknowledges? Is it like either a vain or a selfish woman, (and 'pedantry' and 'affectation' imply both vanity and egoism,) Portia's readiness to part with her husband, and to yield his society – even in their bridal hour – at the demand of friendship? When Antonio's letter is read aloud, announcing his disastrous fortune, and intimating how true a comfort the presence of his friend, Bassanio, would afford, she exclaims warmly, and without a moment's debating, 'Oh! love, despatch all business and begone!' [3.2.321]. When she sees him turn pale, on the first perusal of the letter, her words prove her affectionate observance, – all unlike the self-contemplativeness and perpetual self-absorption which confirm the pedantic or the affected woman; but rather the modesty of wifely affection, which claims to share at least the griefs in the lot of him she loves.

One more noble example must in full justice be quoted. It is where Lorenzo applauds her for bearing the absence of her newly-wedded lord for the sake of the friend to whom he has hastened. She replies [Quotes 3.4.10–23].

There is exquisite subtlety and refinement of modesty in this passage. There is the delicacy of a mind that dreads even to disclaim merit lest it seem to imply that there exists merit to be disclaimed; and there is the sensitiveness of a profound love, which feels it a kind of egoism to laud that being who is but another self. The fact that this speech is put into the mouth of a new-married bride, a yet maiden wife, enhances tenfold its loveliness of modesty.

But Hazlitt, as if to award some merit to Portia, magnanimously acknowledges that 'the speech about Mercy is very well.' Upon my life it is, indeed! 'But,' he then adds, 'there are a thousand finer in Shakespeare.'<sup>[2]</sup> I can only say, I rejoice in *such* a confirmation of our poet's intellectual supremacy from *such* a judge! Only think of there being a 'thousand finer speeches' than this from one brain [Quotes 5.1.180–93]. . . .

There is a class of my own sex who never fail to manifest an uneasiness, if not a jealousy, when they perceive a woman verging towards the manly prerogative; and with such, the part that Shakespeare has assigned to Portia in the trial-scene would induce this prejudice against her. All that we can say is, the poet himself appears not to have apprehended female usurpation where love and esteem constitute the principle of either party; and that he intended these to be the rule of Portia's conduct seems unequivocal.

To sum up her mental and moral accomplishments, the scrutiniser into her course of conduct will allow that she is at once grave, sedate, witty, social, humorous, cheerful,

(and consequently, of course, amiable in every sense;) that she is modest, mentally and socially, bounteous to prodigality; and, to crown all, that she is a dutiful and ardently affectionate wife. All and every of these qualities adorn the character of Portia, and these go to accomplish a perfect woman; and these qualities being acknowledged, it is hoped that she is absolved from the charge of either 'affectation' or 'pedantry.'

Nerissa is a fitting attendant-gentlewoman to Portia. She is lively, intelligent, and ever prompt to enter into the spirit of a plot, a disguise, or a playful equivocal, with her bridegroom-husband. . . . Of Madam Nerissa, however, be it rather more than surmised from indications given, that she is one of that clan who will keep her husband trotting, partly from legitimate and sex-honoured exaction, and partly, perhaps, from liveliness of disposition; and, also, because that he, being a good-natured fellow, will evidently spoil her: and then let us hope he may not have his head tattooed.

That husband, Gratiano, is a most delightful and most natural character. He is one of those useful men in society who will keep up the ball of mirth and good-humour, simply by his own mercurial temperament and agreeable rattle; for he is like a babbling woodside brook, seen through at once, and presenting every ripple of its surface to the sunbeams of good-fellowship. If a pic-nic were proposed, Gratiano would be the man for the commissariat department: and the wines shall be unimpeachable in quantity as well as quality; the ladies shall lack no squire of dames, and the men no stimulus to keep their gallantry from rusting. And, what is better than all, if a friend be in adversity, Gratiano will champion him with good words and deeds, if not with the most sagacious counsel. He would, no doubt, talk a man off his legs; and, therefore, Shakespeare has brought him as a relief against the two grave men, Antonio and Bassanio . . . Shakespeare has made the best apology for the Merchant and his friend; but his own love of cheerfulness with good temper could not fail to throw liberally into Gratiano's scale, and he has nowhere produced a better defence of natural vivacity. Moreover, he has not made Gratiano selfishly boisterous – indulging his own feelings only: he first manifests a solicitude for Antonio's lowness of spirits, and then he rallies him. These are the small and delicate lights thrown into his characters that render them exhaustless as studies, and give us that indefinable, rather, perhaps, that unrecognised and unconscious interest in all they say and do, and which, to the same extent, appears to be the almost undivided prerogative of Shakespeare alone. . . .

Launcelot, the clown, tells Jessica that she 'cannot be the Jew's / Daughter' [3.5.12–13]: <sup>[3]</sup> but, I fear me, Jessica has a worse taint in her blood than Launcelot's imputation would infer; for she robbed her own kindred to enrich the stranger; the directly reverse action, and the natural action, too, of all her tribe; and which, I confess, gives the pretty little Jewess no more than a skin-deep interest with me. To her personal liberty Jessica possessed the chartered right of all nature; to the appropriation of her father's wealth – for Christian behoof – she had not even an ancestral excuse, for the Jews '*borrowed*' of the Egyptians. Her conduct and tone of speech, too, at the time she is purloining the jewels – 'Here, catch this casket, it is worth the pains' [2.6.34], and 'I will [. . .] gild myself / with some more ducats, and be with you straight' [2.6.49–50] – all tallies with her general want of sentiment and delicate feeling. Moreover, Shakespeare has not redeemed her character by putting into her mouth even one little word of regret at leaving her old and forlorn parent, – an unusual thing with him, – but which is so

pointed as to appear a provision on his part to preserve the consistency of her character. The Christians have stripped him bare to the pitiless world; they have taken from him 'the prop that did sustain his house' [4.1.375–6],<sup>[4]</sup> and to the bitter trial of his child's desertion, is added the intelligence, that *she gave her mother's ring for a monkey!* He exclaims at the news, 'Thou torturest me, Tubal; / it was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a / Bachelor,' adding, with a fine Hebraism, 'I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys!' [3.1.120–3] – O consistent Shakespeare! this was not the girl to be touched with remorse at her unfilial conduct. Squanderers and gamblers have no sense of justice; (for she was a gambler, too;) they are always selfish. Truly, the poor Jew's punishment, like Cain's, was 'greater than he could bear.' I have no desire to hypercriticise, or to see more in our poet than he himself intended; but the very circumstance of Jessica's trifling with the Clown upon her conversion from the faith of her fathers, strikingly harmonises with her general tone of character. She would have turned Mohammedan, or Buddhist, or Spinning Dervish, or Spinning Jenny, or spinning *anything*, and danced a polka at her new faith: flimsy, thoughtless, and unstable.

The 'Merchant of Venice' opens with introducing the two subordinate characters, Solanio and Salarino, in conversation with the Merchant himself, upon the subject of the inconstancy of the sea, and the anxiety of mind incurred by having commercial ventures abroad on that element; thus preparing the mind of the reader for the loss of Antonio's argosies as a natural event. As characters in the drama, they offer little worthy of notice, unless it be of disgust at their ridiculing the Jew in his distress upon losing his daughter and his jewels; and yet it must be confessed that in the 1<sup>st</sup> scene of the play some beautiful poetical imagery is put into the mouths of these two insignificant persons when conversing with Antonio upon the anxiety attending commercial speculation. [Quotes 1.1.23–36.]

That portion of the plot in this great drama which turns upon the destiny of the caskets, is like the grafting of an Arabian tale upon a common stock of civic adventure. It certainly forms a fanciful and interesting contrast to the stern and painful realities that preserve a simultaneous movement with it. The critic, Schlegel, says that 'this love-intrigue, as associated with the trial-scene between Shylock and Antonio, being not less extraordinary, becomes natural and probable by means of the other.' This is ingeniously said; and the enthusiastic eulogist of our poet has said some delightful things upon this play; but I would submit that he has not precisely hit the mark of Shylock's character, when he says that 'his morality is founded on the disbelief in goodness and magnanimity,' and that 'his hate is naturally directed against those Christians who possess truly Christian sentiments; the example of disinterested love of our neighbour seems to him the most unrelenting persecution of the Jews.'

Shylock's 'morality' appears to me founded on the great law of wild nature, *ratified by his own national code*; and all his arguments and all his actions are the offspring of the horrible injustice burnt into his own feelings and those of all his tribe: hence his scorpion-like hatred of the Christians; and not merely because one man lent out money without interest, bating the rate of usance in the money-market, – that is an apology, and a natural one for such a man to urge to himself. No; Shakespeare, with his consistent love of justice, has punished him for his cruelty; but, in the persecution exercised

Charles Cowden Clarke

towards him by the professors of a sect who are enjoined to 'do justice and love mercy,' he has read a lesson which ought, if it do not, to last through all time.

## 20 Georg G. Gervinus, 'the relation of man to property'

1863

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From *Shakespeare Commentaries* by Dr. G. G. Gervinus, Professor at Heidelberg. Translated under the Author's superintendence by F. E. Bunnett (2 vols., London, 1863), I, pp. 319–43.

Georg Gottfried Gervinus (1805–71) was a highly regarded German conservative philosophical critic and historian. He helped found the influential political journal *Deutsche Zeitung*, and served as a deputy for the Prussian province of Saxony at the 1848 National Assembly. In his commentary on *Shakespeare* (4 vols., Leipzig, 1849–50), Gervinus sought (in the words of his translator) to find the 'one ruling idea pervading every play, linking every part, every character, every episode, to one single aim. He has pointed out the binding thread in all that before seemed disconnected, and has found a justification for much that before seemed needlessly offensive and perhaps immoral. And in doing this, in . . . giving us a guiding thread through the intricacies of the plot, he has opened out to us a new source of interest, and has afforded a yet firmer basis to our former appreciation of the works of Shakespeare' (1.vii). Gervinus's *Commentaries* appeared in a revised one-volume edition (1875), with a long Introduction by F. J. Furnivall (pp. xix–1).

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For the understanding of Shakespeare nothing is perhaps so instructive as at times, when striking occasions offer, to place by the side of our own reflections upon his works, the explanation of other interpreters, in order that by comparing a series of double expositions, we may penetrate closer and closer to the substance of the Shakespearian poetry. We shall by this means perceive, how very different are the points of view, from which these poems may be apprehended, and how, not without a certain degree and appearance of justice, various opinions upon the same piece may be advanced: which is only a proof of the richness and many-sidedness of these works. At the same time, this will give us occasion to examine ourselves, whether we do not lose that pure susceptibility and unbiased mind in comprehending the writings our master, in order that we may approach as far as possible to the one idea which moved the poet himself in each of his creations, and that we may find out this one idea from the many which each of the more important of those creations is capable of suggesting to the versatile minds of our own day. We shall besides in this comparison of interpretation have occasion repeatedly



to show, where the key to Shakespeare's works is really to be found, and of what kind are the leading ideas according to which he has formed his plays.

Ulrici has before justly remarked that the connecting threads in this piece lie very much hidden in the disparate circumstances that form it. The poet has here not given himself the trouble as in *Romeo and Juliet* to insinuate his design by express explanation. Ulrici (and Rötcher also) perceived the fundamental idea of the *Merchant of Venice* in the sentence: *summum jus summa injuria*.<sup>[1]</sup> With ability and ingenuity he has referred the separate parts to this one central point. The law-suit in which Shylock enforces the letter of justice, and is himself avengingly struck by the letter of justice, is thus placed in the true centre of the piece. The arbitrariness of the will, in which Portia's father appears to assert the whole severity of his paternal right, and as Portia herself laments, withholds his right from the possessor, unites in one idea the second element of the piece with its principal part. Jessica's escape from her father, forms the contrast to this; in the one right is wrong, in the other, wrong is right. The intricacy of right and wrong appears at length at its greatest pitch in the quarrel of the lovers in the last act. Even Launcelot's reflections on the right and wrong of his running away, his blame of Jessica in the 4<sup>th</sup> Act, concur with this point of view. We finally understand the stress which Portia, in her speech to Shylock, lays upon mercy: not severe right, but tempered equity alone can hold society together.

But when we look only upon the external structure of the piece, the essentially acting characters do not all stand in relation to this idea, a requirement fulfilled in all the maturer works of our poet. Bassanio, who is really the link uniting the principal actors in the two separate adventures, Antonio and Portia, has nothing to do with this idea. Just as little have the friends and parasites of Antonio, the suitors of Portia. Moreover Portia's father is called a virtuous holy man, who has left behind him the order concerning the caskets out of kindness, in a sort of inspiration, but in no wise in a severe employment of paternal power. But were we not at all to take into account these grounds, which we draw from the interweaving of the acting characters with the fundamental idea of the piece, we should believe that a reflection like the above will not be read without compulsion in almost any of the Shakespearian pieces. Such propositions, such explanations, we only arrive at, when we consider the story, the action, in this or other pieces, as the central point in question. Ulrici does this: he calls this piece a comedy of intrigue, as, even infinitely more unsuitably, he has also designated *Cymbeline*, which must be classed with those most magnificent works of the poet, which like *Lear* confine within the narrow scope of a drama, almost the richness of an epos. To Ulrici the story of the piece is a given subject; to us, — who do not so separate the dramatic forms, since even Shakespeare has not so separated them, for to him far rather out of every material a particular form arose naturally, fashioned according to inner laws, — to us, the story grows out of the peculiar nature of the characters. *This* Shylock first connects the plot of the action with *this* Antonio, through *this* Bassanio; these men, their characters, and motives exist for our poet before the plot, which results from their co-operation. Granted, that the subject was transmitted to the poet, and that here as in *All's Well that Ends Well*, he held himself conscientiously bound to the strangest of all materials: that which most distinguished him and his poetry, that in which he maintains his freest motion, that from which he designs the structure of his pieces, and even creates the

given subject anew, is ever the characters themselves and the motives of their actions. Here the poet is ever himself, ever great, ever ingenious and original; the story of his plays is for the most part borrowed, often strange, without probability, and in itself of no value. Unconcerned he allows them to remain as a poetic symbol for every thing analogous which might be possible in reality; he investigates human nature, the qualities and passions which probably would be capable of committing such an action, and he now presents to view the springs of these passions, of these dispositions of mind and character, in a simple picture, from which we are indeed never led to an abstract sentence, like Ulrici's.

What we may call the leading idea, the acting soul, in Shakespeare's plays, ever expresses plainly and simply a single relation, a single passion or form of character. The nature and property of love and jealousy, the soap-bubbles thrown forth by the thirst for glory, irresolution avoiding its task, these are the images, the views, which *Romeo and Othello*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Hamlet* present to us, and from which, without aphorism and reflection, rarely from the action and story considered by itself, but ever from a closer investigation of the motives of the actors themselves, we perceive the poet's purpose. It is just this which Shakespeare himself in *Hamlet* demanded from the art: that it should hold the mirror up to nature, that it should give a representation of life, of men, and their operating powers, by which means it works indeed morally, but in the purest poetic way, by image, by lively representation, and by imaginative skill. To perceive and to know the virtues and crimes of men, to reflect them as in a mirror and to exhibit them in their sources, their nature, their workings, and their results, and in such a way, as to exclude chance and to banish arbitrary fate, which can have no place in a well-ordered world, this is the task, which Shakespeare has imposed upon the poet and upon himself.

We will now say, what reflections the *Merchant of Venice* has excited in our own mind. We have heard above, how Gosson designated the moral of a piece, whose purport we have supposed the same as that of the *Merchant of Venice*: it represented 'the greediness of worldly chusers and the bloody mindes of usersers'.<sup>[2]</sup> In Shakespeare's time, the idea and aim of a stage-piece was always conceived in such a simple, practically moral manner. In a similar way, in order to keep with the spirit of the time, we ought always to note the kernel of the pieces of that age, and in doing this, we ought even not to avoid the risk of appearing trivial. We could after our own fashion say in a more abstract and pretentious form, that the intention of the poet in the *Merchant of Venice* was to depict the relation of man to property. The more commonplace this might appear, the more worthy of admiration is that which Shakespeare, in his embodiment of this subject, has accomplished with extraordinary, profound, and poetic power.

If we look back to the pieces which we have previously perused, but still more when we shall have gone through the rest of the works belonging to this period, and at its close shall revert to Shakespeare's life, we shall see our poet throughout the whole space of time, and in almost all the works which proceeded from him, struggling as it were with one great idea, which at length exhibits a similar conflict within himself, in which his nobler spiritual nature battles with and overcomes the lower world without: one indeed of the most remarkable dramas in the inner life of a man, however fragmentary may be the touches, with which we must delineate it. We have before intimated, that in the historical pieces, which almost wholly belong to this period, we should point out the



than doth promise aught' [3.2.105]. And so, not his relation alone, but the relation of a number of beings to this perishable false good, gold, is depicted in our piece. An abundance of characters and circumstances displays how the possession produces in men barbarity and cruelty, hatred and obduracy, anxiety and indifference, spleen and fickleness, and again how it calls forth the highest virtues and qualities, and by testing, confirms them. But essentially the relation of the outward possession to an inclination entirely inward, to friendship, is placed prominently forward. And this is indeed inserted by the poet in the original story, yet not arbitrarily interwoven with it, but developed according to its inmost nature from the materials given. For the question of man's relation to property is ever at the same time a question of his relation to man, as it cannot be imagined apart from man. The miser, who seeks to deprive others of possession and to seize upon it himself, will hate and will be hated. The spend-thrift, who gives and bestows, loves and will be loved. The relation of both to possession, their riches or their poverty, will, as it changes, also change their relation to their fellow men. For this reason the old story of Timon, handled by our poet in its profoundest sense, is at once a history of prodigality, and a history of false friendship. And thus has Shakespeare, in the poem before us, represented a genuine brotherhood between the pictures he sets forth of avarice and prodigality, of hard usury and inconsiderate extravagance, so that the piece may just as well be called a song of true friendship. The most unselfish spiritual affection is placed in contrast to the most selfish worldly one, the most essential truth to unessential show. For even sexual love in its purest and deepest form, through the addition of sensual enjoyment, is not in the same measure free from selfishness, as friendship, an inclination of the soul, which is wholly based upon the absence of all egotism and self-love, and whose purity and elevation is tested by nothing so truly, as by the exact opposite, the point of possession, which excites most powerfully the selfishness and self-interest of men.

And now we shall see, how the apparently disparate circumstances of our piece work wonderfully one into the other, and with what wisdom the principal characters are arranged with respect to each other.

In the centre of the actors in the play, in a rather passive position, stands Antonio, the princely merchant, of enviable immense possessions, a Timon, a Shylock, in riches, but with a noble nature elevated far above the effects, which wealth produced in these men. Placed between the generous and the miser, between the spend-thrift and the usurer, between Bassanio and Shylock, between friend and foe, he is not even remotely tempted by the vices, into which these have fallen; there is not the slightest trace to be discovered in him of that care for his wealth, which Salanio and Salarino impute to him, who in its possession would be its slaves. But his great riches have inflicted another evil upon him, the malady of the rich, who have been agitated and tried by nothing, and have never experienced the pressure of the world. He has the spleen, he is melancholy; a sadness has seized him, the source of which no one knows; he has a presentiment of some danger, such as Shakespeare always imparts to all sensitive, susceptible natures. In this spleen, like all hypochondriacs, he takes delight in cheerful society; he is surrounded by a number of parasites and flatterers, among whom is one more noble character, Bassanio, with whom alone a deeper impulse of friendship connects him. He is affable, mild, generous to all, without knowing their tricks, without sharing their mirth; the loquacious versatility, the

## Georg G. Gervinus

humour of a Gratiano is nothing to him; his pleasure in their intercourse is passive, according to his universal apathy. His nature is quiet and is with difficulty affected; when his property and its management leaves him without anxiety, he utters a 'fie, fie' over the supposition, that he is in love [1.1.46]; touched by no fault, but moved also by no virtue, he appears passionless, almost an automaton. It is a doubly happy position, which the poet has given him in the midst of the more active characters of the piece: for were he of less negative greatness, he would throw all others into deep shadow; we should feel too painful and exciting a sympathy in his subsequent danger. But he is not, therefore, to appear quite feelingless. For in one point he shows that he shared gall, flesh, and blood with others. When brought into contact with the usurer, the Jew Shylock, we see him in an agitation, which partly flows from moral and business principles, partly from intolerance, and from national religious aversion. This point of honour in the merchant against the money-changer and usurer, urges him to those glaring outbursts of hatred, when he rates Shylock in the Rialto about his usances, calls him a dog, foots him, and spits upon his beard. For this he receives a lesson for life in his lawsuit with the Jew, which with his apathetic negligence he allows to run ahead of him. The danger of life seizes him, and the apparently insensible man is suddenly drawn closer to us; he is suffering, so that high and low intercede for him; he himself petitions Shylock; his situation weakens him; the experience is not lost for him; it is a crisis, it is the creation of a new life for him; finally, when he is lord and master over Shylock, he rakes up no more his old hatred against him, and in Bassanio's happiness and tried friendship there lies henceforth for the man roused from his apathy, the source of renovated and ennobled existence.

Unacquainted with this friend of Bassanio's, there lives at Belmont his beloved Portia, the contrast to Antonio, upon whom Shakespeare has not hesitated to heap all the active qualities, of which he has deprived Antonio; for in the womanly being kept modestly in the background, these qualities will not appear so overwhelmingly prominent, as we felt that, united in the man, they would have raised him too far above the other characters of the piece. Nevertheless Portia is the most important figure in our drama, and she forms even its true central point, as for her sake, without her fault or knowledge, the knot is entangled, and through her and in her conscious effort it is also loosened. She is just as royally rich as Antonio, and as he is encompassed with parasites, so is she by suitors from all lands. She too, like Antonio, and more than he, is wholly free from every disturbing influence of her possessions upon her inner being. She carries out her father's will, in order to secure herself from a husband, who might purchase her beauty by the weight. Without this will, she was of herself of the same mind; wooed by princely suitors, she loves Bassanio, whom she knew to be utterly poor. She too, like Antonio, is melancholy, but not from spleen, not from apathy, not without cause, not from that ennui of riches, but just from passion, from her love for Bassanio, from care for the doubtful issue of that choice, which threatens to betray her love to chance. A completely superior nature, she stands above Antonio and Bassanio, as Helena above Bertram, more than Rosaline above Berowne and Juliet above Romeo: it seems that Shakespeare at that time created and endowed his female characters in the conviction, that the woman was fashioned out of better material than the man. On account of the purity of her nature, she is compared to the image of a saint, on account of the strength of her will to Brutus'

Portia; Jessica speaks of her as without her fellow in the world, giving to her husband the joys of heaven upon earth. The most beautiful and the most contradictory qualities, manly determination and womanly tenderness, are blended together in her. She is musical and energetic, playful and serious; she is at once cheerful and devout, not devout before, but after action; and even her society is so chosen; her friend Nerissa is of the same nature, full of raillery and playfulness, but of such vigorous power, and so much attached to Portia, that she only promises her hand to Gratiano in case Bassanio's choice has a successful issue. To this man of her heart Portia represents herself as a rough jewel, although she is far superior to him; she gives herself to him with the most womanly modesty, although she is capable rather of guiding him. She is superior to all circumstances, that is her highest praise; she would have accommodated herself to any husband, for this reason her father might have felt himself justified in prescribing the lottery; he could do so with the most implicit confidence; she knows the contents of the caskets, but she betrays it not. Once she has sent from her eyes speechless messages to Bassanio, and now she would gladly entertain him some months before he chooses, that she may at least secure a short possession; but no hint from her facilitates his election. And yet she has to struggle with the warm feeling, which longs to transgress the will: it is a temptation to her, but she resists it with honour and resolution. Only, quick in judgment, skilled in the knowledge of men, and firm in her treatment, she knows how to frighten away the utterly worthless lovers by her behaviour; so superior is she in all this, that her subsequent appearance as judge is perfectly conceivable. Famous actresses, such as Mrs. Clive in Garrick's time, have used this judgment-scene as a burlesque to laugh at, a part in which the highest pathos is at work, and an exalted character pursues the most pure and sacred object.

Between both, Portia and Antonio, stands Bassanio, the friend of the one, the lover of the other, utterly poor between the two boundlessly rich, ruined in his circumstances, inconsiderate, extravagant at the expense of his friend. He seems quite to belong to the parasitical class of Antonio's friends. In disposition he is more inclined to the merry Gratiano than to Antonio's severe gravity; he appears on the stage with the question – 'When shall we laugh?' [1.1.66], and he joins with his frivolous companions in all cheerful and careless folly. This time he borrows once more three thousand ducats, to make a strange Argonautic expedition to the Golden Fleece, staking them on a blind adventure, the doubtful wooing of a rich heiress. His friend breaks his habit of never borrowing on credit, he enters into an agreement with the Jew upon the bloody condition, and the adventurer accepts the loan with the sacrifice. And before he sets forth, even on the same day and evening, he purchases fine livery for his servants with this money, and gives a merry feast as a farewell, during which the daughter of the invited Jew is to be carried off by one of the free-thinking fellows. Is not the whole, as if he were only the seeming friend of this rich man, that he might borrow his money, and only the seeming lover of this rich lady, that he might pay his debts with her money?

But this quiet Antonio seemed to know the man of bad appearance to be of better nature. He knew him indeed as somewhat too extravagant but not incurably so, as one who was ready and able even to restrict himself. He knew him as one who stood 'within the eye of honour' [1.1.137], and he lent to him, without a doubt of his integrity. His confidence was unlimited, and he blames him rather that he should 'make question of his

## Georg G. Gervinus

uttermost' [1.1.156], than if he had made waste of all he has. In his melancholy, it is this man alone who chains him to the world; their friendship needs no brilliant words, it is unfeignedly genuine. His eyes, full of tears at parting, tell Bassanio, what he is worth to Antonio; it is just the acceptance of the loan which satisfies Antonio's confidence. The down-right and regardless Gratiano, whose jests, faultless to his friend, are an offence to the world, he enjoins seriously as to behaviour and habits in his courting expedition to the noble Portia, and that parting supper helped to a virtuous sin, in withdrawing the loveliest daughter from the most unnatural father. When he comes to Portia, he accedes not to her tender womanly proposal that he should safely enjoy two months' intercourse with her; he will not live upon the rack, and he insists with manly resolution upon the decision. His choice, the very motives of his choice, exhibit him as the man not of show, but of genuine nature; his significant speech upon this fundamental theme of the piece stands here in the true centre of the play. The scene of his choice, accompanied by music and followed by Portia's anxious glances and torturing agony, must be seen to be enjoyed: the amiability and sincerity of both is here in its greatest glory. When he perceives the portrait, he divines indeed his happiness, but he ventures not yet to hope it, and in spite of his agitation he seems absorbed only with the work of art; when the scroll announces to him his triumph, (a flourish of instruments will set forth his words in their true light) he will nevertheless first obtain confirmation from the original, and she who had before followed tremblingly every movement, recovers her composure at the happy decision, and in language full of womanly devotion recalls the man to himself, dazzled as he is by his good fortune.

Bassanio's choice is crowned by success, or more justly: his wise consideration of the father's object and of the mysterious problem, meets with its deserved reward. But his beautiful doctrine of show is to be tested immediately, whether it be really deed and truth. His adventurous expedition has succeeded through his friend's assistance and loan. But at the same moment, in which he is at the climax of his happiness, his friend is at the climax of misfortune and in the utmost danger of his life, and this from the very assistance and loan, which have helped Bassanio to his success. In the very prime of his wedding happiness the horror of the intelligence concerning Antonio occurs. Now the genuineness of the friend shows itself. The intelligence disturbs his whole nature. He goes on his wedding-day – Portia herself permits not, that they should be married first, – to save his friend, to pay thrice the money borrowed, in the hope of being able to turn aside the law in this case of necessity. But Portia proves even here her superior nature. She sees more keenly, what an inevitable snare the inhuman Jew has dug for Antonio; she adopts the surest idea, of saving him by right and law itself; she had at the same time a plan for testing the man of her love. Even with this, the idea of the design of the whole piece concurs most closely. Her own choice had been denied her by her father's arrangement; her delight in Bassanio rested not on a long acquaintance; the alliance made by chance appears to her to acquire its true consecration and security by one solemn trial; she will test him and his friend, she will test him by his friendship. She conceives the friendship of her husband, as brides so readily do, in the most ideal manner; Lorenzo praises her noble conception of friendship, even before he knows what she has done; she wishes to convince herself of the nature of this friendship, in order that she may conclude from it the nature of Bassanio's love. She saves her friend from despair,

and his friend from death, at the same moment that amid their torments she is observing their value. Antonio has in this catastrophe to atone for all that he had sinned against Shylock through sternness, Bassanio for all that of which he was guilty through frivolity, extravagance, and participation in the offences against the Jew: the best part of both is exhibited through their sufferings in their love for each other, and Antonio's words, the seal of this friendship, must have penetrated deeply into Portia's heart. But with equally great agitation she hears the words of Bassanio, that he would sacrifice his wife, his latest happiness, to avert the misfortune which he had caused. This disregard of her must enchant her: this was standing the fiery test. Whilst she turns the words into a jest, she has the deepest emotion to overcome: with those words, the sin is forgiven of which Bassanio was guilty. By his readiness for this sacrifice he first deserves the friend, whom he had brought near to death through the wooing of this wife and the means of pressing his suit, which Antonio had given him; and by this also he first deserves his wife, who could not be called happily won by a fortunate chance, which was at once the evil destiny of his friend. This trial of Bassanio is carried on by Portia in the last act of the piece. It has always been said of this act, that it was added for the satisfaction of an aesthetic necessity, to efface the painful impression of the judgment-scene, but it serves at once also to satisfy the moral interest, by a last proof of the genuineness of the friendship. The helpful judge demands from Bassanio, as a reward, the ring, which his wife had forbidden him to give away. Antonio himself begs him to give the ring, and places his friendship in the scale against his wife's commandment; love and friendship come into final collision, amusing to the spectator, but most serious to those tested by it: friendship must carry the day, if love is to be genuine. He puts his wife after his friend, because he obtained his wife only by means of his friend. And he proves thus in an emergency which placed a painful choice before him, that he was in earnest in those words, that he would sacrifice his wife to his friend, that his friend might not fall a sacrifice to his wife. He proves in this severe Brutus-like sentence against that which was his dearest treasure, that he is worthy of this Portia.

These are the several characteristics of the noblest circumstances, relations, and intricacies between man and man, between worth and possession. Shylock is the contrast, which we hardly need explain, although indeed in this age of degeneration of art and morals, lowness and madness could go so far as to make a martyr on the stage of this outcast of humanity. The poet has certainly given to this character, in order that he may not sink quite below our interest, a perception of his pariah-condition, and has imputed his outbursts of hatred against Christians and aristocrats, partly to genuine grounds of annoyance. Moreover he has not delineated the usurer from the hatred of the Christians of that time against all that was Jewish, else he would not have imparted to Jessica her lovely character. But of the emancipation of the Jew he knew indeed nothing, and least of all of the emancipation of this Jew, whom Burbage in Shakespeare's time acted in a character frightful also in exterior, with long nose and red hair, and whose inward deformity, whose hardened nature, is far less determined by religious bigotry, than by the most terrible of all fanaticism, that of avarice and usury. He hates indeed the Christians as Christians, and therefore Antonio who has mistreated him; but he hates him far more, because by disinterestedness, by what he calls 'low simplicity' [1.3.41-52], he destroys his business, because he lends out money gratis, brings down the rate of



usage, and has lost him half a million. Riches have made him the greatest contrast to that which they have rendered Antonio, who throughout appears indifferent, incautious, careless, and generous. Shylock on the other hand is meanly careful, cautiously circumspect, systematically quiet, ever inwardly shufflingly occupied, like the genuine son of his race, disdainful not the most contemptible means, nor the most contemptible object, speculating in the gaining of a penny, looking so far into the future and into small results, that he sends the greedy Launcelot into Bassanio's service, and against his principle he eats at Bassanio's house, only for the sake of feeding upon the prodigal Christian. This trait is given to him by the poet in a truly masterly manner, in order subsequently to explain the barbarous condition, on which he lends Antonio that fatal sum. Shakespeare after his habit has done the utmost, to give probability to this most improbable degree of cruelty, which, according to Bacon's words, appears in itself to every good mind, a fabulous tragic fiction. Antonio has mistreated him; at the moment of the loan he was like to mistreat him again; he challenges him to lend it as to an enemy; he almost suggests to him the idea, which the Jew places, as if jestingly, as a condition of the loan; and he, the man railed at for usury, will now generously grant it without interest, to the man who never borrowed upon advantage. The same crafty speculation and prospect which, at all events, is attended with one advantage, underlies this idea: in one case the show of disinterestedness, in the other the opportunity for a fearful revenge. Had the Jew really only partially trifled with the idea of such a revenge, the poet does everything to make the jest fearfully earnest. Money had effaced everything human from the heart of this man, he knows nothing of religion and moral law, but when he quotes the Bible in justification of his usury; he knows of no mercy, but to which he can be compelled; nothing of justice and mercy dwells in him, nothing of the affection of kindred. His daughter is carried away from him, he is furious, not because he is robbed of her, but because she has robbed him in her flight; he would see his daughter dead at his feet, provided that the jewels and gems were in her ears; he would see her hearsed before him, provided the ducats were in her coffin. He regrets the money employed in her pursuit; when he hears of her extravagance, the irretrievable loss of his ducats occasions fresh rage. In this condition he pants for revenge against Antonio, even before there is any prospect of it, against the man, who by long mortifications had stirred up rage and hatred in the bosom of the Jew and with whose removal his usury would be without an adversary. Obduracy and callousness continue to progress in him, until at the pitch of his wickedness he falls into the pit he had dug, and then, according to the notions of the age, learns from the actions of Antonio and of the Duke, how mercy in a Christian spirit produces other actions, than the unmerciful god of the world, who imposed upon him its laws alone. This awful picture of the effects of a thirst for possession, however strongly it is exhibited, will appear as no caricature to him, who has ever stumbled upon similar evidences in the actual world, in the histories of gamblers and misers.

The sense, which we have now given to the *Merchant of Venice*, perfectly coincides with all, even the subordinate characters of the piece. Thus it is with the self-interested suitors of Portia, who, corrupted by glitter and show, choose amiss. Thus is it also with the parasitical companions of Antonio, who forsake him with his fortune, those loquacious half-friends, who forebode his danger before he does, and do not even write

to Bassanio. Thus again, with Lorenzo and Jessica, an extravagant, giddy couple, who free from restraint, squander their pilfered gold in Genoa, and give it away for monkeys, and reach Belmont like famished people. The little Jessica is placed no higher by the poet, than she could be without a mother in the society of Shylock and Launcelot, with a mind entirely childlike, naïve, true, and spotless, and if we may trust Lorenzo's words and her sure perception of the greatness of Portia, with a capacity for true wisdom. Thus as she is, she is thoroughly a modest child, whom on the threshold of moral consciousness, unnatural circumstances have driven to feel ashamed of her father, to fly from him concealed in a boy's clothes, a dress painful to her easily excited modesty. Thus delicately feminine, she has no scruples of conscience, to steal herself the ducats and the jewels of her father. A new relation to possession is brought to view in this nature: it is that of the inexperienced child, who is quite unacquainted with the value of money, who innocently throws it away in trifles, having learnt in her paternal home neither domestic habits nor economy. In this, Lorenzo is only too congenial with her, although he would have her believe, that he was as a man, what Portia is as a woman; Antonio, who knows them better, takes both under his guardianship, and manages their inheritance for them. Launcelot also bears a relation to the common idea of the piece. Greedy and rough as he is, he also has an inclination to want economy; thus as he knows Bassanio, he would live better in the house of the Jew, but out of a sense of honour, he would rather go to the generous poor man, than remain with the rich miser. Otherwise the scene with his father, as we have already pointed out, is exhibited in parodic contrast to Jessica's relation to hers. The emphasis of that scene lies in the words that the son of a father must ever come to light, that childlike feeling can never be renounced, not even by so coarse and blunt a fellow as this. How much more should this be with a being so ethereal as Jessica! But that it is not so, is the strongest shadow thrown by the poet upon Shylock; he has intended by this to cast none upon Jessica. 'She is damn'd', says Shylock [3.1.31–3]. 'That's certain, if the devil may be her judge', answers Salarino (1.322–43).

## 21 John Ruskin, Shylock 'the corrupted merchant'

1873

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From *Munera Pulveris* (1873), Chapter IV: 'Commerce'. This work was originally published in four issues of *Fraser's Magazine*, June 1862–April 1863.

John Ruskin (1819–1900), the great Victorian prose stylist, art critic, architectural and cultural historian, political economist and social reformer, was educated privately. He entered Christ Church College, Oxford in 1836 and three years later won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry. The publication of his major work, *Modern Painters*, extended from 1843 to 1860. *Unto this Last* (1862) contained four articles attacking the 'pseudo-science' of political economy (expounded by J. S. Mill and Ricardo), and his ideas for social and economic reform were given further expression in *Munera Pulveris* (1873). He repeats his theory that *The Merchant of Venice* is an attack on the 'great crime of usury' in several other works.

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[Ruskin argues that trade inevitably leads to 'fraud between enemies' and 'treachery among friends', for 'the idea of sale is that of an interchange between enemies respectively endeavouring to get the better one of another'.]

This inhumanity of mercenary commerce is the more notable because it is a fulfilment of the law that the corruption of the best is the worst.<sup>[1]</sup> For as, taking the body natural for symbol of the body politic, the governing and forming powers may be likened to the brain, and the labouring to the limbs, the mercantile, presiding over circulation and communication of things in changed utilities, is symbolized by the heart; and, if that hardens, all is lost. And this is the ultimate lesson which the leader of English intellect meant for us, (a lesson, indeed, not all his own, but part of the old wisdom of humanity,) in the tale of the *Merchant of Venice*; in which the true and incorrupt merchant, – *kind and free, beyond every other Shakspearian conception of men*, – is opposed to the corrupted merchant, or usurer; the lesson being deepened by the expression of the strange hatred which the corrupted merchant bears to the pure one, mixed with intense scorn, –

This is the fool that lent out money gratis; look to him, jailor, [3.3.2–3]

(as to lunatic no less than criminal) the enmity, observe, having its symbolism literally carried out by being aimed straight at the heart, and finally foiled by a literal appeal to the great moral law that flesh and blood cannot be weighed, enforced by 'Portia'<sup>2</sup>

*Shylock 'the corrupted merchant', 1873*

(‘Portion’), the type of divine Fortune, found, not in gold, nor in silver, but in lead, that is to say, in endurance and patience, not in splendour; and finally taught by her lips also, declaring, instead of the law and quality of ‘merces’, the greater law and quality of mercy, which is not strained, but drops as the rain, blessing him that gives and him that takes. [4.1.184–7] And observe that this ‘mercy’ is not the mean ‘Misericordia’, but the mighty ‘Gratia’, answered by Gratitude, (observe Shylock’s leaning on the, to him detestable, word, *gratis*, and compare the relations of Grace to Equity given in the second chapter of the second book of the *Memorabilia*;<sup>[3]</sup>) that is to say, it is the gracious or loving, instead of the strained, or competing manner, of doing things, answered, not only with ‘merces’ or pay, but with ‘merci’ or thanks. And this is indeed the meaning of the great benediction ‘Grace, mercy, and peace’,<sup>[4]</sup> for there can be no peace without grace, (not even by help of rifled cannon,) not even without triplicity of graciousness, for the Greeks, who began but with one Grace, had to open their scheme into three before they had done. (101–4)

## 22 James Spedding, Portia the central character

1875

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From 'The *Merchant of Venice* at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in 1875', originally in *Frazer's Magazine*, July, 1875; reprinted in Spedding, *Reviews and Discussions, Literary, Political, and Historical, not relating to Bacon* (London, 1879), pp. 357–68.

James Spedding (1808–81), like Edward Fitzgerald, was educated at Bury St Edmunds Grammar School and Trinity College, Cambridge. At Cambridge he was a member of the 'Apostles', an exclusive conversazione society, and became a warm friend of the Tennysons, Arthur Hallam, Thackeray, and Fitzgerald. Tennyson said of him 'He was the Pope among us young men – the wisest man I know', and gave Spedding many of his poems to read in manuscript. Having only achieved a second class in the Classical Tripos, Spedding worked in the colonial office from 1835 to 1841, and then dedicated the remainder of his life to the study of Francis Bacon. In *Evenings with a Reviewer*, 2 vols. (1881; privately printed, 1845) he defended Bacon from Macaulay's vicious misrepresentations. Spedding, together with R. L. Ellis and D. D. Heath, brought out *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 7 vols. (1857–9), followed by Spedding's single-handed edition of *The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon*, also in 7 volumes (1861–74), together forming an outstanding scholarly edition that is only just being replaced. Spedding was a keen judge of poetry and drama: his essay identifying the shares of Shakespeare and Fletcher in *Henry VIII* (*Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1850; reprinted by the New Shakspeare Society in 1874) has been described as 'one of the first classics of Shakespeare authorship studies' (Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (Oxford, 2002), p. 341). Spedding occasionally wrote drama reviews for *Frazer's Magazine*, such as this review of the ill-fated revival of *The Merchant of Venice* by Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in Tottenham Court Road. Bancroft commissioned scene-paintings of actual views of Venice, one tableau per act, necessitating the rearrangement and transposition of scenes, and lengthy delays during scene-changes. A 'colossal failure', the production was soon taken off and replaced by one of the modern 'cup and saucer' comedies for which the Bancrofts were famous. (See George C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, 2 vols. (New York, 1920, 1966), 2.261–2, 306–7, 364–5.) Ellen Terry's Portia was her first great success, repeated with Irving at the Lyceum in 1879. For Spedding's comments on Shylock see No. 28.

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The decay of the legitimate drama has long been a subject of complaint: and if by the legitimate be meant the *poetic* drama, it must be admitted that fashion has not run strongly enough in that direction of late years to encourage managers to collect and train companies for the proper performance of it. A particular actor appears from time to time, and makes a name, by merit or otherwise, as representative of one of Shakespeare's great characters; and then a company of some kind is got together to support him. But it is long since we had a theatre that made the representation of the poetic drama its proper aim and business.

The immediate cause of this is not far to seek. The demand for the higher art is not sufficient to draw the supply; consequently the supply is not sufficient to encourage the demand. Playgoers do not ask for the great plays, because there is nobody to act them; managers do not procure people to act them, because playgoers do not ask for them. It is a difficulty which cannot be dealt with by way of precontract, for there is no way of engaging the public beforehand to supply full houses. The experiment must be made at the risk of the management, and the risk must be considerable. But it is all the more to be wished that when it is made, and made in a manner which deserves success, it should not fail for want of due information or appreciation on the part of the public. And here it is that the Press has the power of doing both good and ill service. Though the concurrent applause of all the newspapers cannot make people take pleasure in a thing which does not amuse or interest them, it can make them go once to see it. Concurrent depreciation, on the other hand, by two or three will deter vast numbers from going at all, and so cut off the appeal which should lie from the judgment of the critic to the feeling of the audience. Thus it comes that the success of such adventures rests in great part with the theatrical columns of the daily Press; columns very unlike the *columnae* that Horace speaks of,<sup>[1]</sup> to which mediocrity was intolerable.

Through what we take to be nothing worse than thoughtlessness on the part of these invisible powers, a very praiseworthy experiment of the kind has lately fallen far short of the success it deserved, and is in danger of carrying with it in its fall a chance for the poetic drama which can hardly be expected to offer itself again. The managers of the Prince of Wales's Theatre having, by great care and skill, trained a company to act a certain class of popular plays (not of the poetic order) as well, perhaps, as they deserve to be acted, and thereby established for their house a well-merited reputation, were inspired with a laudable ambition to try the effect of the same care and skill in a higher region, and see whether one of Shakespeare's comedies could not be got up as perfectly, according to its kind, as *School* or *Society*.<sup>[2]</sup> They chose a play which, though often acted, always pleasing, and containing one famous part, and one famous speech in another part, has never had justice done to it as a whole. They set it forth with scenery, costume, grouping, and general pictorial effect, equal to anything of the kind that has been produced in these times, when the arts of decoration have been so much studied. They took great pains both with the dialogue and the action, in all the parts, and in the minutest particulars. And though the best training for the Robertsonian drama leaves much to be learnt, and much also to be unlearnt, by an actor before he is fit for Shakespeare, they succeeded at least in inspiring every one of the company with a desire to do his best with the part assigned to him. More than all – because without some additional feature of special interest the best under such conditions would not, perhaps,

## James Spedding

have been good enough to make the *Merchant of Venice* attractive to a public which, if it will allow us to say so, requires 'education' for the enjoyment of this kind of art no less than the players for the performance of it – they engaged for the principal part a lady ready furnished with all the qualities needed in it, who could show how 'one of Shakespeare's women' may be and ought to be acted, and of whose performance it is not too much to say that it would of itself have gone far to supply that very 'education' which both audience and actors stand so much in need of.

This being beyond all question the most important novelty and the great distinction of the enterprise, it might have been expected that judicious critics would try to make it conspicuous as a great event for playgoers, and a thing to be seen. And that they failed to do so is the more surprising because the merit of the performance, and even the singularity of its merit, appears to have been felt by them all. But unfortunately, while they agreed in distinguishing Miss Ellen Terry's Portia with exceptional praise, at once intelligent, discriminating, and unreserved, they agreed also in *beginning* their several notices with complaints of the unsatisfactory character and announcements of the imperfect success of the whole experiment, the effect of which must have been simply to warn people away, and which have, in fact, resulted in the premature withdrawal of the piece before half the playgoing world have had a chance of seeing it. If the critics (who in these days of small theatres can make any play fail by calling it a failure, and give any play a chance of succeeding by calling it a success) had only begun by advising everybody to go and see Miss Terry in Portia – which was no more than the just inference from their own reports – they might have indulged themselves in what censures they pleased upon the rest, and done no harm. Those who went might have agreed with them or might have differed – all that *we* have happened to meet with did, in fact, differ with them widely and vehemently – but in either case they would have seen the play.

To us this premature withdrawal, though we cannot believe it to be final, seems an accident very much to be regretted, not only as tending to discourage a kind of enterprise which ought by all means to be encouraged, but because it will be difficult to find another part so well suited to the exercise of Miss Terry's peculiar gifts, and impossible to find another actress so well qualified to represent one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's female creations.

Mrs. Jameson, in attempting to classify the poet's women according to their characteristic qualities – as characters in which intellect and wit, passion and fancy, or the moral sentiments and affections, severally predominated – placed Portia among the women of intellect.<sup>[3]</sup> But when we read her analysis of the character – one of the best things in a book which contains some of the best Shakesperian criticism that we possess – it becomes plain that a fourth class should have been provided for her – a class in which none of these qualities *predominated*, but all were equally developed; and if one was at any time more conspicuous than the rest, it was only because the accidents of the situation gave more occasion and scope for the exercise or exhibition of it. Suppose Portia's situation changed, and you feel at once that it would call up the appropriate feeling and be met in the appropriate attitude: for each of the enumerated qualities has its proper place in her nature, and is ready to answer the moment it is called upon. Even in the part which she has to play, bright, joyous, and happy as it is – a succession of fortunate adventures crowned with complete success – the occasional shadows which cross and

threaten it are sufficient to draw out the virtues which she holds in reserve, and to reveal the latent capacities of her being; giving certain assurance that tenderness, sweetness, modesty, affection, moral elevation, charity, self-denial, and magnanimity, are as inseparable from her nature as intellectual power and ready wit; that she is capable of as much passion as is consistent with self-control, of as much imagination and fancy as can keep company with reason, of as much play of humour and sportive mischief as can be indulged without doing harm or giving pain. For though her lot is unusually free from strong contrasts of bright and dark, it is chequered with continual interchanges of light and shadow, which supply a succession of picturesque effects, and impart more real variety to her character than is to be found in many of those which are made to pass through opposite extremities of passion or fortune.

And if this variety of graces distinguishes the character of Portia as designed by Shakespeare, it was not less the distinction of it as acted by Miss Terry.<sup>[4]</sup> As she moved through the changing scene, every new incident seemed to touch some new feeling; and each change of feeling expressed itself by voice, countenance, or gesture in a manner so lively and natural that it was felt at once to be both true in itself and in harmony with the rest. Everything that she had to do seemed to come equally easy to her, and was done equally well; and the critic who would undertake to define the limits within which her power lies must be either very sagacious or very blind and deaf. Putting aside the foolish prejudice which appropriates to a particular character a particular type of face – which supposes, for instance, that Lady Macbeth cannot be acted by a woman whose face and figure cannot be made up into some kind of resemblance to Mrs. Siddons – and remembering that where the feeling is, any face can express it, if we ask ourselves what forms of human feeling lie beyond the possible range of Miss Terry's sympathetic conception, we find the question hard to answer. We knew before that, within a certain range, she was mistress of her art. We know now that her range is both wide and high. The part of Portia is not a long one, but the memorable features in her performance of it make a long list. Remember – we are sorry that we cannot now say, observe – in the scene where according to the new stage-arrangement she first appeared, the reserved and stately courtesy with which she received the Prince of Morocco, and explained to him the conditions of his venture; her momentary flutter of alarm as he went to make his choice; her sudden relief, mixed with amusement, when he began by dismissing the leaden casket with contempt, her conversation with Nerissa (properly her first scene), half plaintive, half playful, in which she bemoaned her fortune, and discussed the characters of the suitors – bringing out every shade of humorous meaning in perfect relief, and yet without the least coarseness or exaggeration; the delicate embarrassment of her first interview with Bassanio, when, in desiring him to postpone his trial, she was betrayed into an avowal of her love; her deeper agitations of fear and hope as he deliberated over the caskets, and her outburst of passionate emotion when he concluded at last in favour of the right one; the sweet dignity with which she surrendered to him herself and all that was hers; her quick alarm at his change of countenance on reading Antonio's letter; her eager sympathy and impetuous resolution when she heard the contents; the hurried dispatch of her letter to Bellario, writing and carrying on her conversation with Lorenzo at the same time (a novelty, by the way, required by the new scenic arrangements, but, as she handled it, a real improvement and enrichment of the



## James Spedding

text), and the bright promptitude of all her arrangements for departure, – all in the best blank verse, yet all so life-like; her perfect assumption of the manner and demeanour of the young and learned, and very gentlemanly, doctor of laws; the touching earnestness of her appeals to Shylock's better nature, as if desiring to save him from the penalty of his act by persuading him to forbear it; the silent accumulation of moral anger as he rejected each overture, and insisted upon pressing to extremity his legal advantage, till she seemed to feel for the moment a kind of scornful pleasure in offering him his own cup to drink; and at last, when, all serious business being happily over, she was at leisure to contemplate the situation, her infinite enjoyment of the humour of it – it would take a column to describe all that passed through her mind, and looked out of her eyes, as she said to Bassanio:

I pray you *know me* when we meet again; [4.1.419]

the gaiety of heart which prompted her demand of the ring as a fee, and the abounding spirit of affectionate mischief with which she pursued the jest to its happy conclusion – all this, executed so perfectly as it was, – with a delivery of the words, whether verse and prose, so modulated that the ear was never for a moment weary; the action so delicately suited to the word and the word to the action; the meaning never missed and never obtruded, the modesty of nature never overstepped – implies, to our thinking, a degree of intelligence, imagination, feeling, humour, and taste, which (combined as it is with such perfect command of all the organs of expression) should suffice for the representation of *any* female character that is truly drawn by art from nature. And if, when such an artist appears, she may not act Shakespeare's women because the rest of the company have acquired a reputation of acting Robertson's men, who can wonder that the legitimate drama declines?

Every theatre in London has a public of its own, composed of those members of the general public who are attracted by the kind of entertainment in which it excels. The attraction held out by the Prince of Wales's has been what is called 'pleasant comedy'; by which is meant correct imitations of the surface and slang of modern London life, with a careful setting of rooms and furniture and street landscapes very like the reality, and a careful avoidance of everything that appeals to the imagination or the heart. That a public brought together in the way of natural selection by a common taste for this kind of entertainment should find the *Merchant of Venice* less attractive, was to be expected. And though London contains other publics to which it was certain to prove much more attractive, and which would in due time have made up for secessions, time was required for the attraction to take effect upon them. They had to learn that there was something at the theatre worth seeing, and probably to alter domestic arrangements made on the assumption that there was not. But though this would be enough to account for a temporary falling-off in the attendance, it does not explain the chorus of depreciatory criticism with which the performance itself has been assailed, and which (there being so little apparent occasion for it) must be owing to some popular delusion with regard to the play itself. That in the representation at the Prince of Wales's Portia seemed for the first time a more interesting person than Shylock was a remark made by one of the critics, and made as much in derision of the whole performance as in compliment to the

exceptional merit of Miss E. Terry. Whether it was the first time that this has happened we cannot undertake to say, but if it was, it must be the first time that the play has been properly put upon the stage. For who that reads it as Shakespeare left it can doubt that this was *his* intention? Those who know it only on the stage may doubt; for since the great tragic actors took up the part of Shylock the rest of the play (which was originally a comedy) has been sacrificed to it. The pruning-knife has been applied so freely to Bassanio (a part worthy of Charles Kemble in his prime) that no actor of eminence now takes it. The scenes at Belmont have been so handled that they might almost be left out without being missed. And though Portia has remained in possession of the chief actress in the company, she is associated in popular imagination chiefly with the elegant-extract speech in praise of mercy, which is remembered as the distinguishing feature of Mrs. Siddons' performance (and in that rather as a specimen of declamation than of true dramatic effect), and has never been reckoned among the great parts.

In the case of Shylock, on the contrary, the admiration and sympathy properly due to the *actor* – generally the great tragedian of the day, and personally more interesting than all the rest of the company put together – have been transferred to himself; till we have come to regard one of the harshest pictures of malignity and depravity that Shakespeare ever exhibited in human shape as a kind of tragic hero, with something of the Miltonic Satan in him –

The unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield,  
And what is else not to be overcome.<sup>[5]</sup>

Heroic qualities, which, joined with a feeling (belonging more to our own century than the sixteenth) that they are partly justified by provocation and hard usage and insults from baser natures, enable the actor to make his exit with an air of contemptuous superiority that imposes upon the audience, and brings them into a mood so sympathetic that if the end of the trial were the end of the play they would probably be quite satisfied, and care no more what becomes of Portia and the rest of her party. Indeed, we can remember long ago to have heard a good authority speak of the fifth act of the *Merchant of Venice* as an extraordinary instance of Shakespeare's inequality, all the interest having ended with the fourth; and extraordinary it would certainly be if the interest was meant to centre in Shylock. But read the play as it was written, and imagine all the parts acted equally well: – what title has Shylock to be the central figure? There is nothing in him either good, or affecting, or amusing, or terrible, or magnanimous. Passion there is, and intellectual power, but it is passion of the meanest and most malignant kind. There is no mystery about him. His first soliloquy introduces him to us exactly as he is – a Jewish usurer, who hates all Christians, but especially Christians who are simple enough to lend money gratis; hates them because they bring down the rate of usance, and means to be revenged when he can. A chance offers itself at the moment. Antonio, a gratuitous lender, who has often spoiled his bargains by redeeming his debtors from forfeiture, wants to borrow money himself. He offers it, under pretence of kindness, as a loan without interest; but contrives, under cover of a jest, to engage the borrower's life as

## James Spedding

security for the repayment of the principal. There you have the whole case – the man, the motive, the design. The hard words and indignities to his beard and gaberdine which he has suffered in former disputes with Antonio are of small account with him. Those he has always been content to let pass with a shrug, and only remembers now for purposes of rhetoric. But the delivery of debtors from forfeiture is an injury not to be forgiven, and he deliberately resolves to kill him out of his way if he has the chance. Who can suppose that Shakespeare would have introduced *into a comedy* such a character as this, with intent to make him an object either of admiration or pity, or even of abhorrence? Is it not plain that, for purposes of comedy, his proper fate is to be baffled and defeated, and then dismissed with contempt? And so in the real play he is; for his fate is no way tragical; and his punishment, while it is appropriate enough to satisfy the sense of justice, is not so heavy as to cast a shadow inconsistent with merriment. One-half of his goods is restored to him at Antonio's request; the other is to be held in trust for his son-in-law, payable upon his own death, and though the condition that he should 'presently become a Christian' may seem to us an inhuman and unnecessary aggravation, we must remember that in those days a Christian was a Christian, and that to the audience at the Globe it would seem neither a punishment nor an indignity. Antonio meant it, we fancy, for a mercy, thinking that Shylock's soul, which he had some reason for supposing to be in a bad condition, would be the better for it.

The Shylock of the modern stage is said to have been invented and brought into fashion by Macklin in 1741. In the primitive times it was treated, no doubt, according to the description in the title-page of the *Comical History of the Merchant of Venice*, simply as 'Shylock the Jew', whose 'extreme cruelty towards the said merchant in cutting just pound of his flesh' was advertised as one of the attractions. In the late revival, the restoration of Portia to her legitimate pre-eminence had the effect of reducing Shylock to his proper place. But the popular tradition of a century is not easily overcome, and its influence was traceable in the conception of the character. Mr. Coghlan,<sup>[6]</sup> coming to his task with a reputation for success in the lightest and most modern comedy, has of course been reproved for aspiring to rise above it. It is the regular remark in all such cases. As it appeared to us, however, it was not the accomplishments of the light comedian so much as the example of the great tragedians, that really stood in his way. It betrayed him into an ambition to make too much of the part. His long pauses, his elaborate by-play, his exaggerated emphasis, were meant to make it impressive, and were in themselves skilful; but they did in fact make it slow and heavy, and combined with the tedious intervals between the acts (necessary, we suppose, for the arrangement of the scenery) to make the whole play drag. In addressing Antonio, he spoke of the insults he had received from him with an emphasis and angry bitterness which would have been very effective in the proper place, but were here against his meaning and inconsistent with his own game – which was to make Antonio believe that he was ready to forget all such things, and to deserve his love by friendly dealing. In the trial-scene he was so excessively deliberate in all his movements, so long in answering questions, so slow of delivery both in the set speeches and in the scornful retorts, that all the eagerness and impatience in pursuit of his prey which makes itself felt so strongly in reading appeared to have died out of him. A quicker movement all through would have corrected the principal defects of the personation, and, whatever the critics might say, it would have

had its effect upon the audience. And if, at the same time it had been possible to shorten the intervals between the scenes, and restore them to their proper order, the action would have been found to be much lighter and livelier, and more harmonious. Shakespeare was not troubled with complicated scenery. A room in Portia's house at Belmont was easily changed into a street in Venice; and a great part of his art in constructing plays so that they should 'please' consisted in the rapid interchange of short scenes. As a series of pictorial illustrations, the scenic arrangements at the Prince of Wales's cannot be too much praised. The living and moving groups, as well as the painted scenes, formed a succession of fine Venetian pictures. But it must be owned that the delays which they involved interfered very materially with the enjoyment of the play.

But whatever improvements it admitted of, we must repeat the expression of our regret that it has not proved attractive enough to be continued, that the managers have had to fall back again upon the humours of the club, the street, and the drawing-room, and that the critics are all applauding them for having so graciously submitted to 'the judgment of the public', and by this simple expedient of substituting *Money*<sup>[7]</sup> for the *Merchant of Venice*, made their houses once more 'the home of pleasant comedy'. . . .  
(357-67)

## 23 Frederick James Furnivall, Shylock ‘the hero of the piece’

1877

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From ‘Introduction’ to *The Leopold Shakspeare* (London, 1877)

Frederick James Furnivall (1825–1910), an exceedingly prolific critic and theatrical scholar who helped transform English studies, went to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, graduating BA (1847) and MA (1850). The son of a wealthy physician, he qualified as barrister but devoted his considerable energies to philanthropic work and to the Christian Socialist movement. He taught for twenty years at the London Working Man’s College. A proponent of spelling reform, Furnivall was instrumental in creating the climate for what became the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Among the societies he founded were the Early English Text Society (1864), and the New Shakspeare Society (1873). His work on Shakespeare includes an Introduction to the revised 1875 edition of Gervinus’s *Shakespeare Commentaries* [No. 20], a lengthy introduction to *The Leopold Shakspeare* (1877), and many editions of individual plays, including *Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice: The First (tho worse) Quarto, 1600* (1881). Furnivall received an honorary D. Litt. from Oxford in 1901. With others he was instrumental in creating the British Academy and became, in 1902, one of its founding fellows.

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If we turn back to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the first play in which Shakspeare dealt with this passionate, scheming, Italian nature, we shall see how he has advanced. If we turn toward the great Venetian play of his Third Period, *Othello*, we shall see to what greater height, to what lower deep, he had to pass. *The Merchant of Venice* is the first full Shakspeare. The only blemish on the play – the seemingly tedious casket-scenes – become almost its brightest gems, when an actress of genius like Miss Ellen Terry puts into them the wonderful by-play that she did at the Prince of Wales’s Theatre in the summer of 1875. The hero of the piece is undoubtedly Shylock. The first entry of the play in the Stationers’ Registers is the *Merchant of Venice*, otherwise called the *Jew of Venice*. And beside the gracious figure of Portia, that of the cursing Shylock ever stands. But as Antonio’s friendship is the occasion for the display of Shylock’s character, and triumphs over his hate, the play is justifiably called *The Merchant of Venice*. The Jews were banished from England in 1290, and Holinshed relates how the captain who took away the richest of them, drowned them all in the Thames, and he implies that this act was approved by many Englishmen even in Elizabeth’s time. Shylock’s tribal hatred of Antonio and the Christians was surely wholly justified, and so was his individual hatred

to a great extent. A cur when kicked will bite when he sees a chance. It is only the hate that springs from avarice in Shylock that we can condemn. That his whole hate was intense, we may judge by his risking 3,000 ducats, dearer to him than his daughter's life,<sup>1</sup> to gratify it. The hereditary self-restraint in the man and his hypocrisy, 'O father Abraham, what these Christians are' (1.3.160), &c., are noticeable – the latter point matches Richard the Third's 'I thank my God for my humility' [2.1.73]. His appeal to justice, 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' [3.1.59] &c., is unanswerable, and is not yet admitted in many a land calling itself civilized. For how short a time, alas, have we admitted it! That wonderful scene with Tubal in Act 3, sc. 1, Shylock's gloating over his revenge, his subduing his avarice to it, his self-possession in defeat, are all work of the first order. But at last comes, 'I am not well,' [4.1.396] and one wishes he had been spared the spiteful punishment of being made a Christian. His was a strong nature, capable of good, 'tis the fallen angel who makes the worst devil but devil or not, Shylock carries our sympathies with him. . . .

Portia is one of those characters that, like Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Shakspeare shows us first in gloom and then brings into the sunshine of love. She is sad at first, and no wonder. The lottery of her destiny bars her the right of voluntary choosing. She is but the sport of that great allotter of fate, Chance, which Shakspeare has made such a leading element in this play. But chance is kind to her, and gives her the man she loves. . . . Nothing can be happier than her judgment of her lovers. . . . [Provides examples.] Note, too the generous wisdom of her judgment of Antonio's character from Bassanio's; her quick insight and wit on the call for action; her self-reliance – she risks her all and makes a joke of it – her admirable handling of her case in court; the reserve of her power of deciding the case until she has first tried to raise Shylock to the nobleness she would have him reach. See how the essence of all the virtues of woman is in her speech for mercy, which will echo to all time. . . . See, too, how through the whole of the trial scene she keeps up her happy, roguish humour, chaffing her husband about giving her up, and insisting on his ring. No one can praise Portia too highly. She is the happy mean between the brilliant, saucy Beatrice, and the quiet, devoted Viola.

Jessica . . . is more romantic and impulsive. Love is her ruling passion, as greed is her father's. In a certain sense she reproduces Juliet. She would give up herself, her all, for love. She leads Lorenzo, and plans their elopement. Just as Portia leads Bassanio. Jessica knows the value of money in one way, but she sacrifices it to a whim. The lyrical beauty of the night scene with Lorenzo, a certain touch of Easternness in her character, her sadness of music, show depths of nature which speak a happy future for the pair. Antonio is to me the Shakspeare of the *Sonnets*. The beautiful unselfishness of his message to Bassanio [Quotes 3.2.321–2] can only be matched by Shakspeare's own feeling for his Will in *Sonnets* 87, 93, with which are to be set 71–4, 97, 99. We have no hesitation in accepting Bassanio's character of him [Quotes 3.2.292–6]. Bassanio is a bit of an adventurer, yet he is noble.<sup>2</sup> One must not find fault with the man whom Antonio and Portia loved. Still he is not worthy of Portia though one does not blame him so much for being willing to give up Portia for his friend. . . . Bassanio felt that Portia herself commended him for being willing to sacrifice his all, his life, even her, for the friend who had forfeited his life, for him. Gratiano, with his head in his hat, saying 'Amen' and behaving properly, is great fun all through. . . . and in the trial and ring scenes we enjoy

Frederick James Furnivall

his jeers, and his getting out of his scrapes with that lawyer's scrubby boy. Launcelot Gobbo, as Launce in *The Two Gentlemen*, has a discussion with himself, after the manner of Davus in Terence's *Andria*, Act 1, sc. 3. And though we have no dog here, yet we do have the inimitable damning of Jessica, the forerunner of Touchstone's of Corin (*As You Like It*, 3.2). The fun of Launcelot and his father interrupting one another while asking Bassanio for his place, is reproduced with added power in Dogberry and Verges in *Much Ado*. Shakspeare keeps up in *The Merchant* his satire of his contemporaries that we saw in his first *Love's Labours Lost*. [Provides satirical illustrations.] Notwithstanding the three-months' bond, and the gaoler engaged a fortnight beforehand, the action of the play is hurried into thirty-nine hours. When once he'd started, Shakspeare couldn't wait three months, 'twas not his nature to, in a play like this. (17-18)

## 24 Denton Jaques Snider, a Hegelian reading

1877

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From *System of Shakespeare's Dramas* (2 vols., St Louis, 1877). Volume I.

Denton Jaques Snider (1841–1925), born in Ohio, was educated at Oberlin College. After serving in the Union Army he taught Latin and Greek at the Christian Brothers College, St Louis, Missouri, where he spent most of his life. A member of the St Louis Philosophical Society, he spread aesthetic enlightenment to the American Middle West. His early works were devoted to the classics, most of his later ones to the exposition of his philosophical system. His two main books on Shakespeare, in common with many of his other works, were published at his own expense. Influenced by Hegelian philosophy, his *System of Shakespeare's Dramas* was published in 1877 and in an enlarged form ten years later, under the title *The Shakespearean Drama. A Commentary: The Comedies*.

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The general movement of the play lies in the conflict between the Right of Property and the Existence of the Individual, and in the Mediation of this conflict through the Family, which owes its origin in the present case to that same individual whom it rescues. That is, the Family, represented by Portia, the wife, returns and saves the man who aided, by his friendship and generosity, to bring it into being. All the characters of the play, though possessing peculiarities of their own, must be seen in their relation to this fundamental theme of the work.

There are three central movements, which may be named in order: The Conflict, the Mediation, the Return. Of the first movement there are two threads, showing, respectively the Property-conflict and the Love-conflict, though the former is raised to the highest spiritual significance by the underlying religious element. These two threads, moreover, are interwoven in the subtlest manner; still, an analysis has to tear them apart temporarily. In the first thread the antagonists are Antonio, the Christian, and Shylock, the Jew. Antonio is the centre of a group of five friends, who, in a variety of ways, ingraft themselves upon the action; around Shylock also are to be placed his daughter, Jessica, his clownish servant Gobbo, – both of whom are leaving him and going over to his opponents, – and his friend Tubal. The contrast between the two men in their personal relations is this: Antonio is the object of the warmest friendship, while Shylock is disrupting his own family, – driving away daughter and servant. The second thread unfolds the Love-conflict, which has here three phases, represented by Portia, Jessica, and Nerissa. The second Movement, – the Mediation, – has the same two threads: the



## Denton Jaques Snider

Property-conflict is brought to a successful conclusion by Portia, disguised as a lawyer; the Love-conflict has ended in all three cases with a happy solution, namely, marriage. But both friends and lovers have been torn asunder in the performance of their various functions; hence the Third Movement will be the Return, which brings all to Belmont, – the blissful abode of harmony. [Quotes from the end of the drama.]

The Collision which supplies the nerve of the play may be stated, in a general form, to be between Christianity and Judaism. But mark! it is not between these religions as dogmatic systems of Theology, but as realized in the practical life of men. [Discusses practicality.] We desire to lay stress upon an important fact. Shakespeare has nowhere, in any of his dramas, made religion, as such, the principal motive. This was no doubt intentional on his part, for no man understood the concrete nature of religion – religion as determining the conduct of mankind – better than he. In this form he uses it continually. But to make men die for an abstract principle of Theology, Shakespeare utterly refused, – and he was right. [Gives instances of abstract Theological principles.]

Let us now take up the second thread, – the Love-conflict, – in which Portia is the main figure, supported, however, by Nerissa and Jessica. Portia is the third great character of the play, and in importance stands quite on a par with Antonio and Shylock. Her function is mediatorial; in fact, she may be called the grand mediatrix of the entire drama. In her we see the instrumentality by which the main results of the drama are brought about. Through her courtship by Bassanio, Antonio comes into the power of the Jew by means of the loan. At her house all the personages of the play assemble, and the wooing is done. Moreover, she accomplishes the rescue of Antonio, which is the main mediation of the poem. The great principle of which she is the bearer may be termed the Right of Subjectivity. She asserts the validity of the Internal and Spiritual against the crushing might of externality; but she does not deny the Right of the Objective in its true limitation. Only when this Objective becomes destructive of its end and self-contradictory, as in the case when the Law was about to murder Antonio, does she place a limit to it and invoke a higher principle. Her struggle is with legality and prescription asserting themselves in spheres where they do not belong; but, in relations where this contradiction no longer appears, she is the most ethical of women. In the Family her subordination is complete, – indeed, devout. We shall see that all her acts have one end and one impelling motive, – devotion to her husband, an absolute unity with his feelings and interests; in other words, subordination to the Family. She vindicates the Right of Subjectivity for herself, in order that she may obtain the one whom she really loves, – without which principle, it need hardly be said, the true existence of the Family is impossible.

Shylock ranks as one of the most perfect characterizations in Shakespeare. How complete in every respect! How vividly does he rise up before us! Not merely his physical appearance, but his entire spiritual nature stands forth in the plainest lineaments. In fact, we feel as if we knew him better than we could possibly have done in real life. The Poet has laid open the most hidden recesses of character, has portrayed him in the most diverse relations, with a truth and fulness unapproached and unapproachable. We ask ourselves, Whence this completeness, this richness, this concreteness, of characterization? If we wish to see the infinite difference upon the same subjects, compare Shylock with the best efforts of other dramatists. Take *L'Avare*, by Molière. Placed by

the side of Shylock, how meagre and unsatisfactory! Can we get at the ground of this extraordinary superiority? First, we should say that Shylock is something more than mere avarice; he has a deeper motive in his nature, and his greed for gain is only one of its manifestations. It is true that his end in life is Thrift, as before stated, but that end is the offspring of his moral and spiritual being, – of his religion. Everything goes back to this centre. Shylock is a Jew, – one of the ‘peculiar people.’ In all his actions this deepest principle of his faith and his consciousness wells out; given the motive, he marches logically to its consequences. Thus we have arrived at an absolute spiritual unity in the man. The second reason for the transcendent excellence of this characterization is the breadth which it exhibits. The activities of Shylock embrace quite the totality of Life. We see him in his family, in business, in civil relations, in social relations, in morality, in religion. We behold him brought into contact with every essential form of society; and he acts in them, brings his principle to the test through them. Nor is he plunged into them from the outside, but is brought into living relation with them. Hence the concreteness, the perfection, the complete individualization of character. [Discusses Molière.]

But does Portia really give any hint to Bassanio which of the caskets to choose? It will be recollected that it was forbidden her in her father’s will to tell this secret. A suspicious circumstance is the introduction of a song during the choice of Bassanio, which the previous choosers did not have the benefit of. Hence one is inclined to scrutinize closely the meaning of the song. It is somewhat enigmatic, yet its general purport may be slated to be: ‘Do not choose by the eye, – by the glittering outside, – for it is the source of all delusion.’ Hence Portia, after observing with the greatest care all the formalities of her father’s will, breaks it just at the point of its conflict with her subjective right. This is done so delicately by her that it is scarcely perceived; still, it is none the less real. Thus she stands here as the grand bearer of the Right of Subjectivity, in its special form of Love versus Obedience, to the will of the parent. [Discusses child-parent relationships.]

To aid the readers who may desire to grasp these results in the more difficult, yet more precise, forms of philosophical statement, the following summary is given: The collision is between Antonio and Shylock, and is mediated by Portia. Its logical basis is the contradiction between the Objective as realized in the institutions of Reason, and the Subjective as the individual side of man. The former undertakes to crush the latter, through which alone it had existence, for it is posited by Subjective; hence it becomes contradictory of itself, and is negated. The Subjective, since it is not universal, is, in its turn, a new self-contradiction, and, hence, a negation itself, – which results in its subsuming itself under the Objective. So Portia asserts the Right of Subjectivity only to end in subordinating herself to one of the forms of objective reality, – the Family. (305, 307, 313, 316, 325, 328, 338)

## 25 Frederick William Hawkins, a plea for toleration

1879

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From *The Theatre* 1 November 1879, pp. 191–8.

Frederick William Hawkins (1849–1900), was a journalist and theatrical historian. A sub-editor and reporter for the *London Times*, he was one of the founders and editors of the weekly magazine *The Theatre*, from which this extract comes. In addition to a popular *Life of Edmund Kean* (London, 1869), he published *Annals of the French Stage from its Origin to the Death of Racine* (London, 1884), and *The French Stage in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1888). Hawkins's contribution to *The Theatre* (which Irving owned at this time) preceded Irving's first performance as Shylock at the Lyceum (1 December 1879), and inaugurated a series of 'Round Table' discussions in this journal.

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[Hawkins summarizes the Jewish history of settlement in England and animosity towards the Jews represented in Marlowe's drama. He also describes the Lopez case. (See No. 32.)]

The sympathy enjoyed by Shylock, I submit, is designedly aroused in the interest of the great but downtrodden race he represents. The man who exhausted worlds and then imagined new, whose mind was such that at times he seemed to touch some awful secret of the cosmos, whose works are lighted up by wisdom, generosity, and tenderness, such a man could have had no share in an outburst of vulgar envy and fanaticism. He saw the Jews as they were, and so seeing them wrote *The Merchant of Venice* in order to exhibit one of their number at a disadvantage as a direct result of the unreasoning prejudice against them. He more than counteracted with one hand what he seemed to do with the other. In availing himself of the greatest popular madness of his time he sought to appease it. His play might have been regarded as an attack upon the Jews, but in reality it defended them. Much of the true significance of the play is to be appreciated only by those who read between the lines, for even if Elizabethan audiences and readers had been well-disposed towards the Jews the dramatist was too great a master of his art to preach his moral. Nor, as I shall endeavor to show, is my view unsupported in any respect by the play itself. No pains appear to have been spared to dignify the character of Shylock. The whole force of an old untainted religious aristocracy is breathed in some of his speeches. He is filled with a generous enthusiasm for his sacred tribe and ancient law. His avarice, a vice forced upon him by circumstances, is relieved by gleams of an originally noble nature. He has so deep a veneration for the memory of his dead wife

that 'a wilderness of monkeys' [3.1.113] would not compensate him for the loss of the ring she had given him in youth. He is tenderly attached to his daughter, whom he leaves in charge of his house and his keys. Many of the graces of intellect, too, are engrafted upon him, as may be seen from his wealth of ideas and the felicitous language in which they are expressed. How comes it, then, that his fine nature has become so warped and soured, his fertility of mind so much misused? As an inevitable consequence of the inherited and personal wrongs he has endured, is enduring, and will always have to endure. Now, these wrongs, observe, are set by the dramatist in the strongest possible light. The sacred nation has been plundered and kept without the pale of ordinary society for centuries. The respected Antonio, at whom his hate is more particularly directed, is not only a hater of that nation – in itself an inexpiable crime in his eyes – but has reviled him in public as a 'dog,' has spat upon his gaberdine and even upon his beard, and intimates his readiness to do such things again. His thirst for vengeance, therefore, if repulsive in itself . . . is not unnatural, and when the merchant falls into his power, it becomes almost sublime. [Quotes 3.1.53–73.]

In penning this energetic protest – the most cogent, perhaps, ever raised against the persecution of the Jews – Shakespeare seems to be so far carried away by the force of conviction as to lose sight of the caution imposed upon him by the nature of his relations with the public, and the fact that such words were uttered in a theatre and printed within four years of the condemnation of Lopez (perhaps within as many months)<sup>[1]</sup> may be cited as a proof of rare moral courage. In the trial-scene Shylock's reason seems to have been shaken by the flight of his daughter; and the knowledge that Antonio has assisted her to get away, a circumstance often overlooked, may account in some measure for the increased malignity he here displays towards the merchant. If, moreover, we view Shylock in juxtaposition with his enemies, we may gain further evidence as to the dramatist's intentions. The play was written not so much for the sake of its brighter elements as for the purpose of concentrating attention upon an oppressed and insulted Jew. The enemies of Shylock, one and all, are scarcely permitted to gain even our respect. In the words of Hazlitt, 'while he is honest in his vices, they are hypocrites in their virtues.'<sup>[2]</sup> In all his contests with them the advantage is clearly on his side. These considerations, I think, justify the conclusion at which I have arrived, namely, that in *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare was animated by a tolerant spirit, indirectly excited sympathy for Shylock by humanizing the character and assigning adequate motives for the vindictiveness ascribed to it, and sought to enforce the truth that the darkest passions of human nature are nurtured by undeserved persecution and obloquy. His reasons for altering the Italian story, perhaps, were very different from what they are commonly supposed to have been. (192–3)

## 26 Henry Irving, Shylock: an actor's view

1879

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From 'The Round Table: The Character of Shylock', *The Theatre* 1 December 1879, pp. 254–5.

Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905), the foremost Victorian theatrical manager and actor, was born John Henry Brodribb. In 1871 he began his connections with the Lyceum, a theatre he managed from 1887 until 1901, performing with Ellen Terry and acting as its artistic director, administrator, leading actor, and director/producer. He hired leading designers, musicians, and painters, including Sir Edward Burne-Jones and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. In an interview with Joseph Hatton in 1884 Irving described the genesis of his interpretation of Shylock (see No. 35). Irving's response to Frederick Hawkins's essay in *The Theatre* (of which he was owner) follows in the tradition of Hazlitt [No. 5]: Shylock has been badly treated in the past, he hates well, is malevolent, but wronged. Irving published this essay as 'By an Actor'.

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If – and there is great virtue in the word – if Mr. Hawkins's theory is the logical result of the view that Shakespeare consciously enlisted our sympathies on the side of Shylock, it may, I think, be accepted. For that Shakespeare intended us to regard the Jew of Venice with feelings of exalted pity and commiseration I have no doubt. Mr. Hawkins supports his views by an elaborate examination of the character, its surroundings, and the conditions under which it was created. The dramatist was constrained by the anti-Jewish prejudices of his time to exhibit Shylock in a more or less odious light, but while doing so took care to represent him as animated by the whole force of an 'old untainted religious aristocracy,' to suggest the antiquity and grandeur of the race to which he belonged, to soften his character by many exquisite touches of human feeling, to attribute his vindictiveness to the 'inherited and personal wrongs' he has to endure as a Jew. In one respect, it seems to me, Mr. Hawkins does not make so much of his case as is possible. He points out that the enemies of Shylock are scarcely permitted to gain even our respect, but this is not enough. In *The Merchant of Venice* the Jew appears to less disadvantage than the Christian. Both are animated by the spirit of intolerance, the latter especially. Antonio, otherwise estimable, shows this spirit in a very repelling form. The Duke and Portia preach to Shylock of mercy, but when the day goes against him they do not practice what they preach – nay, even insist upon his changing his faith. Moreover, Bassanio is a mere fortune-hunter; and Jessica and Lorenzo, if they had their deserts,

*Shylock: an actor's view, 1879*

would be taken up for being concerned together in a downright robbery. 'O Father Abraham! what these Christians are!' [1.3.162] In writing *The Merchant of Venice*, in short, Shakespeare rose without an effort above the prejudices of his time against the Jews, and the tendency of the play is undoubtedly to show that 'the worst passions of human nature are nurtured by undeserved persecution and obloquy' [Hawkins, No. 25]. How far this tendency was a matter of deliberate design we shall never know, but Mr. Hawkins's arguments are hardly overthrown by the fact that the principle of religious toleration is not expressly enforced in the text. Shakespeare never preached his moral, in the first place because he was a great dramatist, and secondly because if he had done so in this case the actors would have been 'hissed, hooted, and pippin-pelted from the stage' by a Jew-hating audience. (254-5)

## 27 Frederick James Furnivall, not a doctrinal play

1879

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From 'The Round Table: The Character of Shylock', *The Theatre* 1 December 1879, pp. 255–6.

For Furnivall, see No. 23.

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Was this 'the object with which the *The Merchant* was given to the world, that it was intended as a plea for toleration towards the Jews?' [Hawkins, No. 25]. Most certainly not. Was Shakespeare's assertion of Shylock's humanity intended to reach farther than Shylock, and include, or be a plea for, the Jewish race as well as the special Jew? Without doubt it was. No greater mistake in criticism can be made than to treat the object of *The Merchant* as doctrinal. Its object was to weave the casket and bond stories into one happy whole, and to exhibit the characters of Shylock, Portia, and Antonio, and their lesser satellites, and to produce out of the conflicting chances on which happiness and life were set, that thing of beauty, that joy for ever that the play is, 'a symphony of grace and fierceness, mercy and vengeance, friendship and love, and fiend-like hate, of wit and humour too, all harmonized by the quiet strains of Heaven's one choir of stars'.<sup>[1]</sup> But when, in picturing what Christ, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,' had become in the brutal utterance of that most beautifully unselfish Christian Antonio, Shakespeare, with his fairness to all men, could not forbear showing that this religious intolerance had degraded the Jew even more than the Christian; the Jew yet shared the common humanity that all the children of Adam inherited, and had the same right to turn fiend, to indulge revenge, that the Christian had. In the face of this climax to Shylock's speech, how can it be contended that the *object*, the main purpose, of the play is to put forward 'a plea for toleration towards the Jews?' Had that been Shakespeare's object, would he have clinched his argument with that 'revenge,' the claim that Jews had a right to turn devils as freely as Christians had? Was there no noble Jew in history, no suffering one, specially no woman, in romance, through whom he could have put forth his plea more effectively than through Shylock? Assuredly there were many. I reject then the 'object' view. I reject also any connection of Lopez, executed (most brutally) as a Portingale with 'other Portingales,' on June 7, 1594, with the Shylock of (almost certainty) 1596, when all minds were taken up with the Cadiz expedition.<sup>[2]</sup> But I believe that, in doing justice to Shylock as a man, Shakespeare meant to do justice to all of Shylock's race. (255–26)

## 28 James Spedding, 'not about Jewish grievances'

1879

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From 'The Round Table: The Character of Shylock', *The Theatre* 1 December 1879, pp. 257–8.

For Spedding see No. 22 above. His close friend Edward Fitzgerald urged him to devote more of his time to Shakespeare. Fitzgerald wrote 'I never heard him read a page but he threw new light on it'.<sup>1</sup>

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The best contribution I can offer to this discussion is the expression of an old man's difficulty in accepting these new discoveries of profound moral and political designs underlying Shakespeare's choice and treatment of his subjects. I believe that he was a man of business, that his principal business was to produce plays which would draw. I believe that he took the story of the caskets and of the pound of flesh because he thought he could combine them (I forget whether he found them together or put them together) into a good romantic comedy that was likely to succeed, and I think he managed it very well. But if, instead of looking about for a story to 'please' the Globe audience, he had been in search of a subject under cover of which he might steal into their minds 'a more tolerant feeling towards the Hebrew race,' I cannot think that he would have selected for his hero a rich Jewish merchant, plotting the murder of a Christian rival by means of a fraudulent contract, which made death the penalty of nonpayment at the day, and insisting on the exaction of it. In a modern Christian audience it seems to be possible for a skillful actor to work on the feelings of the audience so far as to make a man engaged in such a business an object of respectful sympathy. But can anybody believe that, in times when this would have been much more difficult, Shakespeare would have *chosen* such a case as a favourable one to suggest toleration to a public prejudiced against Jews? [Discusses legal defence cases.] I do not believe, in fact, that Shakespeare, either in choosing the subject or treating it, was thinking about Jewish grievances or disabilities at all either way. What he had to think about was, how he could introduce into a *comedy*, without putting everything out of tune, an incident so shocking, and a project so savage, that 'the imagination almost refuses to approach it.' And I think he managed this also very skillfully, by first depriving Shylock of all pretence of grievance or excuse, which was done by the offer of all the money due to him upon his bond, with twice as much more to compensate him for the very short time he had had to wait for it beyond the appointed day – an offer which leaves him without any conceivable motive for



James Spedding

preferring the pound of flesh except the worst – and then dismissing him with a punishment very much lighter than he deserved. (257–8)

## 29 Israel Davis, Shylock's 'nobility and distinction'

1879

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From 'The Round Table: The Character of Shylock', *The Theatre* 1 December 1879, pp. 258–9.

The Anglo-Jewish journalist and editor Israel Davis (1847–1927) was educated at the City of London School. He gained a classical scholarship to Christ's College, Cambridge, graduating 12th in the first class in the Classical Tripos of 1870. Called to the Bar at the Inner Temple, Davis became a legal assessor for the London Marine Board. A regular contributor to the *London Times*, he wrote his first leading article for the *London Jewish Chronicle* in 1869. The subject was his Cambridge friend Numa Hartog (1846–71) who became the first Jewish Senior Wrangler in the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos. Hartog knew George Eliot,<sup>1</sup> whom Davis refers to in his contribution to this 'Round Table'. Davis became editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, which he helped make probably the leading Jewish newspaper in the English-speaking world.

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It is, perhaps, going a little too far to say that Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice* as a plea for toleration towards the Jews. [Brief discussion of Anglo-Jewish history.] I think it must be admitted that Shakespeare deliberately and consciously chose to represent his Jew as a human being. Shakespeare was too thoroughly an artist to write a play with a moral purpose. In regard to the essence of a drama, he was guided irresistibly by a keen appreciation of the real nature of men's thoughts and feelings. As he had the philosophic spirit he was entirely free from a common failing of common men, to regard with scorn and hate everything which is unlike themselves. The more unlike it was to usual experience the more would an object attract his curious observation; and to comprehend a living thing the first necessity is to sympathize with it. As the result, Shakespeare's Jew is an interesting character, not evil by nature, but made evil by the treatment to which he has been subjected. The moral suggests itself that if the Jew had been treated in a better way he would have been a better man; and Shakespeare cannot have been unconscious that he preached that moral, although the purpose of his play was to preach no lesson, but to describe human life. By other writers who had dealt with the story of the Jew he had been exhibited as an impossibly malignant creature. It was reserved for Shakespeare to picture the unhappy Jew tortured and outraged, his self-respect and his pride of race wounded by Antonio, his friends cooled, his enemies heated, and his business stopped by Antonio, the memory of his dead wife profaned, the love of his

Israel Davis

daughter alienated by Antonio's friend, and the girl herself carried off, as her father believes, in Antonio's ship. It is a being enraged by some of these wrongs who devises the bond, and it is one driven frantic by the accumulation of them all who insists upon the penalty. Shakespeare put into Shylock's mouth the immortal words beginning, 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' [3.1.53] in which the common humanity of Jews, made like other men in the image of God, is insisted upon; and also the argument which must have smitten for many years afterwards the consciences of the traffickers in the slave trade, — 'You have among you many a purchased slave,' [4.1.90].

The dramatist must have been aware that the tendency of what he wrote was to represent the Jew as no worse than in the like circumstances another man would have become, and to ridicule fancied superiorities of races or religions, as he obviously does when in another play he makes a sottish clown say, 'If thou wilt, go with me to the ale-house; if not, thou art an Hebrew, a Jew, and not worth the name of a Christian,' [*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 2.5.46–8]. Perhaps the truest test of Shakespeare's meaning is the impression which the play, when carefully interpreted, makes upon those who see it. Mr. Irving makes us feel by his faithful and reverent interpretation that, in spite of Shylock's sordid anxiety to destroy a competitor, his character has nobility and distinction, that his intellect has quickness and clearness, that his fate is unduly hard. So far and no farther could the process of rehabilitation go in Shakespeare's days. It was reserved for a latter-day genius to carry the idealization of the Jew to a higher pitch, but it was a greater step for Shakespeare in the sixteenth century to create the Shylock of *The Merchant of Venice* than for George Eliot in our own times to imagine the Mordecai of *Daniel Deronda*. (258–9)

## 30 David Anderson, Shylock 'a product of history'

1879

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From 'The Round Table: The Character of Shylock', *The Theatre* 1 December 1879, pp. 259–60.

David John Anderson (1837–1900) was drama critic for several English newspapers between 1874 and 1897, including *All the Year Round* and *The Theatre*. In 1857 he published *Jewish Emancipation: A Voice from Israel*, arguing for Jewish civil and religious freedoms.

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It seems to me that the key to Shylock's character and conduct is contained in the four lines [Quotes 1.3.121–4]. He argues that, having been insulted, he must exact revenge according to the old law of his nation and the dispensation of the prophet, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Possibly trade rivalry has had something to do with Antonio's vindictiveness, for we do not find that the remainder of the personages of the play entertain any particular ill-feeling towards the Jew. Whether or not Shakespeare studied Shylock from a living model, and whether he intended to enlist our sympathies on his behalf, must probably remain a matter of conjecture to the end of time. But that the character is eminently natural and consistent with historical truth I shall proceed to show. The poet flourished in an age somewhat similar to our own; and to him the Protestant Reformation and the dawn of polite learning in England were what the French Revolution and the freedom of the press are to us. And he had so far conquered the prejudices of the dark ages that before judging the Jew he could put himself in the Jew's place, and could thoroughly realize how Shylock, born of a most ancient and most proud ancestry, felt himself the equal, if not the superior, of the highest dignitaries of Venice. Antonio might spit upon the hated gaberdine – the badge of the alien people – as other Christians – forgetful of the Master's orders – had robbed and murdered other Jews in cold blood; as other Christians had blasphemed against his beloved faith and driven his fathers forth to be scapegoats in the wilderness of the world. But fetters could not bind nor whips tame the indomitable spirit of Shylock. True to the old Arabian blood, he would be revenged! Here, in England, to-day, the Jewish citizen is on an equality in all things with his Christian fellow subjects. But to understand the character of Shylock it is absolutely necessary to study the history of his time, and note to what persecutions and oppression his brethren were subjected, and what treatment they had endured in every country in Europe during several previous centuries. I see no reason why the Jewish race should be ashamed of Shylock; and I venture to suggest that at the

## David Anderson

period of the play there may have been hundreds of such characters in the cities and towns of Italy. Save for his revengeful spirit, the Jew compares favourably with the other principal characters of the play. Bassanio is confessedly a fortune hunter. Antonio deceives his fashionable friends as to the true state of his affairs. Jessica deceives and robs her father, and Lorenzo receives the stolen goods. It is not surprising, under the circumstances, that Shylock appears unamiable. There were but very few Jews in England at the time when *The Merchant of Venice* was produced, probably in 1594; and therefore I am not able to subscribe to the theory that the play may have been written with the object of lessening the prejudices of the time against the Jews. It appears to my mind far more reasonable to believe that, having the character of a Jew to depict, Shakespeare should display more of the artist than the advocate, and that unerring instinct of a genius which always went straight to the heart of the matter in hand. So far as I am able to divine the meaning of the poet, Mr. Irving has grasped the character of the Jew of Venice in all its details and apparent inconsistencies. No longer a mountebank or a fiend in human shape, Shakespeare's and Irving's Shylock is a product of history, and, as some might contend, on the poet's part of an insight little short of revelation. (259–260)

## 31 Oscar Wilde, a sonnet to Portia

1879

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'Portia', first published in *World: A Journal for Men and Woman*, 12 (14 January 1880), p. 13.

Oscar Fingell O'Flahertie Wilde (1854–1900), the great Irish writer, was born in Dublin to an Anglo-Irish family. His father was a distinguished eye surgeon, his mother, Jane Francesca Elgee, wrote nationalist poetry under the pseudonym 'Speranza'. Wilde was educated at Trinity College, Dublin and then at Magdalen College, Oxford. In 1878 Wilde won the Newdigate prize for poetry, and was influenced by Pater's aesthetic philosophy of beauty and art for art's sake. Wilde's first volume of verse, in which his poem 'Portia' appears, was published in 1881. Stuart Mason (pseud. Christopher Millard) in his *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde* (1914) notes that 'Portia' was 'Written at the Lyceum Theatre', where Wilde saw Ellen Terry's performance as Portia on 28 November 1879. A dedication 'To Ellen Terry' was presumably added by Wilde's friend Ross in 'a manuscript version' (p. 228). Wilde was guest at a Lyceum Theatre banquet held on 14 February 1880 to celebrate the 100th performance of Ellen Terry and Henry Irving's *The Merchant of Venice*.<sup>1</sup>

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### *Portia*

I marvel not Bassanio was so bold  
To peril all he had upon the lead,  
Or that proud Arragon bent low his head,  
Or that Morocco's fiery heart grew cold:  
For in that gorgeous dress of beaten gold  
Which is more golden than the golden sun,  
No woman Veronesé<sup>[2]</sup> looked upon  
Was half so fair as Thou whom I behold.  
Yet fairer when with wisdom as your shield  
The sober-suited lawyer's gown you donned  
And would not let the laws of Venice yield  
Antonio's heart to that accursèd Jew –  
O Portia! take my heart: it is thy due:  
I think I will not quarrel with the Bond.

## 32 Sidney Lee, 'the Lopez case' and Shakespeare's Jew

1880

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From 'The Original of Shylock', *Gentleman's Magazine* 246 (February 1880), pp. 185–200.

Sir Sidney Lee (1859–1926), born Solomon Lazarus, the son of a London Jewish merchant, changed his name at the suggestion of his Oxford mentor Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol College, Oxford. Lee was educated at the City of London School and Balliol, where he read Classics and modern history. His undergraduate essay on Shylock attracted the attention of F. J. Furnivall (No. 23), who recommended Lee to Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), then starting the new *Dictionary of National Biography* (*DNB*). Lee was subeditor from 1883 to 1891, and full editor from 1891 to 1917. Lee wrote 764 articles in the first series of the *DNB* (66 vols., 1885–1901), two which he expanded into book-length biographies: *A Life of William Shakespeare* (1898; 13 editions by 1926), and *Queen Victoria: A Biography* (1902). He also produced a facsimile of the *First Folio* (1902), an edition of Shakespeare in 20 vols., published in America as *The Renaissance Shakespeare* (1907), and in England as *The Caxton Shakespeare* (1910), for which he wrote the Introduction only. His later work included two collections of essays, *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century* (1904), *Shakespeare and the Modern Stage* (1906), and *The French Renaissance in England* (1910). Knighted in 1911, in 1913 Lee became the first Professor of English Language and Literature at East London College (subsequently Queen Mary College) in the University of London.

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The character of Shylock, to which Mr. Irving's admirable impersonation at the Lyceum has given a newly revived interest, has long been a bone of contention among critics. Some have insisted that Shylock is an incarnation of the spirit of revenge, and that his connection with a special nationality is an accidental and not an essential circumstance. Others have perceived in him little beyond a monster of iniquity such as Shakespeare and his contemporaries actually imagined the Jew to be, of whom they are supposed to have known nothing more than what was to be learnt from stories descended from the Middle Ages. A third order of critics has represented Shylock as a human creature more sinned against than sinning, belonging to a race whose character has been moulded by centuries of persecution; and they have seen in the play at once a vigorous protest against religious prejudices and a logical plea for religious toleration.

Each of these verdicts contains a modicum of truth, but, in effect, so small an amount,

*'the Lopez case' and Shakespeare's Jew, 1880*

that were they all three compounded they would give a far from satisfactory estimate of the Jew's character. Shylock is far more than an unusually passionate man, with all his milk of human kindness curdled by persecution to the sourness of hate, seeking to 'feed revenge' for lifelong injury, and careless in what crimes his purpose may involve him. If we detach him for one moment from the main incidents of the play, and picture him to ourselves when his passions are cooled and his attention is turned to the customary pursuits of his life, we find no ordinary Italian or English merchant, but the living semblance of a *Jewish* trader – shrewd and covetous, it is true, but possessed of other characteristics still more distinctive of his race. Strong domestic affections, which even the cares of his counting-house cannot obscure, deep-set sympathies with the fortunes of his 'tribe,' and firm faith in the sacredness of its separation from the Gentiles, are traits that, combined with a pious horror of eating or drinking with Christians and a fondness for Scriptural illustration, leave little doubt in the minds of those acquainted with the peculiarities of Jewish character that they have been drawn directly from a contemporary model. It is the minuteness with which the features peculiar to Shylock's race are expressed in the play that places him in a different category from Shakespeare's portrayals of other foreigners. His Romans could be readily transformed into Englishmen, and such Roman spirit as they do possess is traceable to Plutarch. Few of his Italians are very strictly localised. Of Shylock almost alone of all Shakespeare's characters can it be truly said that it would be impossible for him to undergo a change of nationality without rendering his character utterly meaningless. But it is not only a large nose that, as in the case of Barabas, identifies Shylock with 'the tribe of Levi:' his kinship is brought out by his faithful adherence to Jewish sentiment.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that Shakespeare was himself acquainted with Jews, and obtained an intimate knowledge of them from personal observation. For it is incredible that even he could have supplemented, out of his inner consciousness, the conception of them to be derived from contemporary writers whose attention was caught by their most superficial characteristics only. But we are well aware that cursory readers will meet us with a serious objection from an historical point of view. Between 1290 and 1655 – the dates respectively of the expulsion of the Jews and of their return – most works on history either distinctly state or silently imply that no Jews were known in England. If Shakespeare, therefore, is assumed to have studied Shylock in the life, historical students will be forced to conclude that he went abroad to seek his model. The story of Shakespeare's travels is now, however, admitted to be of very doubtful authenticity, and we are thus landed in what seems to be an awkward dilemma. Fortunately the appearance is worse than the reality. Ignorance of the history of the time, as documents in the State Paper Office teach it to us, could alone set such a difficulty before us. Deeper investigation than has yet been made into the domestic history of the 16th century will prove how sadly the history of Jews in England needs further elucidation, and how erroneous are many of the prevalent notions respecting it. Armed with arguments derived from an examination of the State Papers, chiefly of the reign of Elizabeth, we are prepared to meet objectors to the conclusion on historical grounds with a flat contradiction. On the evidence of contemporary records we can safely assert that Jews were residing in England throughout Shakespeare's lifetime, and that



opportunities of more or less intimate intercourse with them were for many years open to him.

We need not go very far to find two important pieces of evidence to show that at the beginning and at the end of the sixteenth century the presence of Jews in this country was acknowledged by the highest authorities. In the State Papers relating to the marriage of Katharine of Arragon with Arthur, Prince of Wales, we are told that Henry VII. had a long interview with a Spanish envoy to discuss the presence of Jews in England.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in a very rare tract descriptive of English society, and evidently written within the first quarter of the seventeenth century, we are informed that ‘a store of Jewes we have in England; a few in court; many i’ th’ Citty, more in the country.’<sup>2</sup> These witnesses can leave little doubt of the truth of the general proposition that Jews were known here before their formal readmission under Cromwell, and many disconnected notices can be produced to prove it in further detail.<sup>3</sup> We are thus enabled with more or less distinctness to trace from the remains of a great mass of private correspondence, dating from 1500 the fortunes of a Jewish family of the name of Lopez living in England from the beginning of the second quarter of the sixteenth century. But the interest attaching to this discovery is for us more than a purely historical one. It seems capable of throwing much light on contemporary stage history. It is certainly significant that, rarely as the Jew has made his appearance on the English stage,<sup>4</sup> he was the hero of no less than three plays, all written and produced within the same fifteen years of the sixteenth century,<sup>5</sup> and that during those very years a Jewish doctor – Roderigo Lopez by name (the head of the family to whom we have referred) – held a very prominent position in London and at court, and shared with the actors an intimacy with those noblemen who proved themselves the warmest patrons of the drama. It is, perhaps, a more remarkable coincidence that in the same year, and just before the earliest form of the *Merchant of Venice* was first produced, this Jew became the victim of what bears all the appearances of a court intrigue, and underwent a trial and execution which brought his family and faith into such notoriety that one theatrical manager at least found it to his advantage to utilise it. In a more minute examination of this man’s public and private relations than has yet been attempted, we intend to inquire if any grounds exist on which we may (within the limits of historical probability) establish a connection between his career and the creation and development of Shakespeare’s Jew.

[Lee reconstructs the life of Roderigo – properly, Ruy – Lopez, who joined the College of Physicians in 1569, and by 1575 was one of the leading London doctors. Lopez, who treated many of the chief statesmen of his day, and was known to Leicester, Walsingham and Burley, became ‘sworn physician’ to Queen Elizabeth in 1586. In about 1590 Lopez became involved with Antonio Perez, a pretender to the throne of Portugal who had fled from the wrath of King Philip of Spain, and was being cultivated by Essex and his party. Having quarrelled with both Perez and Essex, Lopez agreed to help agents of Philip kill Perez. The Spanish conspirators were also planning to kill the Queen, and tried to get Lopez to join them. He refused, but when some of the conspirators were arrested they falsely accused him, and Essex led a legal campaign to have Lopez executed. The prosecution was conducted by Solicitor-General Coke, who called Lopez a ‘perjured and murdering traitor and Jewish doctor’, while the other judges uttered similar anti-Jewish remarks, and Lopez was found guilty of treason.

*'the Lopez case' and Shakespeare's Jew, 1880*

Elizabeth and her legal advisers believed him innocent, but Essex's partisans exerted so much political pressure that she finally agreed to his execution in June 1594. As the hangman performed his work, the Tyburn crowd shouted 'he is a Jew!'.]

It remains for us to show how far these circumstances connect themselves with contemporary stage history. No one living in London at the time could have been ignorant of Lopez's history and fate, and it cannot surprise us that the caterers for public amusements gave expression to the popular sentiments respecting him. The attention of Philip Henslowe, the best-known and most successful theatrical manager of the time, was at once attracted to the Jew's career. For it can be no merely fortuitous coincidence that caused him in 1594 to produce plays entitled *The Jew* and *The Jew of Malta* more frequently than any others within the same lapse of time, and to secure the greatest of his financial successes by these representations. The entries in his rough diary inform us that *The Jew* formed the subject of no less than twenty representations between May 1594 and the end of the year.<sup>6</sup>

The piece best liked by the populace, and therefore most often produced on these occasions, was Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, and, in spite of Charles Lamb's well-known criticism,<sup>[7]</sup> there was much in it not only to suggest a famous criminal like Lopez, but a few rough touches to identify him with contemporary Jews in the eyes of any Elizabethan audience. Barabas renders with great faithfulness the bitter hate that the Hebrew had for the Christian in the lines –

I learn'd in Florence how to kiss my hand,  
Heave up any shoulders when they call me dog,  
And duck as low as any barefoot friar,  
Hoping to see them starved upon a stall,  
Or else be gathered for in our synagogue;  
That when the offering-basin comes to me,  
Even for charity I may spit into't. [2.3.23–9]

But even a greater fidelity to Jewish custom is expressed in another characteristic of Barabas. He is fond of quoting foreign languages. His French is passable, but the jargon he more frequently indulges in is an impure mixture of Spanish and Italian. Dodsley suggested that this may have been a dialect employed by the Jews of the time, and his supposition receives the strongest confirmation from a letter written by a Jewess some years later to Queen Elizabeth in the same mongrel dialect.<sup>8</sup> To whom Marlowe was specially indebted for this knowledge cannot be determined, but, as he never travelled, we may with great probability attribute it to some Jew residing in London at the time, perhaps to some member of Lopez's family, if not to Lopez himself.

But, however that may have been, there can be no doubt that all the circumstances connected with the Jewish doctor's career reached the ears of Shakespeare. Throughout the year of the execution the dramatist was living in London, and opportunities were open to him of learning fuller details than those contained in the popular reports. He was on terms of considerable intimacy with Essex's friend Southampton, and it is not impossible that he formed some acquaintance at the same time with the Earl himself.<sup>9</sup> In their company he may not unfrequently have met the doctor. When, therefore, the

attention of all the patrons of the stage was concentrated in tracking out the Portuguese plots, Shakespeare could not have remained deaf to the revelations made by them, and the particulars of the trial and execution could not have escaped his observation.

Four important points in the *Merchant of Venice* give this view unexpected confirmation. (1) The name of Antonio, (2) the date and construction of the play, (3) a few points in Shylock's character, and (4) some incidental references to current events, seem to leave little doubt that Lopez was not far removed from Shakespeare's mind when he wrote the play.

1. The name Antonio bears an obvious reference to that of the doctor's chief accuser and enemy. It occurs in connection with none of Shylock's dramatic predecessors, nor in any of the stories on which the plot is conjectured to have been based,<sup>10</sup> while the sympathy felt by London audiences with King Antonio's cause seems especially to recommend it for introduction into the place it occupies in the play. It cannot be objected that Shakespeare, or Shakespeare's stage-manager, was above employing such ordinary means to secure the greatest possible interest in his productions. In *Love's Labour Lost* – a play invented by Shakespeare from beginning to end – the chief hero is entitled the King of Navarre – an appellation that seems to be utterly pointless until we call to mind the relations existing at the time of its composition between Queen Elizabeth and Henry of Navarre. Nothing, moreover, appears to have so delighted an Elizabethan audience as references to the Queen's guests. In the *Merry Wives of Windsor* a current joke about a German Count recently visiting at Windsor is introduced in its entirety.<sup>11</sup> In the play before us, Portia refers to a Polish Palatine who had been lately received at the English Court. [Quotes 1.2.64.] The name Antonio, it must likewise be remembered, was very common among the Portuguese, but is not by any means so ordinary an Italian one as Lorenzo or Ludovico. It has consequently no special fitness in reference to Venice. The character of Antonio is, similarly, not that of an ordinary Italian merchant prince, for those 'royal traders,' in spite of their kingly magnificence and display, always evinced, above everything else, the shrewdness and acuteness of men of business. It was, of course, necessary, for dramatic purposes, to emphasise chiefly Antonio's magnanimity, but the stress Shakespeare lays on it is so great, and so completely obscures all other characteristics, as to suggest that, in a desire to compliment Essex's *protégé*, he may have had an additional motive to differentiate Antonio from the usual type of merchants.

2. The date of the play has not been definitely settled. Malone, the first editor to attempt a chronological arrangement of Shakespeare's works, placed it in 1594. He accepted the well-known tradition that the enterprising Henslowe obtained in that year a new play from Shakespeare, which he produced on August 23, and entered in his diary as 'the Venesyon comodey,'<sup>12</sup> and identified it with the *Merchant of Venice*. This is a somewhat early date to which to refer the play in the form in which we now find it, and the Cambridge editors (Messrs. Clark and Wright), judging from the discrepancies to be found in the first printed editions,<sup>13</sup> have come to the more probable conclusion that Henslowe's entry refers to a first rough draft of the comedy only. Shylock would, therefore, have first appeared not much more than three months after Lopez's famous execution. Even in the quartos of 1600 there is much to show that the play originally was rapidly worked up. The interweaving of the two plots of the bond and the caskets is

far from perfect. The admixture is mechanical. The whole emphasis of the drama is laid on the character of Shylock, whose name, and not that of the merchant, originally gave the piece its title.<sup>14</sup> Jessica and Bassanio, although important to the development of the dramatic action, are very imperfectly characterised. All these circumstances give undeniable evidence of hurry in the production of the drama. To the fact that it was quite within Shakespeare's experience to write to meet an exceptional demand, the story of the composition of the *Merry Wives of Windsor* bears important testimony.<sup>15</sup>

3. On points of character we must speak with greater hesitation. Lopez's extant correspondence is very incomplete, and only gives us glances here and there of his characteristics. We can say with some probability that the spirit of revenge in the doctor's case was similar in calibre to that in Shylock's. But we can speak with certainty on one point only. In their devotion to their family the two Jews closely resemble each other. Neither Lopez nor Shylock, in good fortune or in bad, fail to exemplify the Jewish virtue of domesticity. Lopez excused his attendance at court on the ground that the illness of his wife detained him at home.<sup>16</sup> His Dutch correspondents never omit to send his family affectionate remembrances from his Jewish friends in Holland, whatever be the subject of the letter, and he never omits to return them.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Shylock's love for his daughter and for his wife Leah, whose memory he piously cherishes, are touches of character which theories of dramatic art only incompletely explain.

4. There are a few references in the play that seem to connect it with the renowned trial of Lopez. In the third act Shakespeare denounces the fatality of employing the rack to extort a prisoner's confession of crime, 'where men enforced do speak anything.' [Quotes 3.2.25–39.] Many commentators have imagined the passage to have been suggested by some notorious contemporary instance of the application of torture. The Clarendon Press editors remark on it: 'Shakespeare was old enough to remember the case of Francis Throckmorton in 1584, and that of Squires in 1598 was fresh in his mind.'<sup>18</sup> The spirit of the passage is, however, so entirely in Shakespeare's earliest manner, that few can doubt that it appeared in the original version of the play in 1594. It seems therefore possible, with greater probability, and with greater precision so far as the date is concerned, to connect it with the case of the Jewish doctor. Again, in the trial scene Gratiano, while jeering at the Jew, declares it would be better for twelve jurymen to send him to the gallows than two godfathers to lead him to the font. [Quotes 4.1.394–6.]<sup>19</sup> From an historical point of view, these words are much out of place in the mouth of a speaker in a Venetian court of justice, where trial by jury was never known. But it is clear from other portions of the same scene, and from a similar scene in *Othello* that Shakespeare knew sufficient of the ordinary legal procedure of the Doge's court to prevent him from falling into such an error unconsciously. The only point of the utterance can, therefore, lie in its suggestion of the way in which an English court of law would treat a Jew – an allusion that would be sure to suggest to an attentive audience of his time the recent proceedings against the Jew-traitor. Shylock is elsewhere described as being infused with the spirit of a wolf lately hanged on the gallows for human slaughter; [4.1.132–5] and his name is so frequently brought into connection with a 'halter' as to imply a reference to some event enacted at Tyburn, in which a Jew was concerned [4.2.97; 4.1.361–3].

This is the last of the four points to which we intended to call attention. In our

## Sidney Lee

previous observations we gave the chief external facts on which a relationship between Shylock and a contemporary Jew could be established, and in these last remarks we have shown how far the conclusion we there arrived at was borne out by the play itself. That we have succeeded in discovering the actual original of Shylock we are not presumptuous enough to imagine. Our knowledge of Lopez is at the best only incomplete and fragmentary, and it is quite possible that, had we the means of learning their characters and lives, Lopez's cousin,<sup>20</sup> his Jewish friend Geronimo,<sup>21</sup> and any of the 'other divers kinsmen here,' to whom Coke referred at the Doctor's trial,<sup>22</sup> would present as striking a likeness to Shylock as Roderigo himself.<sup>23</sup> What we may fairly claim to have proved is that Jews were residing in England in Shakespeare's day, and that the Jew of Venice bears evidence of having had a contemporary prototype. We have placed, at least, beyond all reasonable doubt the facts that one Jew of England came into considerable prominence while the dramatist was growing up to manhood, and was treated with great indignity because of his religious belief towards the end of his remarkable career, which closed only a few months before the *Merchant of Venice* appeared. We have shown what grounds there are for believing that Shakespeare and his friend Burbage came into contact with this famous Jew; and we have pointed out how, in spite of the plot of the play, which Shakespeare based on an old and popular tradition that allowed of very slight adaptation to current events, the name and character of Lopez's accuser correspond with the name and character of Shylock's enemy. Those whom the theory in no way convinces, may at least be induced to admit that our investigation, if it has itself failed of its object, has at least opened the storehouse where the original of Shylock may yet be found. (186–200)

## 33 Henry James, a critique of Irving and Terry

1881

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From 'The London Theatres', *Scribner's Monthly*, 31, no. 3 (January 1881), pp. 354-69.

Henry James, Jr. (1843-1916), known today primarily as a major novelist, also wrote plays (unsuccessfully), and contributed regularly to journals such as the *North American Review*, the *Nation* and the *Atlantic Monthly* as well as *Scribner's Monthly*. His less than enthusiastic observations on Irving's Lyceum production incidentally reveal his admiration of Shakespeare. This review was reprinted in Henry James, *The Scenic Art. Notes on Acting and the Drama 1872-1901*, ed. Allan Wade (London, 1949), pp. 138-46.

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Upward of two years ago the Lyceum passed into the hands of Mr. Henry Irving, who is without doubt at present the most distinguished actor in England. [Discusses the recent history of the Lyceum Theatre.] Mr. Irving for the last two years, then, has had his own way at the Lyceum, and a very successful way it has been. Hamlet and Shylock have constituted the stock of his enterprise, though he has also acted several of the parts in which he built up his reputation. [Describes these.] During the whole of last winter, however, *The Merchant of Venice* held the stage, and this performance disputes with that of *Hamlet* the chief place in his list of successes as an actor. Among his triumphs as a manager, the former play, we believe, quite heads the list; it has every appearance of being an immense financial success, and startling stories are told of the great sums of money it brings in to the happy lessee of the theatre. It is arranged upon the stage with a great deal of ingenuity and splendour, and has a strong element of popularity in the person of Miss Ellen Terry, who is the most conspicuous actress now before the London public, as the picturesque Shylock of her Portia is the most eminent actor. Mr. Irving has been a topic in London any time these five years, and Miss Terry is at least as much of one. There is a difference, indeed, for about Mr. Irving people are divided, and about Miss Terry they are pretty well agreed. The opinion nourishes on the one side that Mr. Irving is a great and admirable artist, and on the other the impression prevails that his defects outnumber his qualities. He has at least the power of inspiring violent enthusiasms, and this faculty is almost always accompanied by a liability to excite protests. Those that it has been Mr. Irving's destiny to call forth have been very downright, and many of them are sufficiently intelligible. He is what is called a picturesque actor; that is, he depends for his effects upon the art with which he presents a certain figure to the eye,

## Henry James

rather than upon the manner in which he speaks his part. He is a thoroughly serious actor, and evidently bestows an immense deal of care and conscience upon his work; he meditates, elaborates, and, upon the line on which he moves, carries the part to a very high degree of finish. But it must be affirmed that this is a line with which the especial art of the actor, the art of utterance, of saying the thing, has almost nothing to do. Mr. Irving's peculiarities and eccentricities of speech are so strange, so numerous, so personal to himself, his vices of pronunciation, of modulation, of elocution so highly developed, the tricks he plays with the divine mother-tongue so audacious and fantastic, that the spectator who desires to be in sympathy with him finds himself confronted with a bristling hedge of difficulties. He must scramble over the hedge, as best he can, in order to get at Mr. Irving at all; to get at him, that is, as an exponent of great poetic meanings. Behind this hedge, as we may say, the actor disports himself with a great deal of ingenuity, and passes through a succession of picturesque attitudes and costumes; but we look at him only through its thorny interstices. In so doing, we get glimpses of a large and various ability. He is always full of intention, and when the intention is a matter of by-play, it is brilliantly carried out. He is, of course, much better in the modern drama than in the Shakespearean; because, if it is a question of sacrificing the text, the less we are obliged to sacrifice the better. . . .

Mr. Irving's rendering of Shakespeare, however, is satisfactory in a varying degree. His *Macbeth*<sup>[1]</sup> appeared to us wide of the mark, but his *Hamlet* is very much better. In *Macbeth*, as we remember his performance, he failed even to look the part satisfactorily – a rare mistake in an actor who has evidently a strong sense of what may be called the plastic side of the characters he represents. His *Hamlet* is a magnificent young prince: few actors can wear a cloak and a bunch of sable plumes with a greater grace than Mr. Irving; few of them can rest a well-shaped hand on the hilt of a sword in a manner more suggestive of the models of Vandyke. The great trouble with the *Hamlet* was that it was inordinately slow – and this, indeed, is the fault throughout of Mr. Irving, who places minutes between his words, and strange strides and balancings between his movements. Heat, rapidity, passion, magic – these qualities are the absent ones, and a good general description of him is to say that he is picturesque but diffuse. Of his *Shylock* during last winter, it is often said that it presents his faults in their mildest and his merits in their highest form. In this there is possibly a great deal of truth; his representation of the rapacious and rancorous Jew has many elements of interest. He looks the part to a charm, or rather we should say, to a repulsion, and he might be painted as he stands. His conception of it is a sentimental one, and he has endeavoured to give us a sympathetic, and, above all, a pathetic *Shylock*. How well he reconciles us to this aspect of the character we ourselves shall not undertake to say, for our attention was fixed primarily upon the superficial execution of the thing, and here, without going further, we found much to arrest and perplex it. The actor struck us as rigid and frigid, and above all as painfully behind the stroke of the clock. The deep-welling malignity, the grotesque horror, the red-hot excitement of the long-baffled, sore-hearted member of a despised trade, who has been all his life at a disadvantage, and who at last finds his hour and catches his opportunity – these elements had dropped out. Mr. Irving's *Shylock* is neither excited nor exciting, and many of the admirable speeches, on his lips, lack much of their incision; notably the outbreak of passion and prospective revenge after he finds

that Antonio has become forfeit, and that his daughter has fled from him, carrying off her dowry. The great speech, with its grim refrain: 'Let him look to his bond!' [3.1.47] rising each time to an intenser pitch and culminating in a pregnant menace, this superb opportunity is missed; the actor, instead of being 'hissing hot,' as we have heard Edmund Kean described at the same moment, draws the scene out and blunts all its points.

Miss Terry is at present his constant coadjutor, and Miss Terry is supposed to represent the maximum of feminine effort on the English stage. The feminine side, in all the London theatres, is regrettably weak, and Miss Terry is easily distinguished. It is difficult to speak of her fairly, for if a large part of the public are wrong about her, they are altogether wrong, and one hesitates to bring such sweeping charges. By many intelligent persons she is regarded as an actress of exquisite genius, and is supposed to impart an extraordinary interest to everything that she touches. This is not, in our opinion, the truth, and yet to gainsay the assertion too broadly is to fall into an extreme of injustice. The difficulty is that Miss Terry has charm – remarkable charm; and this beguiles people into thinking her an accomplished actress. There is a natural quality about her that is extremely pleasing – something wholesome and English and womanly which often touches easily where art, to touch, has to be finer than we often see it. The writer of these lines once heard her highly commended by one of the most distinguished members of the Comédie Française, who had not understood a word she spoke.

'Ah, Miss Terry, for instance; I liked her extremely.'

'And why did you like her?'

'Mon Dieu, I found her very natural.'

This seemed to us an interesting impression, and a proof the more of the truism that we enjoy things in proportion to their rarity. To our own English vision Miss Terry has too much nature, and we should like a little more art. On the other side, when a French actress is eminent she is eminent by her finish, by what she has acquired, by the perfection of her art, and the critic I have just quoted, who had had this sort of merit before his eyes all his life, was refreshed by seeing what could be achieved in lieu of it by a sort of sympathetic spontaneity. Miss Terry has that excellent thing, a quality; she gives one the sense of something fine. Add to this that though she is not regularly beautiful, she has a face altogether in the taste of the period, a face that Burne-Jones<sup>[2]</sup> might have drawn, and that she arranges herself (always in the taste of the period) wonderfully well for the stage. She makes an admirable picture, and it would be difficult to imagine a more striking embodiment of sumptuous sweetness than her Ophelia, her Portia, . . . . Her Ophelia, in particular, was lovely, and of a type altogether different from the young lady in white muslin, bristling with strange grasses, whom we are accustomed to see in the part. In Miss Terry's hands the bewildered daughter of Polonius became a somewhat angular maiden of the Gothic ages, with her hair cropped short, like a boy's, and a straight and clinging robe, wrought over with contemporary needlework. As for her acting, she has happy impulses; but this seems to us to be the limit of it. She has nothing of the style, nothing of what the French call the authority, of the genuine *comédienne*. Her perception lacks acuteness, and her execution is often rough; the expression of her face itself is frequently amateurish, and her voice has a curious husky monotony, which,



## Henry James

though it often strikes a touching note in pathetic passages, yet on the whole interferes seriously with finish of elocution. This latter weakness is especially noticeable when Miss Terry plays Shakespeare. Her manner of dealing with the delightful speeches of Portia, with all their play of irony, of wit and temper, savours, to put it harshly, of the school-girlish. We have ventured to say that her comprehension of a character is sometimes weak, and we may illustrate it by a reference to her whole handling of this same rich opportunity. Miss Terry's mistress of Belmont giggles too much, plays too much with her fingers, is too free and familiar, too osculatory, in her relations with Bassanio. The mistress of Belmont was a great lady, as well as a tender and a clever woman; but this side of the part quite eludes the actress, whose deportment is not such as we should expect in the splendid spinster who has princes for wooers. When Bassanio has chosen the casket which contains the key of her heart, she approaches him, and begins to pat and stroke him. This seems to us an appallingly false note. 'Good heavens, she's touching him!' a person sitting next to us exclaimed – a person whose judgement in such matters is always unerring. [Comments on 'the amount of kissing and hugging' on the English stage, compared with the French.]

In speaking of the performances of Shakespeare at the Lyceum just now as 'inadequate,' we meant more particularly that no representation of Shakespeare can be regarded as at all adequate which is not excellent as a whole. Many of the poet's noblest and most exquisite speeches are given to secondary characters to utter, and we need hardly remind the reader how the actors who play secondary characters (putting, for the moment, those who play primary ones quite aside) are in the habit of speaking poetic lines. It is usually a misery to hear them, and there is something monstrous in seeing the most precious intellectual heritage of the human race so fearfully knocked about. Mr. Irving has evidently done his best in distributing the parts in *The Merchant of Venice*, and with what sorry results this best is attended! What an Antonio! what a Bassanio! what a Nerissa! what a Jessica! The scene between Lorenzo and Jessica on the terrace at Belmont, in which the young lovers, sitting hand in hand, breathe out, in rhythmic alternation, their homage to the southern night – this enchanting scene, as it is given at the Lyceum, should be listened to for curiosity's sake. But who, indeed, it may be asked, can rise to the level of such poetry? who can speak such things as they should be spoken? Not, assuredly, the untrained and undedicated performers of whom the great stock of actors and actresses presenting themselves to the English and American public is composed. . . . (358–9, 362–3)

## 34 Charles Kensington Salaman, Shylock from a Jewish point of view

1882

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From *Jews as They Are: Shylock, from a Jewish Point of View* (London, 1882).

Charles Kensington Salaman's (1814–1901) book is a defence of Jews and Judaism in the wake of Henry Irving's 1879 Lyceum production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Salaman's defence of Jewish religious ethics and behaviour may be seen as a reflection of the vulnerability felt in certain sections of the Anglo-Jewish community in the light of the beginnings of a wave of mass Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. Charles Kensington Salaman's *Jews as They Are*, published in 1882 and in a second edition three years later, appears to be his sole work of literary and historical criticism. Otherwise, Salaman earned his living by composing popular songs, and simplifying complex piano scores.

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### I.

Native and foreign writers have long been engaged in criticising, commenting and speculating upon Shakespeare's inimitable drama *The Merchant of Venice*; and it will doubtless furnish matter for further criticism, exposition and learned discussions to writers yet unborn. Innumerable, and apparently inexhaustible literary antiquaries and commentators have occupied themselves in searching for, and investigating the probable sources whence Shakespeare derived the elements of its plot, its incidents, and its characters, upon whom he has conferred an immortal personality; and also of minutely analysing every part of the play with reference to its complete design. In commenting upon this magnificent drama I have had in view an entirely different object, which is to vindicate the Jewish name from a large amount of unjust obloquy which it has too long sustained in its connection with Shakespeare's ideal Hebrew.

The *raison d'être* of *The Merchant of Venice* is, unquestionably, Shylock, the Jew, who is justly regarded as one of Shakespeare's most masterly dramatic creations. Noble in conception, transcendent in execution, and powerful in human interest, this remarkable character may be considered the *primum mobile* of the play; while the execrable supposititious incident of the bond and pound of flesh, which leads to its most dramatic 'situation,' may be viewed as its cardinal motive. Upon his much-maligned imaginary Israelite – grave, stern, proud, shrewd, logical, defiant and inflexible – Shakespeare has profusely expended some of the sublimest efforts of his genius; but for stage-effect, and in order to conform to the religious prejudices of his age, he has unhappily at the same time heaped upon him many vile propensities, abhorrent alike to Jew and Christian, to

religion and humanity. Under the seal and sanction of his illustrious name the fictitious Shylock has been universally accepted, and as widely condemned, without a sufficiently impartial investigation, as a true impersonation of a wealthy Jew of the Middle Ages. Thus has been ruthlessly cast upon the entire Jewish race a foul slander, an immense enduring wrong.

The fancy portrait of the Venetian Jew, which, with marvellous intuitive faculty and profound knowledge of the springs and actions of the human heart, Shakespeare has so artistically drawn, shows, undoubtedly, many correct outlines of the Jewish character; but its dominant feature, the inhuman desire to wreak upon Antonio, his self-avowed and implacable enemy, his 'lodged hate' [4.1.60], by cutting from his body a pound of flesh, in accordance with the terms of his 'merry' [1.3.173] bond, has, unquestionably, no warrant in reality; no place in any authentic Jewish record; no sanction in Jewish laws, nor in Rabbinical traditions.

Shakespeare misinterpreted Jewish feeling when he put into the mouth of Shylock the sentence: 'I hate him *for he is a Christian*' [1.3.42]. Shylock would not have hated Antonio because of his Christianity; but because Antonio hated his sacred nation; because he railed against him, and his bargains in the public thoroughfares; because he rated him about his moneys, and his profits; because he insulted his revered religion, and himself; because he spat upon his beard and gaberdine, and called him 'misbeliever,' 'cut-throat dog' [1.3.111], and spurned him as a cur. Had Shylock so treated Antonio, would the Christian have loved the Jew? If the Jew of the Middle Ages hated the Christian, it was only in return for the 'lodged hate' which the Christian bore the Jew. Jews at no period of their mediæval history, nor since, have hated Christians on account of their religion; but on account of the cruel oppressions they suffered at their hands; the inhuman persecutions and savage treatment, and insults, and contempt which Christianity and its professors brought upon them and their beloved families, as well as upon their hallowed religion. Jews are, and have always been taught to forgive their enemies; they are not instructed to love them. When Christians sincerely love their enemies, Jews, by 'Christian example,' will be prepared to 'do likewise'.

By all who have attentively studied the spirit of Judaism it will be acknowledged that Jews are strictly enjoined to practise forbearance, and mercy, and charity in its widest sense to all men; and to deal impartial justice to the stranger no less than to each other. They are commanded by their immutable divine Law to love their neighbours as themselves, and to treat all living creatures with kindness, mercy, and humane consideration. When slaughtering animals required for food, they are forbidden to torture them, or to subject them to prolonged suffering. To mutilate any living creature, much less a human being, is strictly opposed to the merciful spirit of the Jewish Law, as it would be abhorrent to the Jewish nature. It may be confidently averred that no Jew that ever had existence, beyond the inflamed imagination of a romancer or a balladmonger, was ever justly charged with the abominable crime of animal mutilation, or even with the barbarous disposition to mutilate, which is ascribed to Shylock. The mere suggestion that so horrible a desire might be possible, has been viewed by all Jews as a foul libel upon Jewish character. Cruelty to the person has never been a Jewish vice. An animal that has been wounded, or upon which any kind of cruelty has been perpetrated, is pronounced by Jewish law, and by Jewish practice, to be wholly unfit for human food.

## *Shylock from a Jewish point of view, 1882*

Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* will, doubtless, endure as long as the language in which it is written; consequently the odium which now attaches to its principal character will be as permanent, unless some all-potent counteracting influence be publicly brought against it.

Shakespeare has dramatised many villainous, brutal, and detestable Christian characters – notably Macbeth, King John, Richard III, and Iago. Other great dramatists, in like manner, have placed upon the stage non-Jewish characters not less execrable, among whom may be mentioned that arch-villain, Sir Giles Overreach;<sup>[1]</sup> but they have left no trace of stigma or reproach upon any community of Christians; whereas the purely imaginary, vengeful, inhuman desires unjustly fastened upon the entirely fictitious Hebrew have balefully recoiled upon the whole Jewish race, with an injury to the character of modern Jews which may be regarded as almost irremediable. It is surely time that this too-long endured national wrong should cease. It is time that Christians should know Jews as they are, and not judge of them as they have been misrepresented in the Middle Ages; nor, indeed, as they are too often misapprehended and misrepresented by intolerance and ignorance even at the present day. It would appear but scant justice rendered by modern Christians to the Jews of modern times, who are their fellow-subjects and citizens, their legislators, their magistrates, their judges, their legal advocates, their colleagues in office, their associates in commerce, their social intimates, their friends – that they should openly avow, and freely and widely acknowledge that the vicious propensities and inhuman dispositions which are dramatically ascribed to Shylock are not in reality Jewish attributes, and that the stage representation of them as such is a libel upon Jewish character, and a perpetual wrong to the Jewish race. The poison should be succeeded by its antidote; the wrong should be followed by its acknowledgement.

## II.

Jews had not been known in England for a period of about three hundred years when *The Merchant of Venice* was written. It is but reasonable, therefore, to suppose that many unfavourable traditions respecting them may have been handed down from generation to generation, coloured, and re-coloured by the jaundiced imaginations of those who spoke and wrote of them; and that many slanderous legends and stories relating to the 'mysterious people' who had been banished from the country in 1290, distorted and exaggerated by each successive narrator, may have prepared playgoers and readers of plays to believe Jews capable of any enormity which might be placed to their discredit. Thus the character of Shylock would have been at once welcomed as a true representative of the people whom they had been taught for ages to despise and to hate.

In what manner Shakespeare acquired his impressions of Jewish character must for ever remain concealed among the many hidden secrets of the Past. He would seem to have possessed prolific sources of knowledge which his critics and commentators have yet failed to discover. He may possibly have had access to many ancient records relating to the ancient Jews of England, dating from 1066 to 1290, some of which have been preserved in the Tower of London and in other depositories of national documents, and from which some compilations were published in the last century, under the title of 'Anglia Judaica,' by Dr. Blossieres Tovey, LL.D.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Charles Kensington Salaman

It may be imagined with what absorbing interest the large-hearted, large-minded Shakespeare would have perused such interesting records; and how earnestly, with his pure religious spirit and his ardent impressionable nature, he would have studied and appreciated the Biblical and post-Biblical history of the Jews; and with what tenderness of feeling he would sorrowfully have contrasted their glorious Past with their then down-fallen state. That our illustrious bard comprehended, and deeply sounded the innermost nature of the proud, although oppressed Israelite, and warmly sympathised with his strictly conservative religious and national sentiments, his deeply-rooted racial aspirations, is clearly shown in his wondrous creation of Shylock, whose incisive utterances, rich in radiant flashes of lightning scorn, bitter irony, trenchant invective, epigrammatic retort, sparkling wit, and inexorable logic, occasionally tempered by emotional allusions to his wife; as when, for instance, he was informed by Tubal that Jessica exchanged a ring for a monkey, he burst forth with:— ‘Thou torturest me Tubal! It was *my* turquoise: I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor: I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys!’ [3.1.120–3] His marvellous variety of thought, his exuberance of ideas, his magic power of language have invested the despised, but feared, Jew with a moral grandeur, an irresistible racial dignity wholly impervious to the mean gibes and arrogance of the cravens whom he condescended to honour with his ‘lodged hate,’ his ‘certain loathing,’ and his withering contempt.

It may be conceived with what amazement the first Christian audiences of *The Merchant of Venice* must have listened to the following trenchant argument from the mouth of a Jew whom they had been taught from infancy to regard as an inferior being possessed of no natural rights [Quotes 3.2.54–73]. That Shakespeare should have had the temerity to put such bold words into the mouth of his ideal Jew whom the other characters of his play were at the same time holding up to public abhorrence and contempt, to ridicule and derision, is even now a subject for astonishment. It unquestionably shows the powerful sway, the irresistible influence that the immortal dramatist must have exercised over the minds of his audiences. However we may deplore the circumstance that the immense genius of Shakespeare has been employed in disseminating an evil impression of Jewish character, and thus of perpetuating a great national wrong, it must be freely confessed that he is entitled to Jewish gratitude for endeavouring to suggest a human motive for the action of Shylock, by exhibiting on the one hand the intolerable insolence and oppression and injustice of his religious adversaries, and on the other hand his acute sense of what was due to him as a rational man, and a Jew. As portrayed by Shakespeare Shylock is, as other men, subject to the infirmities of humanity. [Quotes from Hazlitt: see No. 5.]

He cannot love those who detest and despise him; who scorn all that he holds most dear – his religion and his nation; who rob him of his daughter, the only child of his beloved Leah; who would strip him of his wealth – his ‘well-won thrift’ [1.3.50]; who would wound his soul by their petty insults; who would goad him to madness by their indignities! With what indomitable courage, with what withering scorn, with what nobility of spirit and utterance Shylock exposes the abject meanness of the Venetian fop, Gratiano! With what loathing he shrinks from his approach! How he dwarfs him into insignificance by his glance! How superbly, how independently, and with what unanswerable logic he replies to the Duke! How contemptuously he informs Bassanio

that he is not bound to please him with his answer! Encircled by his bitter enemies, Shylock bears himself proudly as the isolated representative of a once great nation. He is a giant among pigmies, a monarch in his grand desolation, sublime in his complete misery. [Discusses reactions to the play.]

Critics and commentators have variously judged the character of Shylock. Some have considered it in the broad spirit of generosity and justice; others, on the contrary, in the narrow spirit of malice and intolerance. Some have viewed it by the lights of reason and warm sympathy; others in the dim obscurity of social dislike and bigoted prejudices. But under every aspect and presentment Shakespeare's Shylock has, for nearly three centuries, stood prominently forth as the embodiment of assumed evil attributes, in deference to the then existing state of unreasonable popular feeling. [Provides instances of anti-Jewish sentiments.]

Some actors who have been incapable of soaring to the immeasurable heights of Shakespeare's transcendent fancy have misapprehended, and consequently misrepresented alike the human nature and dramatic character and demeanour of Shylock. Actors, in bygone years, were wont to impersonate him as a cruel, cringing, remorseless, gold-grasping money-lender, servile and abased; an aged, red-haired decrepit, revengeful monster, unworthy of consideration. That such a distorted specimen of humanity was not 'The Jew that Shakespeare drew' has been since clearly evidenced.

Some actors of genius who have recognised in Shakespeare's ideal Jew a descendant of an illustrious ancient race of heroes, prophets, and kings; a man 'no less sinned against than sinning'; a man of a naturally noble nature, moved to revenge by long-sustained injuries and insults; a man whose nature has been made hard and inexorable by cruel circumstances, have flung around him the imperial mantle of dignity and honour. It has been left, however, to a great living actor to impersonate for the first time 'The Jew that Shakespeare drew': to impart to that remarkable character a native dignity and expression which, as it would appear, was never dreamt of in the philosophy of earlier actors.

Shylock is a wealthy Jew of Venice, such as the Jews were in that Republic in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Now it is an historical fact that the rich Israelites domiciled in the Venetian Republic before and after their wholesale expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, were a very superior section of the Jewish community. They were either Spanish and Portuguese born, or the descendants of that once distinguished portion of the great Hebrew family. They were proud in spirit, and dignified in demeanour. As merchants they held a very distinguished position. As early as A.D. 1400, the Venetian Senate had placed the Jews of their Republic on a substantial footing, by granting to them the privilege of establishing a bank in the City of Venice; and in 1472 the Doge and the Senate protected them from popular outbreaks, besides commanding the magistracy of Padua to treat them with the same consideration as all the other subjects of the Venetian Republic. In common with the Illustrious family of the Medici, who, as it is well known, were at the same time, sovereigns, bankers, and money-lenders, and who, in the latter capacity, made immense profits from loans upon which they received exorbitant rates of interest, and, in common, also, with the people of all nations, both ancient and modern, the Venetian Jews no doubt lent money to those who sought to borrow it; but to imagine that at any period of their chequered history every

## Charles Kensington Salaman

Jew was a money-lender and 'usurer' is so preposterous a calumny as to be unworthy of refutation.

Indulging one fine September afternoon in 1840, in a solitary ramble over the *Lido*, a strip of *terra firma*, artificially made to keep out the Adriatic from the City of Venice, I was induced by the fineness of the sea-air to wander farther than I had intended. At the approach of twilight I found myself in an unenclosed piece of land, which, from its damp and mildewed appearance, had evidently been washed by the waves of the Adriatic. I was about to retrace my footsteps to find my gondola when my foot struck against a half-sunken stone. I stopped to examine it, and discovered, with great surprise, that it was inscribed with Hebrew characters, and was the upper portion of a Hebrew grave-stone. My curiosity was quickly aroused, and, with a glow of national emotion, I proceeded to inspect other grave-stones, some partially embedded in the earth, which I found scattered about in many directions. I at once conjectured that my ramble had led me into a very old and apparently disused Jewish cemetery. I became more and more interested; I thought of Shylock, and the Jewish merchants of Venice of the olden time, as, in my solitude I stood among the ancient tombs of my ancestors, decyphering, not without some difficulty, the dates and inscriptions upon the several grave-stones which I approached. I noticed particularly a stone upon which was engraven the outspread hands, the insignia of the Jewish priesthood; and other stones upon which were engraven coats of arms, with the addition of a closed helmet. I then copied an indistinct date, 1693, and read the following inscriptions on two separate stones: — 'Deo Grazia, Consorte di Davide Emanuele Moccate Falcio, 21, T., 1546;' and 'Elias Davide Emanuele Moccate, 1542,' and a date, 1469, as far as I could make it out. The ancient cemetery seemed capable of containing the dead of many centuries.

The twilight had been gradually deepening, and, fearing to be overtaken by darkness, I reluctantly returned to seek my gondolier, who had been impatiently awaiting me. I was unavoidably prevented from again visiting the ancient Jewish cemetery, as I had proposed to do, but I had seen sufficient to assure me that the Venetian Jews in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries had been 'men of mark' among the merchants of Venice, that on the *Rialto*, where merchants most did congregate, they had held their own against the Antonios, the Bassanios, and the Gratianos of the time; and that the Jews of Venice were not of the mean, abject stamp which the vulgar imagination has so long associated with the Venetian Shylock. (213–28)

## 35 Joseph Hatton, an interview with Henry Irving

1884

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From 'Boston and Shylock' in *Henry Irving's Impressions of America*, 2 vols. (London, 1884), I.

Joseph Hatton (1841–1907) was born at Andover, Hampshire. Following his initial visit to America in 1876 he secured the position of a foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*. From 1868 to 1874 he edited the old-established *Gentleman's Magazine*, transforming it into a vehicle for undistinguished fiction. In 'Boston and Shylock' Hatton recalls Irving's first night in Boston in the role of Shylock on 12 December 1883, and the interview which Irving gave him after the performance.

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On the first night of the *Merchant of Venice* at Boston, Irving played Shylock, I think, with more than ordinary thoughtfulness in regard to his original treatment of the part. His New York method was, to me, a little more vigorous than his London rendering of the part. Considerations of the emphasis which actors have laid upon certain scenes that are considered as especially favorable to the declamatory methods possibly influenced him. His very marked success in Louis<sup>[1]</sup> no doubt led some of his admirers in America to expect in his Shylock a very hard, grim, and cruel Jew. Many persons hinted as much to him before they saw his impersonation of this much-discussed character. At Boston I thought he was, if possible, over-conscientious in traversing the lines he laid down for himself when he first decided to produce the *Merchant* at the Lyceum. Singularly sensitive about the feelings of his audiences, and accustomed to judge them as keenly as they judge him, he fancied the Boston audience, which had been very enthusiastic in their applause on the previous nights, were not stirred as they had been by his other work in response to his efforts as Shylock. The play, nevertheless, was received with the utmost cordiality, and the general representation of it was admirable. . . .

At the close of the piece, and after a double call for Irving and Miss Terry, I went to his dressing room. 'Yes,' he said, 'the play has gone well, very well, indeed; but the audience were not altogether with me. I always feel, in regard to this play, that they do not quite understand what I am doing. They only responded at all to-night where Shylock's rage and mortification get the better of his dignity.'

INTERVIEWER. 'They are accustomed to have the part of Shylock strongly declaimed; indeed, all the English Shylocks, as well as American representatives of the part, are very demonstrative in it. Phelps<sup>[2]</sup> was, so was Charles Kean;<sup>[3]</sup> and I think American



## Joseph Hatton

audiences look for the declamatory passages in Shylock, to compare your rendering of them with the readings they have previously heard. You omit much of what is considered great business in Shylock, and American audiences are probably a little disappointed that your view of the part forbids anything like what may be called the strident characteristics of most other Shylocks. Charles Kean ranted considerably in Shylock, and Phelps was decidedly noisy, – both fine, no doubt, in their way. Nevertheless they made the Jew a cruel butcher of a Jew. They filled the stage with his sordid greed and malignant desire for vengeance on the Christian, from his first entrance to his final exit.’

IRVING. ‘I never saw Kean’s Shylock, nor Phelps’s, nor, indeed, any one’s. But I am sure Shylock was not a low person; a miser and usurer, certainly, but a very injured man, – at least he thought so. I felt that my audience to-night had quite a different opinion, and I once wished the house had been composed entirely of Jews. I would like to play Shylock to a Jewish audience’ . . . .

‘I look on Shylock,’ says Irving, in response to an invitation to talk about his work in that direction, ‘as the type of a persecuted race; almost the only gentleman in the play, and most ill-used. He is a merchant, who trades in the Rialto, and Bassanio and Antonio are not ashamed to borrow money of him, nor to carry off his daughter. The position of his child is, more or less, a key to his own. She is the friend of Portia. Shylock was well-to-do – a Bible-read man, as his readiness at quotation shows; and there is nothing in his language, at any time, that indicates the snuffling usurer which some persons regard him, and certainly nothing to justify the use the early actors made of the part for the low comedian. He was a religious Jew; learned, for he conducted his case with masterly skilfulness, and his speech is always lofty, and full of dignity. Is there a finer language in Shakespeare than Shylock’s defence of his race? [Quotes 3.1.58–65.] As to the manner of representing Shylock, take the first part of the story; note his moods. He is, to begin with, quiet, dignified, diplomatic; then satirical; and next, somewhat light and airy in his manner, with a touch of hypocrisy in it. Shakespeare does not indicate at what precise moment Shylock conceives the idea of the bond; but he himself tells us of his anxiety to have Antonio on the hip’ [Quotes 1.3.46–51].

‘His first word is more or less fawning; but it breaks out into reproach and satire when he recalls the insults that have been heaped upon him. “Hath a dog money?” and so on; still he is diplomatic, for he wants to make reprisals upon Antonio: “Cursed be my tribe if I forgive him!” [1.3.51–2] He is plausible, even jocular. He speaks of his bond of blood as a merry sport. Do you think if he were strident or spiteful in his manner here, loud of voice, bitter, they would consent to sign a bond having in it such fatal possibilities? One of the interesting things for an actor to do is to try to show when Shylock is inspired with the idea of this bargain, and to work out by impersonation the Jew’s thought in his actions. My view is, that from the moment Antonio turns upon him, declaring he is “like to spit upon him again” [1.3.130–1], and invites him scornfully to lend the money, not as to his friend, but rather to his enemy, who, if he break, he may with better force exact the penalty, – from that moment I imagine Shylock resolving to propose his pound of flesh, perhaps without any hope of getting it. Then he puts on that hypocritical show of pleasantry which so far deceives them as to elicit from Antonio the remark that “the Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind” [1.3.178]. Well, the bond is to be sealed,

and when next we meet the Jew he is still brooding over his wrongs, and there is in his words a constant, though vague, suggestion of a desire for revenge, nothing definite or planned, but a continual sense of undeserved humiliation and persecution' [Quotes 2.5.11–15]. 'But one would have to write a book to go into these details, and tell an actor's story of Shylock.'

INTERVIEWER. 'We are not writing a book of Shylock now, but only chatting about your purpose and intention generally in presenting to the public what is literally to them a new Shylock, and answering, perhaps, a few points of that conservative kind of criticism which preaches tradition and custom. Come to the next phase of Shylock's character, or, let us say, his next dramatic mood.'

IRVING. 'Well, we get at it in the street scene: rage, – a confused passion; a passion of rage and disappointment, never so confused and mixed; a man beside himself with vexation and chagrin' [Quotes 2.7.15–17].

'I saw a Jew once, in Tunis, tear his hair, his raiment, fling himself in the sand, and writhe in a rage, about a question of money, – beside himself with passion. I saw him again, self-possessed and fawning; and again, expressing real gratitude for a trifling money courtesy. He was never undignified until he tore at his hair and flung himself down, and then he was picturesque; he was old, but erect, even stately, and full of resource, and as he walked behind his team of mules he carried himself with the lofty air of a king. He was a Spanish Jew, – Shylock probably was of Frankfort; but Shakespeare's Jew was a type, not a mere individual: he was a type of the great, grand race, – not a mere Houndsditch usurer. He was a man famous on the Rialto; probably a foremost man in his synagogue; proud of his descent; conscious of his moral superiority to many of the Christians who scoffed at him, and fanatic enough, as a religionist, to believe that his vengeance had in it the element of a godlike justice. Now, you say that some of my critics evidently look for more fire in the delivery of the speeches to Solanio, and I have heard friends say, that John Kemble and the Keans brought down the house for the way they thundered out the threats against Antonio, and the defence of the Jewish race. It is in this scene that we realize, for the first time, that Shylock has resolved to enforce his bond. Three times, during a very short speech, he says, "Let him look to his bond!" "A beggar that was used to come so smug upon the mart; *let him look to his bond*; he was wont to call me usurer; *let him look to his bond*; he was wont to lend money for a Christian courtesy; *let him look to his bond*" [3.1.46–50]. Now, even an ordinary man, who had made up his mind to "have the heart of him if he forfeit" [3.1.127] would not shout and rave and storm. My friend at Tunis tore his hair at a trifling disappointment; if he had resolved to stab his rival he would have muttered his intention between his teeth, not have screeched it. How much less likely still would this bitterly persecuted Jew merchant of Venice have given his resolve a loud and noisy utterance! Would not his settled hate have been more likely to show itself in the clenched hand, the firmly planted foot, the flashing eye, and the deep undertones in which he would utter the closing threat: "*Let him look to his bond*" [3.1.50]? *I think so.*'

INTERVIEWER. 'And so do the most thoughtful among your audiences. Now and then, however, a critic shows himself so deeply concerned for what is called tradition that he feels it incumbent upon him to protest against a Shylock who is not, from first to last, a transparent and noisy ruffian.'

## Joseph Hatton

IRVING. 'Tradition! One day we will talk of that. In Davenant's<sup>[4]</sup> time, – and some dare to say he got his tradition from Shakespeare himself – they played Shylock as a comic character, in a red wig; and to make it, as they thought, consistent, they cut out the noblest lines the author had put into his mouth, and added some of their own. We have no tradition in the sense that those who would insist upon our observance of it means; what we have is bad, – Garrick played Othello in a red coat and epaulettes; and if we are to go back to Shakespeare's days, some of these sticklers for so-called tradition forget that the women were played by boys. Shakespeare did the best he could in his day, and he would do the best he could if he were living now. Tradition! It is enough to make one sick to hear the pretentious nonsense that is talked about the stage in the name of tradition. It seems to me that there are two ways of representing Shakespeare. You have seen David's picture of Napoleon and that by Delaroché. The first is a heroic figure, – head thrown back, arm extended, cloak flying, – on a white horse of the most powerful, but unreal, character, which is rearing up almost upon its haunches, its forelegs pawing the air. That is Napoleon crossing the Alps. I think there is lightning in the clouds. It is a picture calculated to terrify; a something so unearthly in its suggestion of physical power as to cut it off from human comprehension. Now, this represents to me one way of playing Shakespeare. The other picture is still the same subject, "Napoleon crossing the Alps"; but in this one we see a reflective, deep-browed man, enveloped in his cloak, and sitting upon a sturdy mule, which, with a sure and steady foot, is climbing the mountain, led by a peasant guide. This picture represents to me the other way of playing Shakespeare. The question is, which is right? I think the truer picture is *the right* cue to the poet who himself described the actor's art as to hold, as it were, the mirror up to nature.'

INTERVIEWER. 'Which should bring us very naturally back to Shylock. Let us return to your brief dissertation at the point where he is meditating vengeance in case of forfeiture of the bond.'

IRVING. 'Well, the latest mood of Shylock dates from this time, – it is one of implacable *revenge*. Nothing shakes him. He thanks God for Antonio's ill-luck. There is in this darkness of his mind a tender recollection of Leah. And then the calm command to Tubal, "Bespeak me an officer" [3.1.126].<sup>[5]</sup> What is a little odd is his request that Tubal shall meet him at the synagogue. It might be that Shakespeare suggested here the idea of a certain sacredness of justice in Shylock's view of vengeance on Antonio. Or it might be to accentuate the religious character of the Jew's habits; for Shylock was assuredly a religious Jew, strict in his worship, and deeply read in his Bible, – no small thing, this latter knowledge, in those days. I think this idea of something divine in his act of vengeance is the key-note to the trial-scene, coupled, of course, with the intense provocation he has received' [Quotes 3.3.6–13].

'These are the words of a man of fixed, implacable purpose, and his skilful defence of it shows him to be wise and capable. He is the most self-possessed man in the court. Even the duke, in the judge's seat, is moved by the situation. What does he say to Antonio?' [Quotes 4.1.3–4.]

'Everything indicates a stern, firm, persistent, implacable purpose, which in all our experience of men is, as a rule, accompanied by an apparently calm manner. A man's passion which unpacks itself in oaths and threats, which stamps and swears and shouts,

may go out in tears, but not in vengeance. On the other hand, there are those who argue that Antonio's reference to his own patience and to Shylock's fury implies a noisy passion on the part of the Jew; but, without taking advantage of any question as to the meaning of "fury" in this connection, it seems to me that Shylock's contempt for his enemies, his sneer at Gratiano [Quotes 4.1.139–40] and his actions throughout the court scene, quite outweigh any argument in favor of a very demonstrative and furious representation of the part. "I stand here for law!" [4.1.142]. Then note when he realizes the force of the technical flaws in his bond, – and there are lawyers who contend the law was severely and unconstitutionally strained in this decision of the court, – he is willing to take his bond paid thrice; he cannot get that, he asks for the principal; when that is refused he loses his temper, as it occurs to me, for the first time during the trial. And in a rage exclaims, "Why, then, the devil give him good of it!" [4.1.345] There is a peculiar and special touch at the end of that scene which, I think, is intended to mark and accentuate the crushing nature of the blow which has fallen upon him. When Antonio stipulates that Shylock shall become a Christian, and record a deed of gift to Lorenzo, the Jew cannot speak. "He shall do this," says the duke, "or else I do recant the pardon" [4.1.391–2]. Portia turns and questions him. He is hardly able to utter a word. "I am content" [4.1.394], is all he says; and what follows is as plain an instruction as was ever written in regard to the conduct and manner of the Jew. "Clerk, draw a deed of gift" [4.1.394], says Portia. Note Shylock's reply, his last words, the answer of the defeated litigant, who is utterly crushed and borne down' [Quotes 4.1.395–7].

'Is it possible to imagine anything more helpless than this final condition of the Jew? "I am not well; give me leave to go from hence!" [4.1.391–2].<sup>[6]</sup> How interesting it is to think this out! And how much we all learn from the actors when, to the best of their ability, they give the characters they assume as if they were really present, working out their studies, in their own way, and endowing them with the characterizations of their own individuality! It is cruel to insist that one actor shall simply follow in the footsteps of another; and it is unfair to judge an actor's interpretation of a character from the standpoint of another actor; his intention should be considered, and he should be judged from the point of how he succeeds or fails in carrying it out.' (224–36)

## 36 Richard G. Moulton, Shakespeare's interweaving of plots

1885

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From *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist: A Popular Illustration of the Principles of Scientific Criticism* (Oxford, 1885).

Richard Green Moulton (1849–1924) was educated at the University of London and Christ's College, Cambridge, becoming a highly successful extension lecturer in Literature at Cambridge University from 1874 to 1890. In 1890 he moved to America, took a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, and from 1892 until his retirement in 1919 was Professor of Literary Theory and Interpretation. His three general areas of interest were the Bible, classical drama, and Shakespeare. Moulton's major work, the twenty-one volume *The Modern Reader's Bible* was published between 1896 and 1898, *The Literary Study of the Bible* in 1895, and *The Ancient Classical Drama* in 1890. Moulton continually revised his work. His *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1885) had two revised editions, while its companion volume, *The Moral System of Shakespeare: A Popular Illustration of Fiction as the Experimental Side of Philosophy*, first published in 1903, was reissued four years later as *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Thinker*.

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[Moulton's study of *The Merchant of Venice* is divided into three chapters.]

### I.

THE TWO STORIES SHAKESPEARE BORROWS FOR HIS *MERCHANT OF VENICE*.

*A Study in the Raw Material of the Romantic Drama.*

The starting-point in the treatment of any work of literature is its position in literary history: the recognition of this gives the attitude of mind which is most favourable for extracting from the work its full effect. The division of the universal Drama to which Shakespeare belongs is known as the 'Romantic Drama,' one of its chief distinctions being that it uses the stories of Romance, together with histories treated as story-books, as the sources from which the matter of the plays is taken; Romances are the *raw material* out of which the Shakespearean Drama is manufactured. This very fact serves to illustrate the elevation of the Elizabethan Drama in the scale of literary development: just as the weaver uses as his raw material that which is the finished product of the spinner, so Shakespeare and his contemporaries start in their art of dramatising from Story which is

already a form of art. In the exhibition, then, of Shakespeare as an Artist, it is natural to begin with the raw material which he worked up into finished masterpieces. For illustration of this no play could be more suitable than *The Merchant of Venice*, in which two tales, already familiar in the story form, have been woven together into a single plot: the Story of the Cruel Jew, who entered into a bond with his enemy of which the forfeit was to be a pound of this enemy's own flesh, and the Story of the Heiress and the Caskets. The present study will deal with the stories themselves, considering them as if with the eye of a dramatic artist to catch the points in which they lend themselves to dramatic effect; the next will show how Shakespeare handles the stories in telling them, increasing their dramatic force by the very process of working them up; a third study will point out how, not content with two stories, he has added others in the development of his plot, making it more complex only in reality to make it more simple.

In the Story of the Jew the main point is its special capability for bringing out the idea of *Nemesis*, one of the most universal of dramatic motives. Described broadly, *Nemesis* is retribution as it appears in the world of art. . . . (43-4)

Now for this dramatic effect of *Nemesis* it would be difficult to find a story promising more scope than the Story of the Cruel Jew. It will be seen at once to contain a double nemesis, attaching to the Jew himself and to his victim. The two moreover represent the different conceptions of *Nemesis* in the ancient and modern world; Antonio's excess of moral confidence suffers a nemesis of reaction in his humiliation, and Shylock's sin of judicial murder finds a nemesis of retribution in his ruin by process of law. The nemesis, it will be observed, is not merely two-fold, but double in the way that a double flower is distinct from two flowers: it is a nemesis *on* a nemesis; the nemesis which visits Antonio's fault is the crime for which Shylock suffers his nemesis. Again, in that which gives artistic character to the reaction and the retribution the two nemeses differ. Let St. Paul put the difference for us: 'Some men's sins are evident, going before unto judgement; and some they follow after.' So in cases like that of Shylock the nemesis is interesting from its very obviousness and the impatience with which we look for it; in the case of Antonio the nemesis is striking for the very opposite reason, that he of all men seemed most secure against it. (46-7)

[Moulton describes Antonio as a character whose self-sufficiency is both a strength and weakness. Quotes 1.1.41-5, Antonio's assurance that his 'ventures' do not depend on chance.]

Antonio is saying in his prosperity that *he* shall never be moved. But the great temptation to self-sufficiency lies in his contact, not with social inferiors, but with a moral outcast such as Shylock; confident that the moral gulf between the two can never be bridged over, Antonio has violated dignity as well as mercy in the gross insults he has heaped upon the Jew whenever they have met. In the Bond Scene we see him unable to restrain his insults at the very moment in which he is soliciting a favour from his enemy; the effect reaches a climax as Shylock gathers up the situation in a single speech, reviewing the insults and taunting his oppressor with the solicited obligation:

Well then, it now appears you need my help:  
Go to, then; you come to me, and you say,  
'Shylock, we would have moneys': you say so;

Richard G. Moulton

You, that did void your rheum upon my beard  
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur  
Over your threshold; moneys is your suit. [1.3.117–19]

There is such a foundation of justice for these taunts that for a moment our sympathies are transferred to Shylock's side. But Antonio, so far from taking warning, is betrayed beyond all bounds in his defiance; and in the challenge to fate with which he replies we catch the tone of infatuated confidence, the *hybris* in which Greek superstition saw the signal for the descent of Nemesis.

I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too,  
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not  
As to thy friends . . .  
*But lend it rather to thine enemy,  
Who, if he break, thou may'st with better face  
Exact the penalty.* [1.3.130–6]

To this challenge of self-sufficiency the sequel of the story is the answering Nemesis: the merchant becomes a bankrupt, the first citizen of Venice a prisoner at the bar, the morally perfect man holds his life and his all at the mercy of the reprobate he thought he might safely insult.

So Nemesis has surprised Antonio in spite of his perfectness: but the malice of Shylock is such as is perpetually crying for retribution, and the retribution is delayed only that it may descend with accumulated force. In the case of this second Nemesis the Story of the Jew exhibits dramatic capability in the opportunity it affords for the sin and the retribution to be included within the same scene. Portia's happy thought is a turning-point in the Trial Scene on the two sides of which we have the Jew's triumph and the Jew's retribution; the two sides are bound together by the principle of measure for measure, and for each detail of vindictiveness that is developed in the first half of the scene there is a corresponding item of nemesis in the sequel. To begin with, Shylock appeals to the charter of the city [4.1.38–9, 102, 218–19]. It is one of the distinctions between written and unwritten law that no flagrant injustice can arise out of the latter. If the analogy of former precedents would seem to threaten such an injustice, it is easy in a new case to meet the special emergency by establishing a new precedent; where, however, the letter of the written law involves a wrong, however great, it must, nevertheless, be exactly enforced. Shylock takes his stand upon written law [3.3.26–31]; indeed upon the strictest of all kinds of written law, for the charter of the city would seem to be the instrument regulating the relations between citizens and aliens – an absolute necessity for a free port – which could not be superseded without international negotiations. But what is the result? As plaintiff in the cause Shylock would, in the natural course of justice, leave the court, when judgment had been given against him, with no further mortification than the loss of his suit. He is about to do so when he is recalled: 'It is enacted in the laws of Venice, &c.' [4.1.347–56]. Unwittingly, he has, by the action he has taken, entangled himself with an old statute law, forgotten by all except the learned

*Shakespeare's interweaving of plots, 1885*

Bellarion, which, going far beyond natural law, made the mere attempt upon a citizen's life by an alien punishable to the same extent as murder. Shylock had chosen the letter of the law, and by the letter of the law he is to suffer. Again, every one must feel that the plea on which Portia upsets the bond is in reality the merest quibble. It is appropriate enough in the mouth of a bright girl playing the lawyer, but no court of justice could seriously entertain it for a moment; by every principle of interpretation a bond that could justify the cutting of human flesh must also justify the shedding of blood, which is necessarily implied in such cutting. But, to balance this, we have Shylock in the earlier part of the scene refusing to listen to arguments of justice, and taking his stand upon his 'humour': if he has a whim, he pleads, for giving ten thousand ducats to have a rat poisoned, who shall prevent him? [4.1.40-6]. The suitor who rests his cause on a whim cannot complain if it is upset by a quibble. Similarly, throughout the scene, every point in Shylock's justice of malice meets its answer in the justice of nemesis. He is offered double the amount of his loan:

If every ducat in six thousand ducats  
Were in six parts, and every part a ducat, [4.1.85-6]

he answers, he would not accept them in lieu of his bond. The wheel of Nemesis goes round, and Shylock would gladly accept not only this offer but even the bare principal; but he is denied, on the ground that he has refused it in open court. They try to bend him to thoughts of mercy:

How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none? [88]

He dares to reply:

What judgement shall I dread, doing no wrong? [89]

The wheel of Nemesis goes round, and Shylock's life and all lie at the mercy of the victim to whom he had refused mercy and the judge to whose appeal for mercy he would not listen. In the flow of his success, when every point is being given in his favour, he breaks out into unseemly exultation:

A Daniel come to judgement! yea, a Daniel! [223]

The ebb comes, and his enemies catch up the cry and turn it against him:

A Daniel, still say I, a second Daniel!  
I thank thee, Jew, for *teaching* me that word. [340-1]

Such then is the Story of the Jew, and so it exhibits nemesis clashing with Nemesis, the nemesis of surprise with the nemesis of equality and intense satisfaction. (46-51)

In the Caskets Story, which Shakespeare has associated with the Story of the Jew, the



dramatic capabilities are of a totally different kind. In the artist's armoury one of the most effective weapons is Idealisation: inexplicable touches throwing an attractiveness over the repulsive, uncovering the truth and beauty which lie hidden in the commonplace, and showing how much can be brought out of how little with how little change. A story will be excellent material, then, for dramatic handling which contains at once some experience of ordinary life, and also the surroundings which can be made to exhibit this experience in a glorified form: the more commonplace the experience, the greater the triumph of art if it can be idealised. The point of the *Caskets Story* to the eye of an artist in Drama is the opportunity it affords for such an idealisation of the commonest problem in everyday experience – what may be called the Problem of Judgment by Appearances.

In the choice between alternatives there are three ways in which judgment may be exercised. The first mode, if it can be called judgment at all, is to accept the decision of chance – to cast lots, or merely to drift into a decision. An opposite to this is purely rational choice. But rational choice, if strictly interpreted as a logical process, involves great complications. If a man would choose according to the methods of strict reason, he must, first of all, purge himself of all passion, for passion and reason are antagonistic. Next, he must examine himself as to the possibility of latent prejudice; and as prejudice may be unconsciously inherited, he must include in the sphere of his examination ancestral and national bias. Then, he must accumulate all the evidence that can possibly bear upon the question in hand, and foresee every eventuality that can result from either alternative. When he has all the materials of choice before him, he must proceed to balance them against one another, seeing first that the mental faculties employed in the process have been equally developed by training. All such preliminary conditions having been satisfied, he may venture to enquire on which side the balance dips, maintaining his suspense so long as the dip is undecided. And when a man has done all this he has attained only that degree of approach to strictly rational choice which his imperfect nature admits. Such pure reason has no place in real life: judgment in practical affairs is something between chance and this strict reason; it attempts to use the machinery of rational choice, but only so far as practical considerations proper to the matter in hand allow. This medium choice is what I am here calling Judgment by Appearances, for it is clear that the antithesis between appearance and reality will obtain so long as the materials of choice are scientifically incomplete; the term will apply with more and more appropriateness as the divergence from perfect conditions of choice is greater.

Judgment by Appearances so defined is the only method of judgment proper to practical life, and accordingly an exalted exhibition of it must furnish a keen dramatic interest. How is such a process to be glorified? Clearly Judgment by Appearances will reach the ideal stage when there is the maximum of importance in the issue to be decided and the minimum of evidence by which to decide it. These two conditions are satisfied in the *Caskets Story*. In questions touching the individual life, that of marriage has this unique importance, that it is bound up with wide consequences which extend beyond the individual himself to his posterity. With the suitors of Portia the question is of marriage with the woman who is presented as supreme of her age in beauty, in wealth and in character; moreover, the other alternative is a vow of perpetual celibacy [2.1.38–42]. So the question at issue in the *Caskets Story* concerns the most important act of life in the most important form in which it can be imagined to present itself. When we turn

*Shakespeare's interweaving of plots, 1885*

to the evidence on which this question is to be decided we find that of rational evidence there is absolutely none. The choice is to be made between three caskets distinguished by their metals and by the accompanying inscriptions:

Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.

Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.

Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath. [2.8.5, 7, 9]

However individual fancies may incline, it is manifestly impossible to set up any train of *reasoning* which should discover a ground of preference amongst the three. And it is worth noting, as an example of Shakespeare's nicety in detail, that the successful chooser reads in the scroll which announces his victory,

You that choose not by the view,  
Chance *as fair*, and choose *as true* [3.2.131–2].

Shakespeare does not say '*more fair*,' '*more true*.' This equal balancing of the alternatives will appear still clearer when we recollect that it is an intentional puzzle with which we are dealing [1.2.27–33], and accordingly that even if ingenuity could discover a preponderance of reason in favour of any one of the three; there would be the chance that this preponderance had been anticipated by the father who set the puzzle. The case becomes like that of children bidden to guess in which hand a sweetmeat is concealed. They are inclined to say the right hand, but hesitate whether that answer may not have been foreseen and the sweetmeat put in the left hand; and if on this ground they are tempted to be sharp and guess the left hand, there is the possibility that this sharpness may have been anticipated, and the sweetmeat kept after all in the right hand. If then the Caskets Story places before us three suitors, going through three trains of intricate reasoning for guidance in a matter on which their whole future depends, whereas we, the spectators, can see that from the nature of the case no reasoning can possibly avail them, we have clearly the Problem of Judgment by Appearances drawn out in its ideal form; and our sympathies are attracted by the sight of a process, belonging to our everyday experience, yet developed before us in all the force artistic setting can bestow.

But is this all? Does Shakespeare display before us the problem, yet give no help towards its solution? The key to the suitors' fates is not to be found in the trains of reasoning they go through. (51–4) [Moulton argues that] the success in love of the suitors, which they are seeking to compass by their reasonings, is in fact being decided by their characters.

To compare the characters of the three suitors, it will be enough to note the different form that pride takes in each. The first suitor is a prince of a barbarian race, who has thus never known equals, but has been taught to consider himself half divine; as if made of different clay from the rest of mankind he instinctively shrinks from 'lead.' Yet modesty mingles with his pride, and though he feels truly that, so far as the estimation of him by others is concerned, he might rely upon 'desert,' yet he doubts if desert extends as far as Portia. What seizes his attention is the words, 'what many men desire'; and he rises to a

Richard G. Moulton

flight of eloquence in picturing wildernesses and deserts become thoroughfares by the multitude of suitors flocking to Belmont [2.7.23–47]. But he is all the while betraying a secret of which he was himself unconscious: he has been led to seek the hand of Portia, not by true love, but by the feeling that what all the world is seeking, the Prince of Morocco must not be slow to claim. Very different is the pride of Arragon. He has no regal position, but rather appears to be one who has fallen in social rank; he makes up for such a fall by intense pride of family, and is one of those who complacently thank heaven that they are not as other men. The ‘many men’ which had attracted Morocco repels Arragon:

I will not choose what many men desire,  
Because I will not jump with common spirits,  
And rank me with the barbarous multitudes. [2.9.31–3]

He is caught by the bait of ‘desert.’ It is true he almost deceives us with the lofty tone in which he reflects how the world would benefit if dignities and offices were in all cases purchased by the merit of the wearer; yet there peeps through his sententiousness his real conception of merit – the sole merit of family descent. His ideal is that the ‘true seed of honour’ should be ‘picked from the chaff and ruin of the times,’ and wrest greatness from the ‘low peasantry’ who had risen to it [2.9.46–9]. He accordingly rests his fate upon desert: and he finds in the casket of his choice a fool’s head. Of Bassanio’s soliloquy we hear enough to catch that his pride is the pride of the soldier, who will yield to none the post of danger, and how he is thus attracted by the ‘threatening’ of the leaden casket:

thou meagre lead,  
Which rather threatenest than dost promise aught,  
Thy paleness moves me more than eloquence. [3.2.104–6]

Moreover, he is a lover, and the threatening is a challenge to show what he will risk for love: his true heart finds its natural satisfaction in ‘giving and hazarding’ his all. This is the pride that is worthy of Portia; and thus the ingenious puzzle of the ‘inspired’ father has succeeded in piercing through the outer defence of specious reasoning, and carrying its repulsion and attraction to the inmost characters of the suitors.

Such, then, is Shakespeare’s treatment of the Problem of Judgment by Appearances: while he draws out the problem itself to its fullest extent in displaying the suitors elaborating trains of argument for a momentous decision in which we see that reason can be of no avail, he suggests for the solution that, besides reason, there is in such judgments another element, character, and that in those crises in which reason is most fettered, character is most potent. An important solution this is; for what is character? A man’s character is the shadow of his past life; it is the grand resultant of all the forces from within and from without that have been operating upon him since he became a conscious agent. Character is the sandy footprint of the commonplace hardened into the stone of habit; it is the complexity of daily tempers, judgments, restraints, impulses, all focused into one master-passion acting with the rapidity of an instinct. To lay down then, that where reason fails as an element in judgment, character comes to its aid, is to

bind together the exceptional and the ordinary in life. In most of the affairs of life men have scope for the exercise of commonplace qualities, but emergencies do come where this is denied them; in these cases, while they think, like the three suitors, that they are moving voluntarily in the direction in which they are judging fit at the moment, in reality the weight of their past lives is forcing them in the direction in which their judgment has been accustomed to take them. Thus in the moral, as in the physical world, nothing is ever lost: not a ripple on the surface of conduct but goes on widening to the outermost limit of experience. Shakespeare's contribution to the question of practical judgment is that by the long exercise of commonplace qualities we are building up a character which, though unconsciously, is the determining force in the emergencies in which commonplace qualities are impossible. (55-7)

## II.

### HOW SHAKESPEARE MANIPULATES THE STORIES IN DRAMATISING THEM.

#### *A Study in Dramatic Workmanship.*

In treating Story as the raw material of the Romantic Drama it has already been shown, in the case of the stories utilised for *The Merchant of Venice*, what natural capacities these exhibit for dramatic effect. The next step is to show how the artist increases their force for dramatic purposes in the process of working them up. Two points will be illustrated in the present study: first, how Shakespeare meets the difficulties of a story and reduces them to a minimum; secondly, how he adds effectiveness to the two tales by weaving them together so that they assist one another's effect.

The avoidance or reduction of difficulties in a story is an obvious element in any kind of artistic handling; it is of special importance in Drama in proportion as we are more sensitive to improbabilities in what is supposed to take place before our eyes than in what we merely hear of by narrative. This branch of art could not be better illustrated than in the Story of the Jew: never perhaps has an artist had to deal with materials so bristling with difficulties of the greatest magnitude, and never, it may be added, have they been met with greater ingenuity. The host of improbabilities gathering about such a detail as the pound of flesh must strike every mind. There is, however, preliminary to these, another difficulty of more general application: the difficulty of painting a character bad enough to be the hero of the story. It might be thought that to paint excess of badness is comparatively easy, as needing but a coarse brush. On the contrary, there are few severer tests of creative power than the treatment of monstrosity. To be told that there is villainy in the world and tacitly to accept the statement may be easy; it is another thing to be brought into close contact with the villains, to hear them converse, to watch their actions and occasionally to be taken into their confidence. We realise in Drama through our sympathy and our experience: in real life we have not been accustomed to come across monsters and are unfamiliar with their behaviour; in proportion then as the badness of a character is exaggerated it is carried outside the sphere of our experience, the naturalness of the scene is interrupted and its human interest tends to decline. So, in the case of the story under consideration, the dramatist is confronted with this dilemma: he must make the character of Shylock absolutely bad, or the incident of the bond will

Richard G. Moulton

appear unreal; he must not make the character extraordinarily bad, or there is danger of the whole scene appearing unreal.

Shakespeare meets a difficulty of this kind by a double treatment. On the one hand, he puts no limits to the blackness of the character itself; on the other hand, he provides against repulsiveness by giving it a special attraction of another kind. In the present case, while painting Shylock as a monster, he secures for him a hold upon our sympathy by representing him as a victim of intolerable ill-treatment and injustice. The effect resembles the popular sympathy with criminals. The men themselves and their crimes are highly repulsive; but if some slight irregularity occurs in the process of bringing them to justice – if a counsel shows himself unduly eager, or a judge appears for a moment one-sided, a host of volunteer advocates espouse their cause. These are actuated no doubt by sensitiveness to purity of justice; but their protests have a ring that closely resembles sympathy with the criminals themselves, whom they not unfrequently end by believing to be innocent and injured. In the same way Shakespeare shows no moderation in the touches of bloodthirstiness, of brutality, of sordid meanness he heaps together in the character of Shylock; but he takes equal pains to rouse our indignation at the treatment he is made to suffer. Personages such as Gratiano, Salanio, Salarino, Tubal, serve to keep before us the mediaeval feud between Jew and Gentile, and the persecuting insolence with which the fashionable youth met the moneylenders who ministered to their necessities. Antonio himself has stepped out of his natural character in the grossness of his insults to his enemy. Shylock has been injured in pocket as well as in sentiment, Antonio using his wealth to disturb the money-market, and defeat the schemes of the Jew; according to Shylock Antonio has hindered him of half-a-million, and were he out of Venice the usurer could make what merchandise he would. Finally, our sense of deliverance in the Trial Scene cannot hinder a touch of compunction for the crushed plaintiff, as he appeals against the hard justice meted out to him: – the loss of his property, the acceptance of his life as an act of grace, the abandonment of his religion and race, which implies the abandonment of the profession by which he makes his living.

Nay, take my life and all; pardon not that:  
You take my house when you do take the prop  
That doth sustain my house; you take my life  
When you do take the means whereby I live. [4.1.374–7]

By thus making us resent the harsh fate dealt to Shylock the dramatist recovers in our minds the fellow-feeling we have lost in contemplating the Jew himself. A name for such double treatment might be 'Dramatic Hedging': as the better covers a possible loss by a second bet on the opposite side, so, when the necessities of a story involve the creation of a monster, the dramatic artist 'hedges' against loss of attractiveness by finding for the character human interest in some other direction. So successful has Shakespeare been in the present instance that a respectable minority of readers rise from the play partisans of Shylock.

We pass on to the crop of difficulties besetting the pound of flesh as a detail in the bond. That such a bond should be proposed, that when proposed it should be accepted,

that it should be seriously entertained by a court of justice, that if entertained at all it should be upset on so frivolous a pretext as the omission of reference to the shedding of blood: these form a series of impossible circumstances that any dramatist might despair of presenting with even an approach to naturalness. Yet if we follow the course of the story as moulded by Shakespeare we shall find all these impossibilities one after another evaded.

At the end of the first scene Antonio had bidden Bassanio go forth and try what his credit could do in Venice. Armed with this blank commission Bassanio hurries into the city. As a gay young nobleman he knows nothing of the commercial world except the money-lenders; and now proceeds to the best-known of them, apparently unaware of what any gossip on the Rialto could have told him, the unfortunate relations between this Shylock and his friend Antonio. At the opening of the Bond Scene we find Bassanio and Shylock in conversation, Bassanio impatient and irritated to find that the famous security he has to offer seems to make so little impression on the usurer. At this juncture Antonio himself falls in with them, sees at a glance to what his rash friend has committed him, but is too proud to draw back in sight of his enemy. Already a minor difficulty is surmounted, as to how Antonio comes to be in the position of asking an obligation of Shylock. Antonio is as impatient as dignity will permit to bring an awkward business to a conclusion. Shylock, on the contrary, to whom the interview itself is a triumph, in which his persecutor is appearing before him in the position of a client, casts about to prolong the conversation to as great a length as possible. Any topic would serve his purpose; but what topic more natural than the question at the root of the feud between the two, the question of lending money on interest? It is here we reach the very heart of our problem, how the first mention of the pound of flesh is made without a shock of unreality sufficient to ruin the whole scene. Had Shylock asked for a forfeiture of a million per cent, or in any other way thrown into a commercial form his purpose of ruining Antonio, the old feud and the present opportunity would be explanation sufficient: the real difficulty is the total incongruity between such an idea as a pound of human flesh and commercial transactions of any kind. This difficulty Shakespeare has met by one of his greatest triumphs of mechanical ingenuity; his leading up to the proposal of the bond by the discussion on interest. [1.3.61–142] The effect of this device a modern reader is in danger of losing: we are so familiar with the idea of interest at the present day that we are apt to forget what the difficulty was to the ancient and mediaeval mind, which for so many generations kept the practice of taking interest outside the pale of social decency. This prejudice was one of the confusions arising out of the use of a metal currency. The ancient mind could understand how corn put into the ground would by the agency of time alone produce twentyfold, thirtyfold, or a hundredfold; they could understand how cattle left to themselves would without human assistance increase from a small to a large flock: but how could metal grow? How could lifeless gold and silver increase and multiply like animals and human beings? The Greek word for interest, *tokos*, is the exact equivalent of the English word *breed*, and the idea underlying the two was regularly connected with that of interest in ancient discussions. The same idea is present throughout the dispute between Antonio and Shylock. Antonio indignantly asks:

Richard G. Moulton

when did friendship take

A *breed* for *barren metal* of his friend? [1.3.133–4]

Shylock illustrates usury by citing the patriarch Jacob and his clever trick in cattle-breeding; showing how, at a time when cattle were the currency, the natural rate of increase might be diverted to private advantage. Antonio interrupts him:

Is your gold and silver ewes and rams? [95]

Shylock answers:

I cannot tell; I make it *breed* as fast; [96]

both parties thus showing that they considered the distinction between the using of flesh and metal for the medium of wealth to be the essential point in their dispute. With this notion then of flesh *versus* money floating in the air between them the interview goes on to the outbursts of mutual hatred which reach a climax in Antonio's challenge to Shylock to do his worst; this challenge suddenly combines with the root idea of the conversation to flash into Shylock's mind the suggestion of the bond. In an instant he smoothes his face and proposes friendship. He will lend the money without interest, in pure kindness, nay more, he will go to that extent of good understanding implied in joking, and will have a merry bond; while as to the particular joke (he says in effect), since you Christians cannot understand interest in the case of money while you acknowledge it in the case of flesh and blood, suppose I take as my interest in this bond a pound of your own flesh [1.3.143–51]. In such a context the monstrous proposal sounds almost natural. It has further been ushered in in a manner which makes it almost impossible to decline it. When one who is manifestly an injured man is the first to make advances, a generous adversary finds it almost impossible to hold back. A sensitive man, again, will shrink from nothing more than from the ridicule attaching to those who take serious precautions against a jest. And the more incongruous Shylock's proposal is with commercial negotiations the better evidence it is of his non-commercial intentions. In a word, the essence of the difficulty was the incongruity between human flesh and money transactions: it has been surmounted by a discussion, flowing naturally from the position of the two parties, of which the point is the relative position of flesh and money as the medium of wealth in the past.

The bond thus proposed and accepted, there follows the difficulty of representing it as entertained by a court of justice. With reference to Shakespeare's handling of this point it may be noted, first, that he leaves us in doubt whether the court would have entertained it: the Duke is intimating an intention of adjourning at the moment when the entrance of Portia gives a new turn to the proceedings [4.1.104]. Again, at the opening of the trial, the Duke gives expression to the universal opinion that Shylock's conduct was intelligible only on the supposition that he was keeping up to the last moment the appearance of insisting on his strange terms, in order that before the eyes of the whole city he might exhibit his enemy at his mercy, and then add to his ignominy by publicly pardoning him [4.1.17–34]: a fate which, it must be admitted, was no more

than Antonio justly deserved. This will explain how Shylock comes to have a hearing at all: when once he is admitted to speak it is exceedingly difficult to resist the pleas Shakespeare puts into his mouth. He takes his stand on the city's charter and the letter of the law, and declines to be drawn into any discussion of natural justice; yet even as a question of natural justice what answer can be found when he casually points to the institution of slavery, which we must suppose to have existed in Venice at the period? Shylock's only offence is his seeking to make Antonio's life a matter of barter: what else is the accepted institution of slavery but the establishment of power over human flesh and blood and life, simply because these have been bought with money, precisely as Shylock has given good ducats for his rights over the flesh of Antonio? No wonder the perplexed Duke is for adjourning.

There remains one more difficulty, the mode in which, according to the traditional story, the bond is upset. It is manifest that the agreement as to the pound of flesh, if it is to be recognised by a court of justice at all, cannot without the grossest perversion of justice be cancelled on the ground of its omitting to mention blood. Legal evasion can go to great lengths. It is well known that an Act requiring cabs to carry lamps at night has been evaded through the omission of a direction that the lamps were to be lighted; and the importers have escaped a duty on foreign gloves at so much the pair by bringing the right-hand and left-hand gloves over in different ships. But it is perfectly possible to carry lamps without lighting them, while it is a clear impossibility to cut human flesh without shedding blood. Nothing of course would be easier than to upset the bond on rational grounds – indeed the difficulty is rather to imagine it receiving rational consideration at all; but on the other hand no solution of the perplexity could be half so dramatic as the one tradition has preserved. The dramatist has to choose between a course of procedure which shall be highly dramatic but leave a sense of injustice, and one that shall be sound and legal but comparatively tame. Shakespeare contrives to secure both alternatives. He retains the traditional plea as to the blood, but puts it into the mouth of one known to his audience to be a woman playing the lawyer for the nonce; and again, before we have time to recover from our surprise and feel the injustice of the proceeding, he follows up the brilliant evasion by a sound legal plea, the suggestion of a real lawyer. Portia has come to the court from a conference with her cousin Bellario, the most learned jurist of Venice. Certainly it was not this doctor who hit upon the idea of the blood being omitted. His contribution to the interesting consultation was clearly the old statute of Venice, which every one else seems to have forgotten, which made the mere attempt on the life of a citizen by an alien punishable with death and loss of property: according to this piece of statute law not only would Shylock's bond be illegal, but the demand of such security constituted a capital offence. Thus Shakespeare surmounts the final difficulty in the story of the Jew in a mode which retains dramatic force to the full, yet does this without any violation of legal fairness.

The second purpose of the present study is to show how Shakespeare has added to the effectiveness of his two stories by so weaving them together that they assist one another's effect.

First, it is easy to see how the whole movement of the play rises naturally out of the union of the two stories. One of the main distinctions between the progress of events in



real life or history and in Drama is that the movement of a drama falls into the form technically known as Complication and Resolution. A dramatist fastens our attention upon some train of events: then he sets himself to divert this train of events from its natural course by some interruption; this interruption is either removed, and the train of events returns to its natural course, or the interruption is carried on to some tragic culmination. In *The Merchant of Venice* our interest is at the beginning fixed on Antonio as rich, high-placed, the protector and benefactor of his friends. By the events following upon the incident of the bond we see what would seem the natural life of Antonio diverted into a totally different channel; in the end the whole course is restored, and Antonio becomes prosperous as before. Such interruption of a train of incidents is its Complication, and the term Complication suggests a happy Resolution to follow. Complication and Resolution are essential to dramatic movement, as discords and their 'resolution' into concords constitute the essence of music. The Complication and Resolution in the story of the Jew serve for the Complication and Resolution of the drama as a whole; and my immediate point is that these elements of movement in the one story spring directly out of its connection with the other. But for Bassanio's need of money and his blunder in applying to Shylock the bond would never have been entered into, and the change in Antonio's fortunes would never have come about: thus the cause for all the Complication of the play (technically, the Complicating Force) is the happy lover of the Caskets Story. Similarly Portia is the means by which Antonio's fortunes are restored to their natural flow: in other words, the source of the Resolution (or Resolving Force) is the maiden of the Caskets Story. The two leading personages of the one tale are the sources respectively of the Complication and Resolution in the other tale, which carry the Complication and Resolution of the drama as a whole. Thus simply does the movement of the whole play flow from the union of the two stories.

One consequence flowing from this is worth noting; that the scene in which Bassanio makes his successful choice of the casket is the Dramatic Centre of the whole play, as being the point at which the Complicating and Resolving Forces meet. This Dramatic Centre is, according to Shakespeare's favourite custom, placed in the exact mechanical centre of the drama, covering the middle of the middle Act. There is again an amount of poetic splendour lavished upon this scene which throws it up as a poetic centre to the whole. More than this, it is the real crisis of the play. Looking philosophically upon the whole drama as a piece of history, we must admit that the true turning-point is the success of Bassanio; the apparent crisis is the Trial Scene, but this is in reality governed by the scene of the successful choice, and if Portia and Bassanio had not been united in the earlier scene no lawyer would have interposed to turn the current of events in the trial. There is yet another sense in which the same scene may be called central. Hitherto I have dealt with only two tales; the full plot however of *The Merchant of Venice* involves two more, the Story of Jessica and the Episode of the Rings: it is to be observed that all four stories meet in the scene of the successful choice. This scene is the climax of the Caskets Story. It is connected with the catastrophe in the Story of the Jew: Bassanio, at the moment of his happiness, learns that the friend through whom he has been able to contend for the prize has forfeited his life to his foe as the price of his liberality. The scene is connected with the Jessica Story: for Jessica and her husband are the messengers who bring the sad tidings, and thus link together the bright and gloomy elements of the

play. Finally, the Episode of the Rings, which is to occupy the end of the drama, has its foundation in this scene, in the exchange of the rings which are destined to be the source of such ironical perplexity. Such is the symmetry with which the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* has been constructed: the incident which is technically its Dramatic Centre is at once its mechanical centre, its poetic centre, and, philosophically considered, its true turning-point; while, considering the play as a Romantic drama with its union of stories, we find in the same central incident all the four stories dovetailed together.

These points may appear small and merely technical. But it is a constant purpose with me in the present exposition of Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist to combat the notion, so widely prevalent amongst ordinary readers, that Shakespeare, though endowed with the profoundest grasp of human nature, is yet careless in the construction of his plots: a notion in itself as improbable as it would be that a sculptor could be found to produce individual figures exquisitely moulded and chiselled, yet awkwardly and clumsily grouped. It is the minuter points that show the finish of an artist; and such symmetry of construction as appears in *The Merchant of Venice* is not likely to characterise a dramatist who sacrifices plot to character-painting.

There remains another point, which no one will consider small or technical, connected with the union of the two stories: the fact that Shakespeare has thus united a light and a serious story, that he has woven together gloom and brightness. This carries us to one of the great battlefields of dramatic history; no feature is more characteristic of the Romantic Drama than this mingling of light and serious in the same play, and at no point has it been more stoutly assailed by critics trained in an opposite school. I say nothing of the wider scope this practice gives to the dramatist, nor the way in which it brings the world of art nearer to the world of reality; my present purpose is to review the dramatic effects which flow from the mingling of the two elements in the present play.

In general human interest the stories are a counterpoise to one another, so different in kind, so equal in the degree of interest their progress continues to call forth. The incidents of the two tales gather around Antonio and Portia respectively; each of these is a full and rounded character, and they are both centres of their respective worlds. The stories seem to start from a common point. The keynote to the story of the Jew is the strange 'sadness' – the word implies no more than seriousness – which overpowers Antonio, and which seems to be the shadow of his coming trouble. Compare with this the first words we hear of Portia:

By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world. [1.2.1–2]

Such a humorous languor is a fitting precursor to the excitement and energy of the scenes which follow. But from this common starting-point the stories move in opposite directions; the spectator's sympathies are demanded alternately for two independent chains of circumstances, for the fortunes of Antonio sinking lower and lower, and the fortunes of Portia rising higher and higher. He sees the merchant and citizen become a bankrupt prisoner, the lordly benefactor of his friends a wretch at the mercy of his foe. He sees Portia, already endowed with beauty, wealth, and character, attain what to her heart is yet higher, the power to lay all she has at the feet of the man she loves. Then,

Richard G. Moulton

when they are at the climax of their happiness and misery, when Portia has received all that this world can bestow, and Antonio has lost all that this world can take away, for the first time these two central personages meet face to face in the Trial Scene. And if from general human interest we pass on to the machinery of plot, we find this also governed by the same combination: a half-serious frolic is the medium in which a tragic crisis finds its solution.

But it is of course passion and emotional interest which are mainly affected by the union of light and serious: these we shall appreciate chiefly in connection with the Trial Scene, where the emotional threads of the play are gathered into a knot, and the two personages who are the embodiments of the light and serious elements face one another as judge and prisoner. In this scene it is remarkable how Portia takes pains to prolong to the utmost extent the crisis she has come to solve; she holds in her fingers the threads of the tangled situation, and she is strong enough to play with it before she will consent to bring it to an end. She has intimated her opinion that the letter of the bond must be maintained, she has made her appeal to Shylock for mercy and been refused, she has heard Bassanio's appeal to wrest the law for once to her authority and has rejected it; there remains nothing but to pronounce the decree. But at the last moment she asks to see the bond, and every spectator in court holds his breath and hears his heart beat as he follows the lawyer's eye down line after line. It is of no avail; at the end she can only repeat the useless offer of thrice the loan, with the effect of drawing from Shylock an oath that he will not give way. Then Portia admits that the bond is forfeit, with a needless reiteration of its horrible details; yet, as if it were some evenly balanced question, in which after-thoughts were important, she once more appeals to Shylock to be merciful and bid her tear the bond, and evokes a still stronger asseveration from the malignant victor, until even Antonio's stoicism begins to give way, and he begs for a speedy judgment. Portia then commences to pass her judgment in language of legal prolixity, which sounds like a recollection of her hour with Bellario:

For the intent and purpose of the law  
Hath full relation to the penalty,  
Which here appeareth due upon the bond, &c. [4.1.247-9].

Next she fads about the details of the judicial barbarity, the balance to weigh the flesh, a surgeon as a forlorn hope; and when Shylock demurs to the last, stops to argue that he might do this for charity. At last surely the intolerable suspense will come to a termination. But our lawyer of half-an-hour's standing suddenly remembers she has forgotten to call on the defendant in the suit, and the pathos is intensified by the dying speech of Antonio, calmly welcoming death for himself, anxious only to soften Bassanio's remorse, his last human passion a rivalry with Portia for the love of his friend.

Bid her be judge  
Whether Bassanio had not once a love. [276-7]

When the final judgment can be delayed no longer its opening sentences are still lengthened out by the jingling repetitions of judicial formality,

Only when every evasion has been exhausted comes the thunderstroke which reverses the whole situation. Now it is clear that had this situation been intended to have a tragic termination this prolonging of its details would have been impossible; thus to harrow our feelings with items of agony would be not art but barbarity. It is because Portia knows what termination she is going to give to the scene that she can indulge in such boldness; it is because the audience have recognised in Portia the signal of deliverance that the lengthening of the crisis becomes the dramatic beauty of suspense. It appears then that, if this scene be regarded only as a crisis of tragic passion, the dramatist has been able to extract more *tragic* effect out of it by the device of assisting the tragic with a light story.

Again, it is a natural law of the human mind to pass from strain to reaction, and suspense relieved will find vent in vehement exhilaration. By giving Portia her position in the crisis scene the dramatist is clearly furnishing the means for a reaction to follow, and the reaction is found in the Episode of the Rings, by which the disguised wives entangle their husbands in a perplexity affording the audience the bursts of merriment needed as relief from the tension of the Trial Scene. The play is thus brought into conformity with the laws of mental working, and the effect of the reaction is to make the serious passion more keen because more healthy.

Finally, there are the effects of mixed passion, neither wholly serious nor wholly light, but compounded of the two, which are impossible to a drama that can admit only a single tone. The effect of Dramatic Irony, which Shakespeare inherited from the ancient Drama, but greatly modified and extended, is powerfully illustrated at the most pathetic point of the Trial Scene, when Antonio's chance reference to Bassanio's new wife calls from Bassanio and his follower agonised vows to sacrifice even their wives if this could save their patron [4.1.273-94] – little thinking that these wives are standing by to record the vow. But there is an effect higher than this. Portia's outburst on the theme of mercy, considered only as a speech, is one of the noblest in literature, a gem of purest truth in a setting of richest music. But the situation in which she speaks it is so framed as to make Portia herself the embodiment of the mercy she describes. How can we imagine a higher type of mercy, the feminine counterpart of justice, than in the bright woman, at the moment of her supreme happiness, appearing in the garb of the law to deliver a righteous unfortunate from his one error, and the justice of Venice from the insoluble perplexity of having to commit a murder by legal process? And how is this situation brought about but by the most intricate interweaving of a story of brightness with a story of trouble?

In all branches then of dramatic effect, in Character, in Plot and in Passion, the union of a light with a serious story is found to be a source of power and beauty. The fault charged against the Romantic Drama has upon a deeper view proved a new point of departure in dramatic progress; and by such combination of opposites the two tales have increased the sum of their individual effectiveness by the added effect of their union in a drama. (58-73)

HOW SHAKESPEARE MAKES HIS PLOT MORE COMPLEX IN ORDER TO MAKE IT MORE SIMPLE.

*A Study in Underplot.*

The title of the present study is a paradox: that Shakespeare makes a plot more complex<sup>1</sup> in order to make it more simple. It is however a paradox that finds an illustration from the material world in every open roof. The architect's problem has been to support a heavy weight without the assistance of pillars, and it might have been expected that in solving the problem he would at least have tried every means in his power for diminishing the weight to be supported. On the contrary, he has increased this weight by the addition of massive cross-beams and heavy iron-girders. Yet, if these have been arranged according to the laws of construction, each of them will bring a supporting power considerably greater than its own weight; and thus, while in a literal sense increasing the roof, for all practical purposes they may be said to have diminished it. Similarly a dramatist of the Romantic school, from his practice of uniting more than one story in the same plot, has to face the difficulty of complexity. This difficulty he solves not by seeking how to reduce combinations as far as possible, but, on the contrary, by the addition of more and inferior stories; yet if these new stories are so handled as to emphasise and heighten the effect of the main stories, the additional complexity will have resulted in increased simplicity. In the play at present under consideration, Shakespeare has interwoven into a common pattern two famous and striking tales; his plot, already elaborate, he has made yet more elaborate by the addition of two more tales less striking in their character – the story of Jessica and the Episode of the Rings. If it can be shown that these inferior stories have the effect of assisting the main stories, smoothing away their difficulties and making their prominent points yet more prominent, it will be clear that he has made his plot more complex only in reality to make it more simple. The present study is devoted to noticing how the Stories of Jessica and of the Rings minister to the effects of the Story of the Jew and the Caskets Story.

To begin with: it may be seen that in many ways the mechanical working out of the main stories is assisted by the Jessica Story. In the first place it relieves them of their superfluous personages. Every drama, however simple, must contain 'mechanical' personages, who are introduced into the play, not for their own sake, but to assist in presenting incidents or other personages. The tendency of Romantic Drama to put a story as a whole upon the stage multiplies the number of such mechanical personages: and when several such stories come to be combined in one, there is a danger of the stage being crowded with characters which intrinsically have little interest. Here the Underplots become of service and find occupation for these inferior personages. In the present case only four personages are essential to the main plot – Antonio, Shylock, Bassanio, Portia. But in bringing out the unusual tie that binds together a representative of the city and a representative of the nobility, and upon which so much of the plot rests, it is an assistance to introduce the rank and file of gay society and depict these paying court to the commercial magnate. The high position of Antonio and Bassanio in their respective spheres will come out still clearer if these lesser social personages are

graduated. Salanio, Salerio, and Salarino are mere parasites; Gratiano has a certain amount of individuality in his wit; while, seeing that Bassanio is a scholar as well as a nobleman and soldier, it is fitting to give prominence amongst his followers to the intellectual and artistic Lorenzo. Similarly the introduction of Nerissa assists in presenting Portia fully; Shylock is seen in his relations with his race by the aid of Tubal, his family life is seen in connection with Jessica, and his behaviour to dependants in connection with Launcelot; Launcelot himself is set off by Gobbo. Now the Jessica Story is mainly devoted to these inferior personages, and the majority of them take an animated part in the successful elopement. It is further to be noted that the Jessica Underplot has itself an inferior story attached to it, that of Launcelot, who seeks scope for his good nature by transferring himself to a Christian master, just as his mistress seeks a freer social atmosphere in union with a Christian husband. And, similarly, side by side with the Caskets Story, which unites Portia and Bassanio, we have a faintly-marked underplot which unites their followers, Nerissa and Gratiano. In one or other of these inferior stories the mechanical personages find attachment to plot; and the multiplication of individual figures, instead of leaving an impression of waste, is made to minister to the sense of Dramatic Economy.

Again: as there are mechanical personages so there are mechanical difficulties – difficulties of realisation which do not belong to the essence of a story, but which appear when the story comes to be worked out upon the stage. The Story of the Jew involves such a mechanical difficulty in the interval of three months which elapses between the signing of the bond and its forfeiture. In a classical setting this would be avoided by making the play begin on the day the bond falls due; such treatment, however, would shut out the great dramatic opportunity of the Bond Scene. The Romantic Drama always inclines to exhibiting the whole of a story; it must therefore in the present case suppose a considerable interval between one part of the story and another, and such suppositions tend to be weaknesses. The Jessica Story conveniently bridges over this interval. The first Act is given up to bringing about the bond, which at the beginning of the third Act appears to be broken. The intervening Act consists of no less than nine scenes, and while three of them carry on the progress of the Caskets Story, the other six are devoted to the elopement of Jessica: the bustle and activity implied in such rapid change of scene indicating how an underplot can be used to keep the attention of the audience just where the natural interest of the main story would flag.

The same use of the Jessica Story to bridge over the three months' interval obviates another mechanical difficulty of the main plot. The loss of all Antonio's ships, the supposition that all the commercial ventures of so prudent a merchant should simultaneously miscarry, is so contrary to the chances of things as to put some strain upon our sense of probability; and this is just one of the details which, too unimportant to strike us in an anecdote, become realised when a story is presented before our eyes. . . . In the present instance the improbability of Antonio's losses is lessened by the gradual way in which the news is broken to us, distributed amongst the numerous scenes of the three months' interval. We get the first hint of it in a chance conversation between Salanio and Salarino, in which they are chuckling over the success of the elopement and the fury of the robbed father. Salanio remarks that Antonio must look that he keep his day; this reminds Salarino of a ship he has just heard of as lost somewhere in the English Channel:

Richard G. Moulton

I thought upon Antonio when he told me,  
And wish'd in silence that it were not his. [2.8.31–2]

In the next scene but one the same personages meet, and one of them, enquiring for the latest news, is told that the rumour yet lives of Antonio's loss, and now the exact place of the wreck is specified as the Goodwin Sands; Salarino adds: 'I would it might prove the end of his losses.' [3.1.18] Before the close of the scene Shylock and Tubal have been added to it. Tubal has come from Genoa and gives Shylock the welcome news that at Genoa it was *known* that Antonio had lost an argosy coming from Tripolis; while on his journey to Venice Tubal had travelled with creditors of Antonio who were speculating upon his bankruptcy as a certainty. [3.1.97–115] Then comes the central scene in which the full news reaches Bassanio at the moment of his happiness: all Antonio's ventures failed [Quotes 3.2.266–71] not one escaped. In the following scene we see Antonio in custody.

These are minor points such as may be met with in any play, and the treatment of them belongs to ordinary Dramatic Mechanism. But we have already had to notice that the Story of the Jew contains special difficulties which belong to the essence of the story, and must be met by special devices. One of these was the monstrous character of the Jew himself; and we saw how the dramatist was obliged to maintain in the spectators a double attitude to Shylock, alternately letting them be repelled by his malignity and again attracting their sympathy to him as a victim of wrong. Nothing in the play assists this double attitude so much as the Jessica Story. Not to speak of the fact that Shylock shows no appreciation for the winsomeness of the girl who attracts every one else in the drama, nor of the way in which this one point of brightness in the Jewish quarter throws up the sordidness of all her surroundings, we hear the Jew's own daughter reflect that his house is a 'hell,' [2.3.2] and we see enough of his domestic life to agree with her. A Shylock painted without a tender side at all would be repulsive; he becomes much more repulsive when he shows a tenderness for one human being, and yet it appears how this tenderness has grown hard and rotten with the general debasement of his soul by avarice, until, in his ravings over his loss, his ducats and his daughter are ranked as equally dear:

I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin! [3.1.87–90]

For all this we feel that he is hardly used in losing her. Paternal feeling may take a gross form, but it is paternal feeling none the less, and cannot be denied our sympathy; bereavement is a common ground upon which not only high and low, but even the pure and the outcast, are drawn together. Thus Jessica at home makes us hate Shylock; with Jessica lost we cannot help pitying him. The perfection of Dramatic Hedging lies in the equal balancing of the conflicting feelings, and one of the most powerful scenes in the whole play is devoted to this twofold display of Shylock. Fresh from the incident of the elopement, he is encountered by the parasites and by Tubal: these amuse themselves with alternately 'chaffing' him upon his losses, and 'drawing' him in the matter of the expected gratification of his vengeance, while his passions rock him between extremes of despair and fiendish anticipation. We may go further. Great creative power is

*Shakespeare's interweaving of plots, 1885*

accompanied by great attachment to the creations and keen sense of justice in disposing of them. Looked at as a whole, the Jessica Story is Shakespeare's compensation to Shylock. The sentence on Shylock, which the necessities of the story require, is legal rather than just; yet large part of it consists in a requirement that he shall make his daughter an heiress. And, to put it more generally, the repellent character and hard fate of the father have set against them the sweetness and beauty of the daughter, together with the full cup of good fortune which her wilful rebellion brings her in the love of Lorenzo and the protecting friendship of Portia. Perhaps the dramatist, according to his wont, is warning us of this compensating treatment when he makes one of the characters early in the play exclaim:

If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven,  
It will be for his gentle daughter's sake. [2.4.33-4]

The other main source of difficulty in the Story of the Jew is, as we have seen, the detail concerning the pound of flesh, which throws improbability over every stage of its progress. In one at least of these stages the difficulty is directly met by the aid of the Jessica Story: it is this which explains Shylock's resolution not to give way. When we try in imagination to realise the whole circumstances, common sense must take the view taken in the play itself by the Duke:

Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,  
That thou but leadest this fashion of thy malice  
To the last hour of act, and then 'tis thought  
Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange  
Than is thy strange apparent cruelty. [4.1.17-21]

A life-long training in avarice would not easily resist an offer of nine thousand ducats. But further, the alternatives between which Shylock has to choose are not so simple as the alternatives of Antonio's money or his life. On the one hand, Shylock has to consider the small chance that either the law or the mob would actually suffer the atrocity to be judicially perpetrated, and how his own life would be likely to be lost in the attempt. Again, turning to the other alternative, Shylock is certainly deep in his schemes of vengeance, and the finesse of malignity must have suggested to him how much more cruel to a man of Antonio's stamp it would be to fling him a contemptuous pardon before the eyes of Venice than to turn him into a martyr, even supposing this to be permitted. But at the moment when the choice becomes open to Shylock he has been maddened by the loss of his daughter, who, with the wealth she has stolen, has gone to swell the party of his deadly foe. It is fury, not calculating cruelty, that makes Shylock with a madman's tenacity cling to the idea of blood, while this passion is blinding him to a more keenly flavoured revenge, and risking the chance of securing any vengeance at all.<sup>2</sup>

From the mechanical development of the main plot and the reduction of its difficulties, we pass to the interweaving of the two principal stories, which is so leading a feature of the play. In the main this interweaving is sufficiently provided for by the



stories themselves, and we have already seen how the leading personages in the one story are the source of the whole movement in the other story. But this interweaving is drawn closer still by the affair of Jessica: technically described, the position in the plot of Jessica's elopement is that of a Link Action between the main stories. This linking appears in the way in which Jessica and her suite are in the course of the drama transferred from the one tale to the other. At the opening of the play they are personages in the Story of the Jew, and represent its two antagonistic sides, Jessica being the daughter of the Jew, and Lorenzo a friend and follower of Bassanio and Antonio. First the contrivance of the elopement assists in drawing together these opposite sides of the Jew Story, and aggravating the feud on which it turns. Then, as we have seen, Jessica and her husband in the central scene of the whole play come into contact with the Caskets Story at its climax. From this point they become adopted into the Caskets Story, and settle down in the house and under the protection of Portia. This transference further assists the symmetry of interweaving by helping to adjust the balance between the two main stories. In its *mass*, if the expression may be allowed, the Caskets tale, with its steady progress to a goal of success, is overweighted by the tale of Antonio's tragic peril and startling deliverance: the Jessica episode, withdrawn from the one and added to the other, helps to make the two more equal. Once more, the case, we have seen, is not merely that of a union between stories, but a union between stories opposite in kind, a combination of brightness with gloom. The binding effect of the Jessica Story extends to the union between these opposite tones. We have already had occasion to notice how the two extremes meet in the central scene, how from the height of Bassanio's bliss we pass in an instant to the total ruin of Antonio, which we then learn in its fulness for the first time: the link which connects the two is the arrival of Jessica and her friends as bearers of the news.

So far, the points considered have been points of Mechanism and Plot; in the matter of Character-Interest the Jessica episode is to an even greater degree an addition to the whole effect of the play, Jessica and Lorenzo serving as a foil to Portia and Bassanio. The characters of Jessica and Lorenzo are charmingly sketched, though liable to misreading unless carefully studied. To appreciate Jessica we must in the first place assume the grossly unjust mediaeval view of the Jews as social outcasts. The dramatist has vouchsafed us a glimpse of Shylock at home, and brief as the scene is it is remarkable how much of evil is crowded into it. The breath of home life is trust, yet the one note which seems to pervade the domestic bearing of Shylock is the lowest suspiciousness. Three times as he is starting for Bassanio's supper he draws back to question the motives for which he has been invited. He is moved to a shriek of suspicion by the mere fact of his servant joining him in shouting for the absent Jessica, by the mention of masques, by the sight of the servant whispering to his daughter. Finally, he takes his leave with the words 'Perhaps I will return immediately,' [2.5.52] a device for keeping order in his absence which would be a low one for a nurse to use to a child, but which he is not ashamed of using to his grown-up daughter and the lady of his house. The short scene of fifty-seven lines is sufficient to give us a further reminder of Shylock's sordid housekeeping, which is glad to get rid of the good-natured Launcelot as a 'huge feeder'; and his aversion to any form of gaiety, which leads him to insist on his shutters being put up when he hears that there is a chance of a pageant in the streets. Amidst surroundings of this type Jessica has grown

up, a motherless girl, mingling only with harsh men (for we nowhere see a trace of female companionship for her): it can hardly be objected against her that she should long for a Christian atmosphere in which her affections might have full play. Yet even for this natural reaction she feels compunction [Quotes 2.3.16–19]. Formed amidst such influences it would be a triumph to a character if it escaped repulsiveness; Jessica, on the contrary, is full of attractions. She has a simplicity which stands to her in the place of principle. More than this she has a high degree of feminine delicacy. Delicacy will be best brought out in a person who is placed in an equivocal situation, and we see Jessica engaged, not only in an elopement, but in an elopement which, it appears, has throughout been planned by herself and not by Lorenzo. Of course a quality like feminine delicacy is more conveyed by the bearing of the actress than by positive words; we may however notice the impression which Jessica's part in the elopement scenes makes upon those who are present. When Lorenzo is obliged to make a confidant of Gratiano, and tell him how it is Jessica who has planned the whole affair, instead of feeling any necessity of apologising for her the thought of her childlike innocence moves him to enthusiasm, and it is here that he exclaims: 'If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven, / It will be for his gentle daughter's sake.' [2.4.33–4] In the scene of the elopement itself, Jessica has steered clear of both prudishness and freedom, and when after her pretty confusion she has retired from the window, even Gratiano breaks out: 'Now by my hood, a gentle, and no Jew' [2.6.51] while Lorenzo himself has warned to see in her qualities he had never expected: 'wise, fair, and true' [2.6.52–7]. So generally, all with whom she comes into contact feel her spell: the rough Launcelot parts from her with tears he is ashamed of yet cannot keep down; Salarino – the last of men to take high views of women – resents as a sort of blasphemy Shylock's claiming her as his flesh and blood; while between Jessica and Portia there seems to spring in an instant an attraction as mysterious as is the tie between Antonio and Bassanio.

Lorenzo is for the most part of a dreamy inactive nature, as may be seen in his amused tolerance of Launcelot's word-fencing – word-fencing being in general a challenge which none of Shakespeare's characters can resist; similarly, Jessica's enthusiasm on the subject of Portia, which in reality he shares, he prefers to meet with banter [Quotes 3.5.83–4]. But the strong side of his character also is shown us in the play: he has an artist soul, and to the depth of his passion for music and for the beauty of nature we are indebted for some of the noblest passages in Shakespeare. This is the attraction which has drawn him to Jessica, her outer beauty is the index of artistic sensibility within: 'she is never merry when she hears sweet music,' [5.1.69] and the soul of rhythm is awakened in her, just as much as in her husband, by the moonlight scene. Simplicity again, is a quality they have in common, as is seen by their ignorance in money-matters, and the way a valuable turquoise ring goes for a monkey – if, at least, Tubal may be believed: a carelessness of money which mitigates our dislike of the free hand Jessica lays upon her father's ducats and jewels. On the whole, however, Lorenzo's dreaminess makes a pretty contrast to Jessica's vivacity. And Lorenzo's inactivity is capable of being roused to great things. This is seen by the elopement itself: for the suggestion of its incidents seems to be that Lorenzo meant at first no more than trifling with the pretty Jewess, and that he rose to the occasion as he found and appreciated Jessica's higher tone and attraction. Finally, we must see the calibre of Lorenzo's character through the eyes of Portia, who selects

him at first sight as the representative to whom to commit her household in her absence, of which commission she will take no refusal.

So interpreted the characters of Jessica and Lorenzo make the whole episode of the elopement an antithesis to the main plot. To a wedded couple in the fresh happiness of their union there can hardly fall a greater luxury than to further the happiness of another couple; this luxury is granted to Portia and Bassanio, and in their reception of the fugitives what picturesque contrasts are brought together! The two pairs are a foil to one another in kind, and set one another off like gold and gems. Lorenzo and Jessica are negative characters with the one positive quality of intense capacity for enjoyment; Bassanio and Portia have everything to enjoy, yet their natures appear dormant till roused by an occasion for daring and energy. The Jewess and her husband are distinguished by the bird-like simplicity that so often goes with special art-susceptibility; Portia and Bassanio are full and rounded characters in which the whole of human nature seems concentrated. The contrast is of degree as well as kind: the weaker pair brought side by side with the stronger throw out the impression of their strength. Portia has a fulness of power which puts her in her most natural position when she is extending protection to those who are less able to stand by themselves. Still more with Bassanio: he has so little scope in the scenes of the play itself, which from the nature of the stories present him always in situations of dependence on others, that we see his strength almost entirely by the reflected light of the attitude which others hold to him; in the present instance we have no difficulty in catching the intellectual power of Lorenzo, and Lorenzo looks up to Bassanio as a superior. And the couples thus contrasted in character present an equal likeness and unlikeness in their fortunes. Both are happy for ever, and both have become so through a bold stroke. Yet in the one instance it is blind obedience, in face of all temptations, to the mere whims of a good parent, who is dead, that has been guided to the one issue so passionately desired; in the case of the other couple open rebellion, at every practical risk, against the legitimate authority of an evil father, still living, has brought them no worse fate than happiness in one another, and for their defenceless position the best of patrons.

It seems, then, that the introduction of the Jessica Story is justified, not only by the purposes of construction which it serves, but by the fact that its human interest is at once a contrast and a supplement to the main story, with which it blends to produce the ordered variety of a finished picture.

A few words will be sufficient to point out how the effects of the main plot are assisted by the Rings Episode, which, though rich in fun, is of a slighter character than the Jessica Story, and occupies a much smaller space in the field of view. The dramatic points of the two minor stories are similar. Like the Jessica Story the Rings Episode assists the mechanical working out of the main plot. An explanation must somehow be given to Bassanio that the lawyer is Portia in disguise; mere mechanical explanations have always an air of weakness, but the affair of the rings utilises the explanation in the present case as a source of new dramatic effects. This arrangement further assists, to a certain extent, in reducing the improbability of Portia's project. The point at which the improbability would be most felt would be, not the first appearance of the lawyer's clerk, for then we are engrossed in our anxiety for Antonio, but when the explanation of the disguise came to be made; there might be a danger lest here the surprise of Bassanio should become

infectious, and the audience should awake to the improbability of the whole story: as it is, their attention is at the critical moment diverted to the perplexity of the penitent husbands. The Story of the Rings, like that of Jessica, assists the interweaving of the two main stories with one another, its subtlety suggesting to what a degree of detail this interlacing extends. Bassanio is the main point which unites the Story of the Jew and the Caskets Story; in the one he occupies the position of friend, in the other of husband. The affair of the rings, slight as it is, is so managed by Portia that its point becomes a test as between his friendship and his love; and so equal do these forces appear that, though his friendship finally wins and he surrenders his betrothal ring, yet it is not until after his wife has given him a hint against herself:

And if your wife be not a mad-woman,  
And know how well I have deserved the ring,  
She would not hold out enemy for ever  
For giving it to me. [4.4.445-8]

The Rings Episode, even more than the Jessica Story, assists in restoring the balance between the main tales. The chief inequality between them lies in the fact that the Jew Story is complicated and resolved, while the Caskets Story is a simple progress to a goal; when, however, there springs from the latter a sub-action which has a highly comic complication and resolution the two halves of the play become dramatically on a par. And the interweaving of the dark and bright elements in the play is assisted by the fact that the Episode of the Rings not only provides a comic reaction to relieve the tragic crisis, but its whole point is a Dramatic Irony in which serious and comic are inextricably mixed.

Finally, as the Jessica Story ministers to Character effect in connection with the general ensemble of the personages, so the Episode of the Rings has a special function in bringing out the character of Portia. The secret of the charm which has won for Portia the suffrages of all readers is the perfect balance of qualities in her character: she is the meeting-point of brightness, force, and tenderness. And, to crown the union, Shakespeare has placed her at the supreme moment of life, on the boundary line between girlhood and womanhood, when the wider aims and deeper issues of maturity find themselves in strange association with the abandon of youth. The balance thus becomes so perfect that it quivers, and dips to one side and the other. Portia is the saucy child as she sprinkles her sarcasms over Nerissa's enumeration of the suitors: in the trial she faces the world of Venice as a heroine. She is the ideal maiden in the speech in which she surrenders herself to Bassanio: she is the ideal woman as she proclaims from the judgment seat the divinity of mercy. Now the fourth Act has kept before us too exclusively one side of this character. Not that Portia in the lawyer's gown is masculine: but the dramatist has had to dwell too long on her side of strength. He will not dismiss us with this impression, but indulges us in one more daring feat surpassing all the madcap frolics of the past. Thus the Episode of the Rings is the last flicker of girlhood in Portia before it merges in the wider life of womanhood. We have rejoiced in a great deliverance wrought by a noble woman: our enjoyment rises higher yet when the Rings Episode reminds us that this woman has not ceased to be a sportive girl.

Richard G. Moulton

It has been shown, then, that the two inferior stories in *The Merchant of Venice* assist the main stories in the most varied manner, smoothing their mechanical working, meeting their special difficulties, drawing their mutual interweaving yet closer, and throwing their character effects into relief: the additional complexity they have brought has resulted in making emphatic points yet more prominent, and the total effect has therefore been to increase clearness and simplicity. (74–89)

## 37 Helena Faucit, on acting Portia

1885

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*From On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters; . . . By One Who Has Personated Them* (Edinburgh, 1885).

Helena Faucit, Lady Martin (1817–98) was one of the leading Shakespearean tragic actresses of the middle and late nineteenth century. Born in London the daughter of an actress, she spent most of her life on the stage. In 1851 she married Theodore Martin (1816–1909), the lawyer, poet, and author who was also Queen Victoria's Private Secretary. Helen Faucit first appeared as Portia in 1836, and was still playing the role in 1869 at the age of 54. Unlike Ellen Terry she never had a regular Shylock. Her reflections on Shakespeare's women characters (which went through four editions within the first six years of its publication) took the form of personal letters. In her 'Introduction' Faucit explains that as a girl, when sick, she spent the days reading Shakespeare, living 'again and again through the whole childhood and lives of many of Shakespeare's heroines' (p. 6). For her the characters 'became living realities . . . and in impersonating them I learned much, which would not otherwise have been learned, as to the master poet's conception and purpose' (p. 1). This extract is from the Fifth Edition (1893).

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September 1, 1880

To Miss Geraldine E. Jewsbury

'In Belmont is a lady richly left'.

It is such a pleasure to me, dear friend, to do anything to beguile your thoughts from the pain and weariness of your sick-bed, that I will try at once to carry out your wish, and put on paper some of the ideas which have guided me in representing Portia. Your letter tells me that she is 'one of your great heroines', and that you desire to hear about her most of all. I am very glad to know you hold her to be a 'real, typical, great lady and woman'. . . . I have always looked upon her as a perfect piece of Nature's handiwork. Her character combines all the graces of the richest womanhood with the strength of purpose, the wise helpfulness, and sustained power of the noblest manhood. Indeed, in this instance, Shakespeare shows us that it is the woman's keener wit and insight which see into and overcome the difficulty which has perplexed the wisest heads in Venice.

## Helena Faucit

For, without a doubt, as it seems to me at least, it is to her cultivated and bright intelligence, and not alone to the learned Bellario, her cousin, that Bassanio is indebted for the release of his friend Antonio. . . .

To know how [Portia] has been able to accomplish [the rescue of Bassanio's friend] we must go back to her youth. I think of her as the cherished child of a noble father, – a father proud of his child's beauty, and of the promise which he sees in her of rare gifts, both of mind and heart. These gifts he spares no pains to foster. He is himself no ordinary man. He anticipates the danger to which the beautiful and wealthy heiress may be exposed; and it was by one of those 'good inspirations' which, as Nerissa says, 'holy men have at their death' [1.2.30], that he fixed upon the device of the three caskets, 'whereof who chooses his meaning chooses' [1.2.34] his beloved daughter.

From the first his aim has been to train her to succeed him in his high position. With this view he has surrounded her with all that is beautiful in art and ennobling in study, and placed her in the society of scholars, poets, soldiers, statesmen, the picked and noblest minds of her own and other lands. Amid this throng of honoured guests, not the least honoured, we may be sure, was the learned 'cousin, Dr Bellario' [3.4.50]. This cousin of hers we may suppose to have been a constant visitor at princely Belmont, and, indeed, to have been her instructor in jurisprudence, a not unfitting branch of the future heiress of Belmont's education. One can imagine how the girl Portia would rush to him for help in her youthful perplexities. . . . Perhaps they have, even in these early days, 'turned over many books together' [4.1.157]. [Discusses the suitors and her father's will.]

During the time, brief as it can be made, of the preparations for the marriage ceremony, Portia will have heard all the particulars of the 'merry bond' [1.3.173]; she will have discovered that money alone, however squandered, cannot shake the obdurate Jew's determination. Accustomed, as I have suggested before by her peculiar training to look with a judicial mind upon serious matters, she, after many questionings about its terms, hits by a happy instinct, as I believe, upon the flaw in the bond. She will say nothing of this to Bassanio, but hurries him away with her wealth to use as his own; and then herself hastens towards Venice, after despatching a messenger to Bellario with a letter informing him of her approach, as well as of her belief that she has found a flaw in the bond, and requests his presence at the trial.

We find her before her departure in the brightest spirits, feeling virtually assured of success, and even jesting in her new happiness with Nerissa. [Quotes 3.4.64–5.] This state of mind, it appears to me, could not have been possible had Portia known what was before her. She is at ease, because she is sure of the full sympathy of her friend and cousin, Bellario, and counts with confidence on his presence in Venice to take the lead in court; and so, after giving her house into the care of Lorenzo and Jessica, who are to be treated in their absence as Lord Bassanio and herself, she goes gaily on to Venice with Nerissa. They will have to haste away, for they 'must measure twenty miles to-day.' [3.4.84]

In the play we see that Portia sends Balthazar to Dr Bellario, and bids him wait for her at 'the trajet' [3.4.53]. But either her mind must have changed, or she must have met messengers from Bellario on the road, who tell her of his illness and inability to help her in person. Consequently she hurries on to Padua; but when they meet – for that they do meet is certain – all her first joyful anticipations receive a woeful shock. She finds her

dear old friend grievously sick. What is to be done? There is no help near; no time to be lost! The Jew 'plies the Duke at morning and at night' [3.2.277]. Bellario's aid, she learns, has been summoned already by the Duke as a last resource. In this extremity, with no other help at hand, Bellario no doubt proposes that Portia should go in his stead, recommended by him as a 'young Doctor of Rome' [4.1.153], then visiting him. This must be done or all is lost. Bellario confirms her belief as to a flaw in the bond and furnishes her with his 'own opinion' [4.1.157] upon all the points of law most vital to the question. They 'turn o'er many books / Together' [4.1.156-7] and Portia proceeds to Venice furnished, as Bellario writes to the Duke, with the Doctor's opinion [Quotes 4.1.156-8]. All this suggests to me that Portia's eye had been the first to see the flaw in the bond, and that her own impression had been confirmed by the great lawyer.

Grave and anxious must have been her thoughts as she crossed the lagoons by 'the common ferry / That trades to Venice' [3.4.54-5]. Hers was not a mind, however, to shrink before difficulty; and, confirmed as she had been by the opinion of the great Doctor of Laws, she feels sure of success, if she can but be true to herself and 'forget she is a woman' [*Cymbeline*, 3.4.154]. All the gay light-heartedness with which she started from Belmont has vanished under this unexpected aspect of affairs. With what trepidation, with what anxious sense of responsibility must she find herself engaged in such a task, the mark for every eye! Nothing but her deep love and grateful happy heart could sustain her through such a trial. To cease to be a woman for the time is not so hard, perhaps, to one who has all her life been accustomed to a position of command and importance; but, in the peculiar circumstances of this case, the effort must have been one of extreme difficulty.

How skilfully, firmly, and gently she begins her task! We may believe that she had some sympathy with Shylock. . . . She feels for the race that has been proscribed, insulted, execrated, from generation to generation. She finds some excuse for the deep hereditary hate which the Jew has for his Christian oppressor, and for his desire of vengeance in the name and for the sake of his persecuted tribe. She would have understood his yearning for the death of the man who had 'disgraced and hindered him of half a million' [3.1.54-5]; but not that he himself should desire to be the cruel executioner. . . .

Portia, as a last resource, tries to bring before [Shylock's] mind's eye the horror of the deed - the gash, the quivering flesh, which is to be 'cut off nearest the merchant's heart' [4.1.32-3] . . . and bids him at least have by a surgeon to stop the wounds, 'lest he do bleed to death' [4.1.258]. No, not even that. "'Tis not in the bond.' He will not do even 'thus much for charity' [4.1.261]. Now all is clear.

At this point, I have always felt in the acting that my desire to find extenuations for Shylock's race and for himself leaves me, and my heart grows almost as stony as his own. I see his fiendish nature fully revealed. I have seen the knife sharpened to cut quickly through the flesh; the scales brought forward to weigh it; have watched the cruel, eager eyes, all strained and yearning to see the gushing blood welling from the side 'nearest the heart', and gloating over the fancied agonies and death-pangs of his bitter foe. This man-monster, this pitiless savage nature, is beyond the pale of humanity. It must be made powerless to hurt. I have felt that with him the wrongs of his race are really as nothing compared with his own remorseless hate. He is no longer the wronged and suffering



## Helena Faucit

man; and I longed to pour down on his head the 'justice' he has clamoured for, and will exact without pity. . . .

But I could never leave my characters when the curtain fell and the audience departed. As I had lived with them through their early lives, so I also lived into their future . . . I do not believe that such a woman as I conceive [Portia] to have been would leave the despised, deserted Jew to his fate. When she finds that even Antonio's 'mercy' is not of the kind to satisfy her woman's heart, she vows to herself that, out of her own great happiness, and in abounding gratitude for it, she will devote herself to the all but impossible task of converting this 'inexorable Jew'. She goes alone to his wretched, lonely home, to which he has been accompanied only by the execrations of the mob. These still ring in his sick ears as he lies there stunned, bewildered, defeated, deserted. But sharper, more harrowing than all, are his self-upbraidings that he should have left a loophole in the bond by which the hated Christian merchant has escaped. In his rage, in his bitter self-accusations, he lashes himself into a state of frenzy. If left alone much longer to these wild, mad moods, he might destroy himself. But, before he has time for this, comes to his door, and will not be denied, this noble lady. He knows her not, roughly enough forbids her entrance; but with gentle force, and with the charm of her winning manners and noble and gracious presence, she contrives to gain an entrance. It is little she can do in her first visits. Still she repeats them, bringing wine and oil and nourishment for the sick body, and sacred ointment for the bruised mind. The reviled, despised Jew finds himself for the first time (for, oh, so long!) tended, thought for, cared for. Why should this be? Never has this been since his early days, – since his beloved Leah left him, perhaps in his early manhood, when the grief at her loss hardened his heart. Her gentle presence by his side through life might have softened down his worst passions, which were only aggravated by the blow sustained in her loss. . . . The Jew would find in Portia a likeness to his beautiful Leah; would, in his weakness, fancy the tender sympathetic eyes, looking so gently on him, were hers . . . .

Then on the Jew's side would come a looking forward to [Portia's visits]; then a hoping, wishing for them, until gradually she had drawn from him from time to time the story of his life, of his woes, of his own wrongs, of the wrongs of his race, of his sweet lost wife; of his ungrateful daughter, who in her flight took not only his ducats, his jewels, but the ring given him by Leah, 'when he was a bachelor' [3.1.121]. We can imagine what a sympathizing ear was lent to all his tale; how she gave him 'a world of sighs' [*Othello*, 1.3.146] – this man who had through life chiefly met with curses, and execrations . . . he would begin to feel that, had he gained his cruel will, and his 'deeds been on his head' [4.1.206] – had he been let to *use* that hungry knife – there would have been 'the smell o' the blood' [*Macbeth*, 5.1.50] under his nostrils day and night; and that same blood would have been upon his soul for ever. Not even the rites of his fathers could have washed it away!

These are his *own* reflections, not forced upon him by Portia. He will recognize her life of self-denial. He will know that with every luxury, every happiness around her, she leaves them all continually to sit with, and comfort, and console his sick body and broken spirit. How can he show that he is grateful? He will do as she wishes, will see the daughter on whom he has poured his curse; will put his blessing in the place of it, will even look upon her Christian husband.

*on acting Portia, 1885*

But I have imagined both daughter and husband much altered, purified. Lorenzo, on reflection, has been ashamed, not perhaps of stealing the Jew's daughter, but of accepting the stolen ducats and jewels which she brought with her, and would be longing, if he dared, to make restitution and confess his meanness. Jessica, under the roof of Portia, and within the sphere of her noble influence, could not fail to grow better and purer . . . she will reflect upon the graceless step she took in leaving her old, lonely father, whatever might have been his faults, and in robbing him, too. How can she look for happiness in her wedded life, she who has commenced it so unworthily? Oh that she could make reparation! . . . And so some day, permission being obtained by Portia, she may be seen at the feet of the old man, there sobbing out her grief and her contrition; and he will remember that he made her 'home a hell' [2.3.2] and look gently upon her. Will this be for him the first taste of the blessedness of mercy? 'It blesseth him that gives and him that takes' [4.1.187].

I think that the Jew will not live long. His body and mind have been too sorely bruised and shaken. But Portia's spell will be upon him to the end. His last looks will be upon the eyes which have opened his, and shown him the 'light to lighten his darkness'; and he who was despised, reviled, and himself at war with all men, will now have felt the happiness of bestowing forgiveness, and the blessed hope of being himself forgiven. . . .

Ever affectionately yours,  
Helena F. Martin.

P.S. One or two of my friends, who have seen this letter when printed only for private circulation, and on whose opinion I place a high value, have objected to my 'dream' about Portia's conduct toward Shylock, after the curtain drops, as being conceived too much in the feeling of the present century. I have, therefore, reconsidered the matter, but cannot give up my first impression. (25-7, 31-3, 35, 39-43)

## 38 M. Leigh-Noel, Portia's womanliness

1885

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From *Shakespeare's Garden of Girls*. By the Author of *'Lady Macbeth: A Study'* (London, 1885).

Madeline Leigh-Noel (subsequently Mrs M. L. Elliott) has faded into obscurity. She wrote at least two books on Shakespeare, *Lady Macbeth: A Study* (1884) and a year later, *Shakespeare's Garden of Girls* (1885). In 1884 she lectured to the New Shakspeare Society on the subject of Shakespeare's heroines. In her *Shakespeare's Garden of Girls* she concentrated upon 'the sisterhood of Shakespeare's heroines' who are 'real flesh and blood, creatures we can believe in . . . Juliet, Imogen, Desdemona, Ophelia, Rosalind and the rest are women we know. They have their counterparts all around us', she wrote, adding 'How [Shakespeare] attained to such familiarity with the feminine nature it is impossible to say' (p. iii). In her Preface she quoted from Charles Cowden Clarke's *Shakespeare – Characters* (1863): 'Shakespeare is the writer of all others whom the women of England should most take to their hearts; for I believe it is to be mainly through his intellectual influence that their claims in the scale of society were acknowledged in England' at a time when 'their position was not greatly elevated above that of the drudges in modern low life'.<sup>1</sup>

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It is very remarkable how again and again Shakespeare brings into prominence the relations between a father and an only daughter. We have it in *Romeo and Juliet*, the *Tempest*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*; and in the *Merchant of Venice*, it appears in the two instances of Portia and her lost father, and Shylock and Jessica. But how different is the tie between Portia's father and herself, and Jessica and her father. In the latter case there is an utter want of mutual love, confidence, and loyalty, whilst in the former there is the most steadfast observance of respect to the will of one no longer present to enforce its fulfillment.

Portia's independence of character was in no small degree owing to the position in which, by her mother's death, she found herself placed. She had been from an early age the head of a large household. Upon her shoulders had devolved the care and responsibilities of a great establishment. As a girl she was placed in authority, having servants under her to whom she could say 'go' or 'come' at her pleasure, and who hesitated not to obey. And to these habits of command were added an ease of manner

and grace of self-possession acquired by long intercourse with the refined and noble associates of her father's wealthy leisure. [Discusses her life.]

Morocco's greeting is dignified and gracious [Quotes 2.1.1–12]. It was impossible to return any but a kind answer to so earnest and manly a pleading. Portia had no liking for the 'shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun' [2.1.2]. She much preferred the companionship of one whose skin more nearly approached her own in colour and complexion, but she carefully disguised the repugnance she felt, until the trial was over. . . .

As he persists in hazarding his fortune, she procrastinates. We can imagine the flood of emotion that would beset her. Had she not just been talking of Bassanio, the hero of her girlish dreams, when the arrival of the Moor was announced? . . . And now in his place stood the swarthy African, goodly, no doubt, in his proportions as a man, and very probably to the sun-kissed virgins of his own land, 'the glass of fashion, and the mould of form' [*Hamlet*, 3.1.153]; but there was a great difference between the young Venetian noble and this sable warrior. The contrast between them would rudely shock the sensibilities of the imaginative girl.

Women, it has been said, love not the man as he is, but the man as they would have him be. They deck him with graces he does not possess, and adorn him with virtues he makes no claim to. . . . And thus they create an ideal of their own, and fall down and worship the image that they in their fondness have set up.

It was Bassanio's chief merit that he was beloved by a woman like Portia and a man like Antonio. But wise women rarely vindicate their wisdom by their loves. Love is a rock upon which many a reputation for prudence has been wrecked ere now. A woman after giving the most precious part of herself, her heart, scarcely realises that mercenary motives can have any place in her lover's suit. Portia's romance was girlish in those dear old days when prudence was over-stepped by passion. She saw but little of Bassanio's real character and naively overlooked the fact that her fortune was world renowned, and that the young Venetian noble could not fail to have heard how rich a prize the mistress of Belmont would be. . . .

And to my mind Bassanio is a type of very many of our day; men to be met with everywhere in good society who attract to themselves the regard of pure women and good men without possessing any positive recommendations, no great principles of action. Bassanio was young, good-looking, and had been rich. His riches he had squandered, not perhaps in riotous living, but in the gratification of expensive tastes, and the generous entertainment of his companions. He had been forced to trespass on the good nature and more carefully husbanded resources of his friends. . . . She was an heiress and a lovely, loveable woman, and he believed himself, or all the world was wrong, the very man to adorn her palace as its lord, and to control her estates as their owner. . . . And yet we can well believe that in the presence of Portia all meaner motives would die, and that Bassanio would lose sight of everything but her wondrous self. He could not fail to be enthralled by the captivating glamour of the sunny-locked blonde. . . .

And then what a revelation is made! We have been taught to regard Portia as Shakespeare's type of a strong-minded woman, and very rightly so; but how different his idea is from the popular one current at the present day. Portia is no hard-featured, loud talking, forbidding-looking being in semi-masculine or dowdy attire, but one endowed with all a Juliet's passion, and radiant with a consuming fire. She is indeed polished and sagacious,

M. Leigh-Noel

gifted and well-balanced, distinguished for intellectual excellence and superior common-sense, but she is none the less subject to the overmastering power of the affections. . . .

In this way Portia has been called the most wonderful of all Shakespeare's feminine creations, for in her he has made clear that the possession of the highest intellectual endowments is compatible in a woman with the age and susceptibilities for tender and romantic love. . . . But whilst Portia is sincere and thorough in her subjection to the man her heart has chosen as its lord, she assumes the place of partner and not that of servant. There is a dignity in her mien that bespeaks the independence of her nature. When her heart has recovered from the wild throbs of rapture that greeted Bassanio's choice, it beats again with the grave and sweet pulsation that is as natural to it, as a spirit of inference and a capacity for calm logical deduction, united to a playful flow of wit, is natural to her intellect. . . .

It has been said by an American writer that in Portia, Shakespeare anticipated the intellect of women who can wield gracefully the tools of men, not sacrificing a trait of their essential womanliness. To most the idea of an intellectual woman is associated with the absence of everything that is tender, or, at any rate, romantic. But it is not so with Portia. . . .

Portia is a judge upon the bench, an advocate at the bar, a preacher in the pulpit, a wit in company, a student when alone, a philosopher in thought, a poet in expression, and, above all, a tender and romantic girl growing up into the truest of women and sweetest of wives. (107-15, 117, 120-1, 128)

## 39 El Seyonpi, privileged Christian, proscribed Jew

1885

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From 'The Name Shylock: A Critical Examination of the Characters in *The Merchant of Venice*', *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 1 August 1885.

'El Seyonpi' is probably the pseudonym of Isaac P. Noyes (b. 1840) a prolific American author on a diversity of subjects who was still active in 1908. In that year various odes were published under his name in Washington D.C., including an *Ode to the Union*, *Ode on Aesthetics*, *Ode on Finance*, *Ode on McClellan* [and] *the Corporation*. In addition to writing poetry, Noyes was the author of *Meteorology*, *The Weather Maps and the 'Rain-Makers'*, also published in Washington, D.C. (1892). His impassioned defence of Shylock and vehement contempt for Antonio indicate that El Seyonpi had Jewish origins.

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As we study the personnel of this play, the most noticeable thing is the combination against Shylock. The Christians are all powerful and high ranking individuals, and friendly to each other. Shylock stands alone. A friend (Tubal) is mentioned, but as a character in the play he might as well have been left out. He is of no importance, at least morally. Shylock is the only Jew that contends against the strong power that seeks to oppress him. He is represented as a money lender. This is his vocation – a vocation as honorable as any other.

Money represents so much labor. When labor, or any product of labor is scarce, it commands a high price. Thus far in the world the price of money is governed by the same principle. The scarcity and the demand regulate the rate at which it is loaned. A great abundance of money and of labor reduces the rate of hire. Money which is the product of labor is obedient to the same law as labor itself – and labor is obedient to the same law as money.

Shylock has money; it is his capital whereby he makes a living. There is no question about the legitimacy of his vocation. It is as honest and honorable a way of securing a livelihood as hiring labor or dealing in the products of labor. No man can afford to work for nothing. He may occasionally accommodate a friend. So a man may lend a sum of money without interest; but this is the exception. No one can live by giving labor or the product of labor for no equivalent.

Now let us turn to the characters; some of them, as the Duke and the Princes, are only side-shows; they have little to do with the real plot of the play, although they may lend

## El Seyonpi

some interest to it as a whole. The principal characters are Antonio, the rich merchant, Bassanio, Lorenzo, Shylock, Portia, Nerissa and Jessica.

Antonio is a man of means – indeed very wealthy. He has his ships in every part of the world. It is not unreasonable to believe that relatively he is like some of our heavy merchants of the present day who invest their capital in ships which they send to India, Africa, South America and China; and who live in grand style by the income from the successful voyages which these vessels make. He is a friend to Bassanio, and is desirous, for some reason, to help him. Bassanio is evidently poor, but loves and is loved by Portia, an heiress; he, however, lacks the means wherewith to gain access to the society of the heiress. By the way, it would have been well if Shakespeare had written another play – a sort of sequel to this, and therein shown up this side – shown the influences at work to accomplish this: what motive, if any, Antonio had in thus favoring Bassanio. Such men as Antonio may appear to work and accommodate for nothing – to loan money to some poor young man in order to help him gain the affection and estate of some heiress, but it is not natural for any such man of the world to work for naught, any more than it is reasonable to expect the Jewish money lender to loan his money on this basis. Antonio is not only willing to help this young man, but he is all the while loaning money on the street for gratis, and doing all he can to destroy the legitimate business of his poor fellow men, because they are non-Christian, and of a different creed from himself. The remarks that Shakespeare has put into the mouth of Shylock throw much light upon the character of Antonio. [Quotes 1.3.41–52, 106–12, 130–1.]

In this there is certainly nothing very commendable on the part of Antonio. His treatment of Shylock is simply contemptible, and yet the world is full of condemnation for this representative (misrepresented) Jew, and very approbative of this exalted Christian gentleman merchant Antonio. Suppose Shylock had had capital sufficient to have sent his 'Argosies with portly sail / Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood' [1.1.9–10], to bring the treasures of the world to Venice for nothing, and thereby destroy Antonio's business. How would Mr. Antonio have liked that?

But the reader may say: 'This is only a play – the mere conception of a play-writer.' Very true; but it has had its effect on the world nevertheless. It is a reflection, a reproduction, of the days of Venice, and of the times of Shakespeare. The Christian was a privileged character, the Jew a proscribed character, and one who had no rights which the Christian was bound to respect. From the whole character of the play there is much left out; but what remains readily reveals it and its importance.

In writing the Hebrew language the vowels, being understood, are often omitted. As it were, the vowels are omitted in this play, and it is no difficult task to supply them. It is plain, on the face of it, that there was a plot against Shylock, a plot to ruin him. The powerful influence of Antonio is against him. The play does not enter into details, but enough is revealed to show that the community in which Shylock resides, bear him no good will. He seems, like the true Jewish character, to have considerable sly humor in his composition. He requests, as a forfeit of the bond, a pound of Antonio's flesh. From the language used, it is evident that it was at least, at this time in the play, intended as a joke, and but for the unexpected turn of affairs further on, there would have been no serious reference to it. At this point it must be specially borne in mind that Shylock has no power over the fortunes of Antonio. If he had, and then had put such a proviso in the

bond, it would have shown a premeditated crime. But it would be foolish to charge such – as foolish as it would be to give him control over the winds and currents of the ocean. Shylock had no influence to wreck or stay the richly-loaded vessels of Antonio. If they were all total wrecks, it was for no fault or power of his. Also it would seem well to bear in mind the character of Shylock, or what a true Shylock should be. The Christian ideal seems to be a low fellow – a mere Jack; but there is no reason for this; and it is full time that he was raised above this conception, and placed on a plane more in harmony with the character of dignified manhood, oppressed by reason of foolish caste.

Antonio is bent on serving Bassanio. He evidently, from the disconnected consonants, had herein an object to accomplish. Portia is an heiress. Bassanio is his friend, perhaps, better, confederate; for such worldly men as Antonio do not interest themselves, to the extent of 3,000 ducats, for pure friendship. Bassanio may be simple enough to think so, but the revelation of the absent vowels – human nature – don't say so.

A supper is given; Shylock is pressed to attend; yet the poor (and from this point of view) miserable Jew, is not only invited, but pressed to attend! He does not want to go. He says: [Quotes 2.5.13–18].

His keen sense tells him that some ill towards him is brewing. He thinks, perhaps, that he will go and see, and learn the worst. He little dreams that his daughter, in whom he has the utmost confidence, will prove so weak as to become false to him and join the forces of the enemy. The plot to steal his daughter, and to completely destroy him, did not originate and mature in a night. Here, again, the wanting vowels reveal the crime.

Shylock could not possibly know of the plot; and little did he dream of its infamy. He knew that there was something wrong. He had not sufficient vowels to guide him, yet he knew, or was quite sure, that there was some foul plot maturing against him.

It is natural and right for man to seek, ask, and demand at least a little property and friendship. Without it he is indeed a sorry creature. Shylock had but a few friends and his business. But he was proscribed by a powerful combination. He knew it, and it did not tend to improve his character or sweetness of temper. If any doubt this, let them 'put themselves in his place'. Under such circumstances man (or woman) can stand a great deal of rebuff and imposition if they only have one little spot where the soul can rest. Shylock had, or supposed he had, this sanctum to which he might retire – a holy of holies – a fireside, where the sterner muscles could relax – where soul would respond to soul.

The plot that was to destroy his peace had evidently been maturing for years. In these 'good old Christian times' anything was lawful that would christianize a Jew. The beloved and trusted daughter is prevailed upon to steal herself away. Not only to steal her father's gold, or allow good Christians to do it, but to steal herself and all the old family keepsakes, which are beyond all price.

We can image Shylock coming home. The infamous plot, when it is too late to prevent it, breaks upon his thoughtful mind; the wanting vowels, at least a part of them, are supplied. Not only is his money gone, but the 'flesh of his flesh' – the soul of his soul – fled – gone – and gone to a Christian stronghold, where were gathered all his powerful personal enemies and the enemies of his race.

The great and good Antonio, too, helps the escape of the fugitive by lending all the help he can and giving the lie to the Duke when Shylock appeals to the state for



protection, and to seek to restore the ducats, the treasures, and the daughter. Antonio certifies to the Duke. They were not with Bassanio in his ship – when he very well knew they were! Individually, Shylock was sharp enough for them; but what can even the keenest person do when thus surrounded and hemmed in on every side? Under such treatment is it to be wondered at that Shylock is fierce with rage? In our more enlightened times many a man has taken the law unto himself, and revenged himself upon such villainy – such infamous villainy – and been vindicated at the bar of public opinion. But Shylock was too powerfully surrounded, and had sense enough to realize it. Any attempt at private justice would have only made matters the worse for him. What he does must be done consistently, in accordance with law.

Under such trials it is very difficult for a strong man to keep within the letter of the law. Self-control, power over himself during such a trying ordeal, required a moral heroism, very seldom exhibited to the world.

What was projected in the first part of the play as a joke, now becomes, to his frenzied mind, an impractical method of obtaining justice from his powerful and contemptible enemy, and satisfying the spirit of revenge provoked by these deep wrongs. Here was a man whom he had never injured – whom he had never wronged; but who had, without even the promptings of revenge, for he had nothing to stimulate this baneful passion, treated him most vilely. What Antonio had done he had done in cold blood, while poor Shylock, frenzied by a succession of dastardly acts, which he is unable to prevent, or defend himself against, seeks an impractical measure of revenge that circumstances beyond his control have put in his power. The world calls him cruel, and the same world that has not a word of reproach against that cold-blooded villain Antonio. Surely the world, then, and even now, is governed by its passions and prejudices.

Here at the close of the drama Shakespeare would seem to reveal his ignorance of business affairs. But then it may be said that it is a poetical license to have Shylock insist upon the bond by Antonio himself, and with his own money. A business man of to-day would not find it difficult to raise the bond in such a case. When the money value of the bond is presented, at least so far as a common-sense transaction like this is concerned, that ends it – or would end it. Antonio cannot, at the time, pay the 3,000 ducats; if he could, all would, according to the drama, be quietly settled. As he cannot, the forfeit must be paid. Bassanio, after having obtained the heiress, stands willing to double the 3,000 ducats, to make it 6,000. Had he simply handed 3,000 ducats to Antonio, Antonio could have paid the bond in full. Nothing is said about interest. From the drama it would seem that Shylock loaned it to him without interest, and all he wants is his principal returned to him. It looks as though the plot of the drama was written to hinge on this one point; as though the idea was first conceived and then the drama arranged to fit it; as though it would be a capital idea, whereby to illustrate the Jewish *versus* the Christian character to suit the taste of the medieval age. The Jew must be made to appear as a low, contemptible person with no regard for the higher demands of a civilized society. This seems to be the light in which the world views this character and scene. But then the world generally takes such a view of things as is most pleasant to it, or as best suits its fancy or prejudice.

Shakespeare's mind was cosmopolitan. He had little care, evidently, for persons, nations or creeds. The ideal actor of to-day will play any part the public calls for. The

play that has a great run is a reflection of the demands of the public, and not a reflection of the creed or sympathy of the actor. On the same principle Shakespeare wrote his plays. How finely this public feeling reveals human nature. All these years this piece has been played, and Shylock has been a despised character. Who ever heard of the name Antonio called or given with reproach? yet, when we come to analyze the two, Shylock is as far ahead of such a contemptible character as Antonio as the ideal Antonio is, in the public eyes, ahead of the ideal Shylock. Shylock is simply robbed, insulted, and most shamefully treated, and that, too, by a number of the first citizens of Venice, who can plead so eloquently for justice and mercy when their side or party is affected, but so soon as they secure their easy triumph – many over one, a State over an humble citizen – they become as heartless and satanic as an ancient Spanish inquisitor.

Antonio's ships come in, and he has an abundance of money – ample to pay the mere 3,000 ducats, a large sum, but small for so wealthy a man as he to pay; and yet it never once enters his mind to make good that 3,000 ducats, an honest loan. On the contrary he is only too willing to rob poor Shylock of not only the 3,000 ducats, and of much greater sums, but far more than this, to rob him of that which is dearer to him than money. Shylock is robbed of all that could make his life happy. His little household destroyed, even the precious keepsakes whereby he treasures the memory of Leah are not left. Money, daughter, keepsakes, the treasures of the heart and soul taken, and the feeling of security and priceless bond of fellow-feeling, such as, in his humble way, he had, all withdrawn from him! No wonder he pleads

I pray you give me leave to go from hence,  
I am not well. [4.1.395–6]

If there is anything that would prompt in man a desire to withdraw to some lonely spot, away from the very sound and sight of his fellow-men, it is such treatment as this. Shylock has borne this great injustice and wrong long enough – even too long. It is full time that the intelligence of the world ceased to be governed by passion and prejudice, and advanced to a more noble platform, and took a more humane view of this character. If Shylock wanted his 'pound of flesh', Antonio wanted the whole body – and he got it! – got it by foul means – by the weight of might, not by superiority of mind; not even by business sharpness, but by the most detestable means – by the triumph of the powerful over the weak. If (in this respect) in a scale of ten Shylock was represented by one, Antonio should be represented by the whole scale, and even more, if possible.

When the world finds itself inadequate to express its feelings for the most contemptible, wholesale brutality and downright meanness, let it sum up in one word, and let that word be ANTONIO! Such a character well deserves such mention. But it is to be hoped that such characters, drawn by such an artist as Shakespeare, will be like mirrors to the world. Seeing the good, will prompt us to imitate it; seeing the mean, will cause such a reaction within us as to prompt us to inwardly vow to ourselves that we will do all in our power to 'help them to right who suffer wrong – to help all the poor and oppressed upon earth from them that swelleth against them'. (4–14)

## 40 William Poel, staging the play

1887

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From *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (London, 1913).

William Poel (1852–1934), actor, director, and manager, founded the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1894. Although only lasting eleven years, this company put on notable performances of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, re-creating Elizabethan stage conventions and settings. Poel was responsible for the revival of many Elizabethan plays in performance. In the 1890s he led an unsuccessful first attempt to rebuild the Globe Theatre in the City of London. The extract is from a lecture Poel gave to the New Shakspeare Society in 1887, consisting of a plot synopsis and an analysis of stage issues. His own production of the play played down the sentimental elements in the characterization of Shylock.

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With regard to Bassanio, we learn in this first scene that he is already indebted to Antonio, that he desires to borrow more money from his friend to free himself from debt before seeking the hand of Portia, a rich heiress, and that Portia has herself encouraged him to woo her. In fact, we are at once deterred from associating purely sordid motives with Bassanio's courtship by his glowing description of her virtues and beauty, as also by Antonio's high opinion of Bassanio's character. Antonio, however, has not the money at hand, and it is arranged that Bassanio is to borrow the required sum on Antonio's security. The entrance of Gratiano is skilfully timed to dispel the feeling of depression that Antonio's sadness would otherwise leave upon the audience, and to give the proper comedy tone to the opening scene of a play of comedy.

In Scene 2 we are introduced to the heroine and her attendant, and learn, what probably Bassanio did not know, that Portia by her father's will is powerless to bestow her hand on the man of her choice – the stratagem, as Nerissa supposes, being devised to insure Portia's obtaining 'one that shall rightly love' [1.2.33]. This we may call the first or casket-complication. Portia's strong sense of humour is revealed to us in her description of the suitors 'that are already come' [1.2.35], and her moral beauty in her determination to respect her father's wishes [Quotes 1.2.106–8]. The action of the play is not, however, continued till Nerissa questions Portia about Bassanio, in a passage that links this scene to the last and confirms, in the minds of the audience, the truth of the lover's statement [Quotes 1.1.163–4].

We now come to the third scene of the play. Bassanio enters conversing with one of whom no previous mention has been made, but whose first utterance tells us he is the

man of whom the required loan is demanded, and before the scene has ended we discover further that he is to be the chief agent in bringing about the second, or pound-of-flesh-complication. There are no indications given us of Shylock's personal appearance, except that he has been dubbed 'old Shylock,' which is, perhaps, more an expression of contempt than of age, for he is never spoken of as old man, or old Jew, and is chiefly addressed simply as Shylock or Jew; but the epithet is one recognized widely enough for Shylock himself to quote [Quotes 2.5.1-2] as also does the Duke [Quotes 4.1.175]. . . . However, the language that Shakespeare has put into the mouth of Shylock does not impress us as being that of a man whose physical and mental faculties are in the least impaired by age; so vigorous is it at times that Shylock might be pictured as being an Edmund Kean-like figure, with piercing black eyes and an elastic step. From Shylock's expression, 'the *ancient* grudge I bear him' [1.3.47], and Antonio's abrupt manner towards Shylock, we may conclude that the two men are avowed enemies, and have been so for some time previous to the opening of the play. This fact should, from the very first, be made evident to the audience by the emphasis Shylock gives to Antonio's name, an emphasis that is repeated every time the name occurs till he has made sure there is no doubt about who the man is that shall become bound.

The dramatic purpose of this scene is to show us Shylock directly plotting to take the life of Antonio, and the means he employs to this end are contrived with much skill. Shylock, in his opening soliloquy, discloses his intention to the audience, and at once deprives himself of its sympathy by admitting that his motives are guided more by personal considerations than by religious convictions [Quotes 1.3.42-5].

The three first scenes should be so acted on the stage as to accentuate in the minds of the audience (1) that Bassanio is the very dear friend of Antonio; (2) that Portia and Bassanio are in love with each other; (3) that Antonio and Shylock are avowed enemies; (4) that Shylock conspires against Antonio's life with full intent to take it should the bond become forfeit.

. . . Jessica is the third female character in the play, and the dramatist intends her to appear, in contrast to Portia and Nerissa, as a tragic figure, dark, pale, melancholy, demure, yet chaste in thought and in action, and with a heart susceptible of tender and devoted love. She plans her elopement with the same fixedness of purpose as the father pursues his revenge. In Scene 4 the elopement incident is advanced a step by Lorenzo receiving Jessica's directions 'how to take her from her father's house' [2.4.30], and a little further in the next scene, by Shylock being got out of the way, when we hear Jessica's final adieu. It is worth noting in this scene that, at a moment when we are ready to sympathize with Shylock, who is about to lose his daughter, the dramatist denies us that privilege by further illustrating the malignancy of the man's character. He has had an unlucky dream; he anticipates trouble falling upon his house; he is warned by Launcelot that there are to be masques at night; he admits that he is not invited to Bassanio's feast out of love, but out of flattery, and still he can say

But yet I'll go *in hate* to feed upon  
The prodigal Christian. [2.5.14-15]

No personal inconvenience must hinder the acceleration of Antonio's downfall. . . .

## William Poel

Scene 9 disposes of the second of Portia's remaining suitors, and, being comic in character, is inserted with good effect between two tragic scenes. . . .

[On Act 3, Scene 1:] The scene opens with Salarino and Solanio hurrying on the stage anxiously questioning each other about Antonio's rumoured loss at sea. Shylock follows almost immediately, to whom they at once turn in the hope of hearing news. It is usual on the stage to omit the entrance of Antonio's man, but apart from the dramatic effect produced by a follower of Antonio coming on to the stage at that moment, his appearance puts an end to the controversy, which otherwise would probably continue. Salarino and Solanio leave the stage awed almost to breathlessness, and Tubal enters. Then follows a piteous scene as we see Shylock's outbursts of grief, rage, and despair over the loss of his gold; yet is his anguish aggravated by the one from whom of all others he had a right to expect sympathy. But Shylock, after Tubal's words, 'But Antonio is certainly undone,' mutters, 'Nay, that's true, that's very true' [3.1.124-5], and takes from his purse a coin, and with a countenance and gesture expressive of indomitable purpose, continues:

'Go, Tubal, fee me an officer; bespeak him a *fortnight* before. I will have the *heart* of him if he forfeit . . . . Go' [3.1.125-7].

Shylock's misfortunes in this scene would arouse sympathy were it not for the damning confession to Tubal of his motive for hating Antonio: 'for were he out of Venice I can make what merchandise I will' [3.1.127-9]. Words that Jessica's lines prove are not idle ones [Quotes 3.2.284-8].

Act III., Scene 2, brings us to the last stage of the casket complication, and here Shakespeare, to avoid sameness, directs that a song shall be sung while Bassanio is occupied in deciding his fate; so that his long speech is spoken after the choice has been made, the leaden casket being then in his hands, and his words merely used to justify his decision. That Bassanio must win Portia is realized from the first. Moreover, his success, after Shylock's threats in the last scene, has become a dramatic necessity, and is thus saved from an appearance of unreality, so that his love adventure develops naturally. His good fortune is Gratiano's; then news is brought of Antonio's bankruptcy and Bassanio is sent to his friend's relief. Scene 3 does no more than show in action what was previously narrated by Solanio in the preceding one, for the Elizabethan dramatists, differing in their methods from the Greeks, rarely allowed narration to take the place of action on the stage. Perhaps this was on account of the mixed character of the audience, the 'groundlings' being too busy cracking nuts to take in an important situation merely from its narration. To them Antonio's danger would not become a fact till they actually saw the man in irons and the jailor by his side. In the fourth scene we go back to Belmont to hear that Portia and Nerissa are to be present at the trial, though with what object we are not told. We hear, also, of Portia's admiration for Antonio, whose character she compares with that of her husband. Scene 5 being comic, well serves its purpose as a contrast to the tragic intensity displayed in the scene which follows. Here, too, Portia and Bassanio win golden opinions from Jessica [Quotes 3.5.73-83].

The trial scene is so well known that I shall not dwell upon it except to mention that I think the dramatist intended the scene to be acted with more vigour and earnestness on

the part of all the characters than is represented on the modern stage, and with more vehemence on the part of Shylock. Conscious of his lawful right, he defies the duke and council in language not at all respectful [Quotes 4.1.44–6]. When Shylock is worsted the traditional business is for him to leave the stage with the air of a martyr going to his execution, and thus produce a tragic climax where none is wanted. We seem to get an indication of what should be Shylock's behaviour in his hour of adversity by reading the Italian version of the story, with which Shakespeare was familiar. 'Everyone present was greatly pleased and deriding the Jew said: "He who laid traps for others, is caught himself." The Jew seeing he could gain nothing, tore in pieces the bond *in a great rage.*' Indeed, Shylock's words, 'Why then the devil give him good of it! / I'll stay no longer question' [4.1.344–5], are exactly suited to the action of tearing up the bond. Certain it is that only by Shylock being 'in a great rage,' as he rushes off the stage, can the audience be greatly pleased, and in a fit humour to be interested in the further doings of Portia. Scene 2 of this act is generally omitted on the stage, though it seems to me necessary in order to show how Nerissa gets possession of Gratiano's ring; it also affords an opportunity for some excellent business on the part of Nerissa, who walks off arm in arm with her husband, unknown to him.

The last act is the shortest fifth act in the Globe edition,<sup>[1]</sup> and if deficient in action Shakespeare gives it another interest by the wealth and music of its poetry, a device more than once made use of by him to strengthen undramatic material. Shakespeare's knowledge of the value of sound, in dramatic effect, is shown by Launcelot interrupting the whispering of the lovers, and profaning the stillness of the night with his halloas, which have a similar effect to the nurse's calls in the balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*; it is also shown by the music, and in the tucket sound; while the picture brought to the imagination, by allusion to the light burning in Portia's hall, gives reality to the scene. (125–33)

## 41 Edwin Booth, Shylock's 'revengeful selfishness'

1888

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From H. H. Furness (ed.), *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice* (Philadelphia, 1888).

Edwin Thomas Booth (1833–93), the leading American actor of his generation, son of Junius Brutus Booth (1796–1852) and brother of John Wilkes Booth (who shot Lincoln), was born in Hartford County, Maryland. He made his debut at the age of 16, acting Tressel to his father's Richard III, and soon achieved great success in both America and England, especially as Hamlet and Othello (with Irving as Iago). His performance as Shylock (at the Winter Garden, New York, in January 1867) was remarkable for the sense of malice and hatred it conveyed: see the account by William Winter, drama critic of the *New York Tribune*, No. 57 below. In a letter to Winter (24 February 1884), Booth sent him a newspaper review of his recent appearance in Baltimore, 'not for what is said of my performance as Shylock but for what I regard as the true Shakespearian portrait of the Jew. I believe you hold a different estimate of the character, as many do, but I have searched in vain for the slightest hint of anything resembling dignity or worthiness in the part'. (D. J. Watermeier (ed.), *Between Actor and Critic. Selected Letters of Edwin Booth and William Winter* (Princeton, NJ, 1971), p. 256.)

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[In the Appendix to his edition Furness printed this letter from Booth with his permission, although 'it was merely the continuance of a verbal discussion and the vindication of a position then maintained'. Furness had printed in his commentary several notes by Booth on how Shylock's role should be acted.]

I believe that Burbage, Macklin, Cooke, and Kean (as did my Father) made Shylock what is technically termed a 'character-part,' – grotesque in 'make-up', and general treatment, not so pronounced, perhaps, as my personation has been sometimes censured for. I think Macready was the first to lift the uncanny Jew out of the darkness of his native element of revengeful selfishness into the light of the venerable Hebrew, the Martyr, the Avenger. He has had several followers, and I once tried to view him in that light, but he doesn't cast a shadow sufficiently strong to contrast with the sunshine of the comedy, . . . to do which he must, to a certain extent, be repulsive, a sort of party that one doesn't care to see among the dainty revellers of Venice in her prime. Antonio's liver-trouble is gloom enough for them, but to heighten the brilliancy for us a heavier cloud is necessary, and it takes the form of Shylock, . . .

*Shylock's 'revengeful selfishness', 1888*

an inhuman wretch,  
Uncapable of pity, void and empty  
From any dram of mercy. [4.1.4–6]

It has been said that he is an affectionate father and a faithful friend. When, where, and how does he manifest the least claim to such commendation? Tell me that, and unyoke! 'Twas the money value of Leah's ring that he grieved over, not its associations with her, else he would have shown some affection for her daughter, which he did not, or she would not have called her home 'a hell' [2.3.2], robbed and left him. Shakespeare makes her do these un-Hebrew things to intensify the baseness of Shylock's nature. If we side with him in his self-defence, 'tis because we have charity, which he had not; if we pity him under the burthen of his merited punishment 'tis because we are human, which he is not, – except in shape, and even that, I think, should indicate the crookedness of his nature. His refusal to accept thrice the amount he loaned seems to have given some critics the idea that as a great Avenger of his wronged people he rises above all selfish considerations, but had he accepted, what a lame and impotent conclusion it would have been! No, this other un-Jewlike action was necessary for stage-effect.

Do not forget, while you read the poet's plays, that he was a player, and, mark you! a theatrical manager with a keen eye to stage-effects; witness the 'gag' of Shylock's sharpening the knife, – a most dangerous 'bit of business,' and apt to cause a laugh; be careful of that 'point.' Would the heroic Hebrew have stooped to such a paltry action? No, never, in the very white-heat of his pursuit of vengeance! But vengeance is foreign to Shylock's thought; 'tis revenge he seeks, and he gets just what all who seek it get, – 'sooner or later', as the saying is. Had his motive been the higher one, Shakespeare would have somehow contrived his success without doubt; but Shylock had grown too strong for him 'Tis said, you know, that he had to kill Mercutio, else the merry fellow would have killed the tragedy; so Shylock would have killed the comedy had he been intended to typify Vengeance. The storm-cloud of his evil passions having burst, he is forgotten in the moonlight of fair Portia's gardens. (383–4)



## 42 Francis A. Marshall, 'the first of his [Shakespeare's] great comedies'

1888

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From *The Works of William Shakespeare. Edited by Henry Irving and Francis A. Marshall and Other Shakespearean Scholars. . . .* (8 vols., London, 1888–90). Volume III (1888).

Francis Albert Marshall (1840–89), born in London the son of a Member of Parliament, was educated at Harrow and Exeter College, Oxford, where he left without taking his degree. After a short period working as a minor civil servant he took up full-time professional dramatic criticism, contributing reviews to the *London Figaro*. Marshall wrote several dramas, and in 1883 published a memoir of his close friend and dramatic collaborator, the actor Henry Irving. Marshall's *A Study of Hamlet* also appeared in the same year. He collaborated with Irving and others on the popular *Henry Irving Shakespeare* (8 vols., 1888–1890). Marshall aired some of his views on Shylock in a contribution to 'The Round Table' discussion in *The Theatre*. He reiterates and amplifies his perceptions in his 'Introduction' to *The Merchant of Venice*.

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[From Marshall's 'Critical Remarks']

*The Merchant of Venice*, one of the most popular of Shakespeare's plays, whether in the study or on the stage, may be called the first of his great comedies; for a comedy it is, in spite of the tragic interest which centres round Shylock and Antonio. We should have expected to find it called on the title-page, in the old edition, a tragi-comedy, that curious composite title which is made to embrace so many plays of the Elizabethan period, varying very much in the degrees of tragedy and comedy which they contain. On the title-page of all the Quartos it is termed 'the excellent' or 'the most excellent history of *The Merchant of Venice*;' but at the head of the page it is called 'the comical history,' and in the Folio it is ranked among the comedies. It is a matter for congratulation that Shakespeare never adopted that composite title tragi-comedy, which certainly suggests a piece neither one thing nor the other, and is very often found attached to a dramatic work that has no dignity or pathos in its tragedy, and no humour or wit in its comedy. In all Shakespeare's comedies there is a strong element of serious interest. In fact without that element comedy, in the highest sense, can scarcely exist. We may call *The Merchant of Venice* the first of Shakespeare's great comedies; for it would be absurd to compare with it, in point of merit, *Love's Labour's Lost*, the *Comedy of Errors* or the *Taming of the Shrew*.

The plot of the play consists, as has been said, of two distinct stories which are very skilfully blended together. In the one, the story of the caskets, Bassanio and Portia are the hero and the heroine. In the story of the Jew and his bond, Shylock and Antonio are the principal characters. The two sets of characters are very naturally brought together through the loan, which Antonio borrows from Shylock for the purpose of supplying Bassanio with the means to carry on his courtship of Portia.

It is doubtful whether Shakespeare had any particular purpose in writing this delightful play. If he had, it was probably to protest against the uncharitableness with which the Jews were still treated in his day. Although Queen Elizabeth found in Catholics and Dissenters sufficient fuel for her religious bonfires, the Jews were still the victims of great social injustice in England. In other countries (in Spain, for instance) they were vigorously persecuted. It is a curious fact, that about ten or twelve years before Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* was produced, viz. in 1584, a play (*The Three Ladies of London*) was printed which, apparently, was popular in those days, and had among its *dramatis personae* Gerontus, a Jew, who is represented as possessing nearly every virtue, and is introduced in a trial scene, in which his generous forbearance is brought strongly into contrast with the meanness and turpitude of his Christian creditor. [Discusses Gerontus.][<sup>1</sup>]

But if Shakespeare's object was to plead for the exercise of more toleration and charity towards the Jews on the part of the Christians, he was far too wise to represent Shylock as the possessor of every virtue. He knew very well that with a popular audience, to which his plays appealed, such a character would gain but little sympathy. Accordingly, while he yielded to popular prejudice by representing Shylock as avaricious and vindictive – but not such a monster of abominable cruelty as Marlowe's Barabas – at the same time he invests the greedy usurer with the dignity of a passionate pride in his race; and he puts into his mouth such powerful arguments, and such eloquent pleas against the social injustice of which he is the victim, that the spectators of *The Merchant of Venice* ought to have gone away in a spirit much more likely to make them treat Jews with a moderate amount of Christian charity, than if Shakespeare had represented Shylock as a phenomenon of noble unselfishness like Gerontus [quotes Gerontus]. . . . [There are] instances where, just as Shylock is beginning to exhibit some noble feeling, he is made to harp upon his avarice lest it should seem that the dramatist was about to make too strong an appeal for sympathy in the Jew's favour.

Shylock, unlike Marlowe's Barabas, has no mean selfishness in his character. He loves his money, not for the pleasures it can purchase for him, nor with that narrow-minded vanity in the sense of possession which the mere miser feels; but rather because it is the evidence of his own thrift and industry, the substantial witness, in one respect at least, to his superiority over the Christians who despise and persecute him. The insults, which Antonio has publicly inflicted on him, are felt by him not so much as directed against himself, personally, as against his tribe, and the sacred nation to which he belongs. Shylock would never have been guilty of betraying the interests of his fellow-countrymen for his own selfish ends, as Barabas cynically declares that he would do. [Cites Barabas.] Nor could he ever be capable of those low vulgar crimes of which Barabas boasts. Shylock loves his Jessica with no ignoble love, although he feels bitterly her desertion of him and her renunciation of the old faith. He could never have conceived

such a cowardly and cruel murder as Barabas plans against his daughter. In short, Shylock is the creation of a man with large-hearted human sympathies, and of a skilful dramatist; Barabas is the work of one who was devoid of any sympathetic qualities, of a powerful but gloomy poet, whose dramatic talent was extremely limited.

Nothing in this play shows more clearly the progress which Shakespeare had made in his art, than the character of Portia. Hitherto he has not given us, in his comedies at least, any female characters that could be said to possess much individuality: the heroines of his earlier comedies are all of a commonplace type; and except, perhaps, in the case of Julia (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*), do not excite our sympathy to any remarkable degree. We have certainly seen, in Juliet and Constance, two of Shakespeare's most interesting heroines; though Juliet is incomparably the finer creation of the two. But in the case of both those characters the nature of the play does not admit of the introduction of the element of comedy. Portia, however, is a worthy predecessor of Beatrice and Rosalind; full of spirit, and of that happy playfulness which it is the privilege of innocence to possess, even where innocence is not accompanied by ignorance of the world and of the evil therein. Portia, no more than Beatrice and Rosalind, is afraid of alluding to some things by name which, in our more prudish times, are spoken of by ladies only with the aid of some laboured periphrasis, and accompanied by blushes which, sometimes, may be suspected of being scarcely less laboured. In the case of Portia it would seem as if the very restrictions, imposed upon her by her father's will, instigated her to allow herself more liberty of speech and action than we should expect in an unmarried woman even of that day. But, however free Portia may be in her speech, and however much the independence of her actions may shock conventionality by the deplorable disregard for chaperons and propriety which it evinces, we must not fall into the error of thinking that Shakespeare intended the Lady of Belmont to be any relation, however distant, of those extremely free-minded heroines for whom some of his contemporaries showed such a partiality. Portia may joke with Nerissa about her lovers, and with her husband about the doctor who had obtained her ring; but there is no more of the wanton in her, perhaps less, than in those very mealy-mouthed young ladies who prate, at such length, about their virtue in dramas of more modern times, e.g. in the tragedies of the eighteenth century. [Reflects upon 'Woman's Rights'.]

The next most important character to Shylock and Portia is Antonio, a character evidently suggested, as I have already said, by the Ansaldo of the old novel. Nothing can exceed his unselfishness, his loyalty and friendship, his gentle patience in suffering, his beautiful equanimity in calamity. Misfortune after misfortune wrings from him no hasty expression, and the imminence of a most horrible death cannot shake his courage with the slightest breath of fear. Even against Shylock, the 'faithless Jew,' whose usury he was never tired of denouncing, whose national pride he never scrupled to wound, and whose person even he was so ungenerous as to insult, – against the man whom he had taken some pains to make his bitter foe, – even against him, when he finds himself in his power, he does not seem to feel any anger or malice. Nothing could illustrate more forcibly the intolerance which is ever the danger of a dominant faith, – more especially when that faith rests upon the consciousness that it is accompanied by the very best of works, – than the character of Antonio, as Shakespeare has drawn him. To every one else he is the model of a true gentleman and a perfect Christian, but to Shylock he is

rude, contemptuous, morally cruel, and sometimes, one is tempted to say, even mean. Shakespeare might have put into the mouth of Shylock the most high-flown sentiments of chivalrous generosity, he might have multiplied in him such acts of almost reckless self sacrifice as those attributed to Gerontus in *The Three Ladies of London* [Quotes from the play] but he would not have so cunningly won over the sympathies of the audience to the side of Shylock, in spite of his abominable avarice and relentless cruelty, as he does by making his persecutor a character whom everyone must respect and whom most men would love. In addition to this he contrasts the physical temperance and moral dignity of Shylock with the thoughtless prodigality of Bassanio, and the petty taunting wit of Gratiano. The latter character seems to have some reminiscence of Mercutio in it and a little foreshadowing of Benedick. He is a laughing philosopher, a thorough worldling, without the robust cynicism of Mercutio, or the half-affected misogyny of Benedick. He is a slight but clever piece of characterization, a capital foil, no less to the serious benevolence of Antonio, than to the dignified malice of Shylock. Bassanio has not so much individuality as we should expect in the man whom such a woman as Portia chose for her husband. Perhaps she chose by the eye rather than by the mind. But still there is a frankness about Bassanio, a warm-hearted loyalty towards his friend, which make one feel that at heart he was a good fellow. The character, dramatically speaking, is dwarfed by the side of Portia and Shylock but, as a means of displaying the art of graceful love-making, an art which seems almost to have perished on our stage, it is a part well worth the study of those who aspire to the position of *jeune premier*.

The minor characters of *The Merchant of Venice* all show an advance in the art of characterization, they all help to give to the play that attractiveness in the eyes of an audience which, let us hope, it will long continue to possess. (250-2)

## 43 Sir George Heynes Radford, Shylock's character determined by the plot

1894

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From *Shylock and Others: Eight Studies* (New York and London, 1894).

Sir George Heynes Radford (1851–1917) was educated at London University, and became a distinguished solicitor and Liberal Member of Parliament. He served as a member of the London County Council and as Chairman of the National Liberal Club Buildings Company. His publications include *Verses and Versicles* (1917), a biography of *Lady Howard of Fitzford* (Plymouth, 1890), and *Liberalism for Short* (1917).

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[Radford begins by discussing Jewish history in England and Shakespeare's possible sources. He then turns to Shylock.]

... Shylock himself is not realistic, is not, as has been foolishly said, a libel on the Jews, but a personage whose character is determined by the requirements of the plot. Shakespeare wanted a villain vindictive enough to endanger the life and peace of the virtuous members of the cast, but not sufficiently heroic to interfere with a happy *dénouement*, and he devised just such a villain in Shylock.

Let us consider the character in broad outlines. He is a great and prosperous merchant, and he has many and excellent reasons for the hatred of Antonio, which has become his ruling passion. The two are alien in race. This is something. [Discusses patriotism and foreigners.] It is all the same. This alone was reason enough for hatred, but there were other reasons. Antonio was a Christian, and the follower of one religion is ready to believe evil of the follower of another. 'Some Jews are wicked, as *all* Christians are,' says Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*.<sup>[1]</sup> Moreover, the Jews were but tolerated in Venice for commercial reasons, and subject to persecution and indignity which only stopped short at the point where such treatment would have deprived the Republic of the commercial advantages obtained through the Jews. Difference of race, difference of religion, persecution – this is enough to make Shylock hate *any* Christian at sight. But there were special reasons for hating Antonio. It seems he had been accustomed to spit on Shylock. This is a practice which may violently stimulate even a slight antipathy. Antonio, too, was a rival in business, and while we do not forget the possibility of a Jewish reader, it is no breach of confidence to confess that fellow-Christians have quarrelled under such circumstances. The most galling incident of rivalry appears to be that Antonio had cut down Shylock's profits as a usurer by lending money without interest, and so 'brought down the rate of usance' [1.3.44–5]. We presume this is sound political economy: and

there seems to be a suppressed proposition that the larger the number of borrowers at interest the higher the rate the lenders can exact. It does not matter, for an antipathy founded on an economic heresy is likely to be quite as strong as if based on a perfectly orthodox doctrine. The conclusion does not seem as obvious as that drawn by Launcelot Gobbo, who found that if Lorenzo converted his Jewish bride to Christianity, he would be damned for raising the price of pork.

This is a digression. To return to Shylock's antipathy. Besides the general grounds above hinted at and those arising from personal reasons, Shylock was at the moment irritated by events for which Antonio was not to blame. His daughter Jessica had not only eloped in a tailor-made suit with a detrimental Christian, but had carried with her quite a cargo of jewels and ready-money, and the young couple were living in Genoa on Shylock's money at the gorgeous rate of 80 ducats a night. With this respectable, old-established, and one may almost say reasonable hatred intensified by Jessica's conduct, Shylock suddenly finds himself in a position to take revenge. Antonio has made default in payment on the day, and Shylock is entitled to exact the forfeiture, 'a pound of flesh to be by him cut off nearest the merchant's heart' [4.1.233]. He can kill his enemy, as he understands the laws of Venice, without incurring any risk of injury to himself. The temptation was great. There are several Christian merchants of blameless character (we mean they have never been in prison) at whose mercy we should be very sorry to be under similar circumstances. Shylock was ready to strike the blow. It was not murder, as he was advised, but justice. He could have Antonio's life without so much as standing an action for assault and battery. It was true that by so doing he would not recover the 3,000 ducats secured by the bond, but he was ready to submit to this loss and even to forego the handsome profit held out by Antonio's friends who offered thrice the principal for his release. Shylock was avaricious, but his revenge rises superior to his avarice: he will not be balked of his revenge for money. This is the noblest point in his not very noble character. He refuses the cash and stands for the law. But it is always risky to rely on a strict view of the law when the court is dead against you on the merits. The judge, or even the jury, will lay hold of some quibble to justify a finding adverse to a suitor of whose conduct they disapprove. Such a quibble was raised by Portia on the language of the bond. It had not been drawn by an Equity<sup>[2]</sup> draughtsman of the old school, in which case it would no doubt have stipulated that the creditor was entitled not only to the pound of flesh, but also to the epidermis, cartilages, arteries, veins, capillaries, blood or sanguinary fluid, and all other appurtenances thereunto belonging or therewith usually held and enjoyed. This careless draughtsmanship enabled the Court, in accordance with its inclinations, to hold that Shylock was entitled to no drop of blood. The plaintiff was baffled by this quibble. By shedding a drop of blood he would break the law and commit a capital offence. He was not prepared to run this risk. His desire for revenge is strong enough to make him unusually indifferent to money, but not strong enough to make him regardless of his life. This is not the revenge of tragedy, and Shylock is not a hero, though the vanity of certain modern actors has exalted the character to such a pitch that they cannot 'climb down' in the fourth act without being ridiculous. But Shakespeare's Shylock climbs down without absurdity and with reasonable alacrity. He is the serviceable villain, serviceable, that is, for the action of the play, who has frightened the ladies by whetting his knife, and now gratifies them by

Sir George Heynes Radford

dropping (reluctantly) all thoughts of bloodshed. Antonio must be saved. The pains and penalties with which Shylock is threatened by the Bench effectually secure this end. Then comes retribution. Both the life and fortune of Shylock, according to the laws of Venice, are held to be forfeited. But it would be distressing to kill him, and his life is spared on condition that he becomes a Christian and gives up the bulk of his fortune. Shylock accepts the terms imposed upon him. He appears only to retain a life interest in half his property, and the whole of it is to go on his death to the gentleman who lately stole his daughter. Shylock leaves the stage promising to execute the necessary documents, and we hear of him no more. What became of him subsequently is merely a matter of conjecture, but his conduct in court justifies us in inferring that he accepted the inevitable and made the best of it. (14–26)

## 44 Frederick Samuel Boas, Shakespeare's concession to bigotry

1896

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From *Shakspeare and his Predecessors* (London, 1896).

Frederick Samuel Boas (1862–1957) grew up in Belfast, where his father, who came from Lübeck, was one of the leading figures in the Jewish community. Boas gained three first-class degrees (in Classics, modern literature, and history) at Balliol College, Oxford. He taught at Oxford until 1901 when he became Professor of History and English Literature at Queen's College, Belfast. From 1905 to 1927 Boas (who had become an Anglican) was Inspector in both English Literature and History for the London County Council. Boas edited *The Year's Work in English Studies* from 1922 until 1955, and was a dedicated member of the English Association. His output was prolific, including such works as *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (1914), *Shakespeare and the Universities* (1923), *An Introduction to the Reading of Shakespeare* (1920), *Marlowe and his Circle* (1929), and *An Introduction to Stuart Drama* (1946). His early work, *Shakspeare and his Predecessors*, first published in 1896 (in the series 'University Extension Manuals', intended for 'the University Extension Movement throughout Great Britain and America', and for 'thoughtful persons who desire the same kind of teaching', combining 'scientific treatment with popularity'), was still in print over forty years later. This extract is taken from the 'New Impression' (1902).

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[In Chapter X, 'Shakspeare "Italianate". *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice*', two plays 'steeped in distinctively Italian colour', Boas discusses the play's sources and the influence of 'non-literary precedents', notably the trial of Dr Lopez for treason, as suggested by Sidney Lee (No. 32 above), which aroused 'popular excitement' and led to the great success of Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*.]

The 'groundlings', with the execution of Lopez fresh in their minds, would appreciate with more than usual zest plays which introduced members of his race in an odious light, and it is in the highest degree probable that it was under these influences that Shakspeare began *The Merchant of Venice*. There is furthermore great plausibility in Mr. Lee's ingenious conjecture that the name Antonio for Shylock's victim, which is not found in the earlier stories, and which is Portuguese rather than Italian, was taken from Antonio Perez, who after the execution of the doctor became a popular hero. But even if this be considered doubtful, it is perfectly certain that Shakspeare had opportunities of acquiring first-hand knowledge of Jewish life without leaving England, and it must assuredly be



counted as part of the tragic inheritance of the Hebrew race, that it should have attracted Shakspeare's gaze at the moment of its deepest degradation, when for it alone the Renaissance was in no sense a 'new birth, and when Luther himself had only sought to rivet faster its chains; and it is perhaps the most convincing proof of Shakspeare's almost superhuman plastic power that for the majority of modern readers Shylock, a product of the dramatic imagination, has supplanted the great historical figures of law-givers and prophets as the type of the sons of Israel.

The play, which has had so transcendent an influence on the popular mind, presents a problem of the utmost difficulty to critical students. It has already been shown that there runs through many of Shakspeare's dramas a leading theme which appears, with variations, in the several sections of the plot. Thus there is nothing *a priori* inadmissible in the many attempts that have been made to discover such a theme in *The Merchant of Venice*, and thereby to fix a central point round which the whole action revolves. But each of these solutions has been in turn found inadequate, for it has failed to embrace some important element in the play. Thus Ulrici, Horn, Simrock, and Rötacher base the ideal unity of the work on the maxim *Summum Jus Summa Injuria*, i.e. abstract legal right, when pushed to its extremity, becomes heinous moral wrong.<sup>[1]</sup> Of this they find illustrations in Shylock's insistence upon the letter of his bond, and in the arbitrary exercise by Portia's father of his testamentary powers, while conversely Jessica, in her flight from Shylock, commits a breach of legal obligation, which is in reality the assertion of a moral right. From this point of view Portia's speech, magnifying mercy at the expense of abstract justice, strikes the keynote of the play. But, as a matter of fact, the designs of Shylock are defeated by a no less rigid insistence upon the letter of the law than his own, nor are we made to feel that the strange provisions of the will by which Portia is bound inflict upon her any real injury. Another view of the play is that which, with some modifications in detail, is supported by Gervinus, Hebler, and Elze. This finds in Bassanio's speech, when he is choosing the casket, the fundamental idea of the play, namely, the contrast between appearance and reality, and above all, between the inward things of true price and the god of this world, the symbol of all external things – money. Thus in Gervinus' pithy phrase the aim of the poet was to delineate 'the relation of man to property', and this he illustrates by the different methods in which Antonio, Shylock, Portia, Bassanio, and Jessica handle wealth. But we do not think of Portia primarily in relation to her possessions; in the underplot of the elopement the idea of wealth and its true use is entirely subordinate, and in the episode of the Rings it is completely absent. Kreyssig, who emphasizes the inadequacy of all attempts to sum up the doctrine of the play in a formula, yet lets himself be drawn into the statement that the most constant and definite underlying idea is that 'lasting prosperity, sure and practical success, can only be attained by moderation in all things, by the skilful employment and cheerful endurance of given circumstances, equally removed from defiant opposition and cowardly submission'.<sup>[2]</sup> Such an interpretation is too much of a truism to be very enlightening, and a study of the rival theories leads to the conviction that while each throws light on important aspects of the play, not one of them covers, nor, from the nature of the piece could cover, the whole of its complex issues. To borrow an illustration from the work itself, many of the commentaries on *The Merchant of Venice* are as caskets over which flourishes the scroll of *Summum Jus Summa Injuria*, or *The relation of man to property*, but

when enticed by the inscriptions we open the caskets expecting to find therein the 'heavenly picture' of the genius of the play, we suffer disappointment. Warned by this experience, let us proceed after another fashion. Let us recognize that in this drama, which introduces semi-mythical incidents and carries us to the very borderland of the possible, Shakspeare has cared less than usual about unity of design, and has expended his power upon brilliant portraiture of character, whereby he has minimized the inherent improbabilities of the story, and upon equally brilliant technique, in the manipulation of an intricate series of far from ductile plots.

In the forefront of the play stands the figure from whom it takes its name, and who is the hero of the Bond-story, Antonio, the Merchant of Venice. His character is summed up in the words applied to him at a later period by Bassanio; he is one in whom

The ancient Roman honour more appears  
Than any that draws breath in Italy. [3.2.295-6]

He is a member of one of those patrician families in which still ran the blood of the republican rulers of the world, and, though bowing to the circumstances of his age, he has embarked in commerce on a princely scale, he carries into the financial sphere the spirit of the senate-house or the forum. In the most material of occupations, it has been aptly said he remains an idealist, 'a Brutus of the counting-house and the exchange.' In him, even before the era of the Roman plays, Shakespeare shows his power of grasping the essentials of the 'antique Roman' character – its power and its weakness. Antonio, conscious of his lofty standard of rectitude, exhibits from the first that fault of self-sufficiency which is the besetting temptation of the righteous. It appears in every word of his opening dialogue with the two young fashionable loungers, Salarino and Salanio, who are suggesting reasons for the fit of 'sadness' from which Antonio admits himself to be suffering. It is in reality one of these hypochondriacal seizures to which the favourites of fortune are at times subject, though here it serves as a presentiment of evil to come. The foppish young gentlemen, whose own financial cares are doubtless confined to the problem of making two ends meet, naturally enough set down Antonio's seriousness to anxiety about the safety of his worldwide ventures, and they draw fancy-pictures of what tremors they themselves would go through under similar conditions. But Antonio stiffly repels the suggestion [Quotes 1.1.41-5].

Such a haughty assumption of unassailable solidity by a merchant, who, above all other men, is exposed to constant risks, has in it the ring of a challenge to destiny, which, we instinctively feel, will sooner or later be taken up. In a similar spirit of grave disdain he sets aside, with a curt 'fie, fie', the suggestion that love is the cause of his melancholy, and indeed this dignified man of affairs is the most unlikely of victims to sentimental passion. Emotion with him – and in this again he is a true type of the antique Roman – takes the more masculine and solid form of friendship, especially for his kinsman Bassanio, who at this moment appears on the scene with two of his intimates, Lorenzo and Gratiano. With deferential flourishes the pair of satellites bow themselves out of the presence of their superiors, and the topic of Antonio's 'sadness' is now taken up by Gratiano, a typical society humourist, who, with good-natured badinage, seeks to rally the merchant into a more cheerful mood. Antonio listens with dignified composure

## Frederick Samuel Boas

while he runs on, but makes no answer to his 'exhortation', and is manifestly relieved when the garrulous wag goes off with Lorenzo, for he at once turns to Bassanio, and broaches an entirely new subject. We now learn that Bassanio, though he stands 'within the eye of honour', and thus satisfies Antonio's lofty moral standard, is the very antithesis of his friend and kinsman in temperament and manner of life. A man of fashion and a spendthrift, to repair his broken fortunes he has determined to venture for the hand of Portia, the wealthy heiress of Belmont. Though he gives Antonio to understand that there have been previous passages of love between them, and extols the lady's virtues and beauty, Bassanio's scheme, as he unfolds it, is rather too much of a financial enterprise to quite suit our taste. Like other speculations it needs capital, and for this he now appeals to Antonio, on the plea that it will be an investment which may recoup the merchant for former losses. Antonio, with limitless generosity, places at his friend's disposal his purse, his person, his extremest means; but after his lofty protestations to Salarino and Salanio it is surprising to hear him confess that all his fortunes are at sea, and that he cannot himself furnish the money. Thus to serve his friend he has to stoop from his pedestal of financial purity, which forbids borrowing or lending, and to send Bassanio forth to raise a loan upon his credit. The young nobleman goes at once to the most notorious money-lender in the city, Shylock, the Jew.

Had Bassanio been as familiar with the Rialto as with the haunts of the gay world, he would have sought relief in some other quarter. For between Antonio and Shylock there was an ancient grudge, rooted in deep-seated antipathies, national, religious, and professional. The Italian patrician, a native of the mighty Venetian republic, would naturally scorn the alien, admitted into the state only on sufferance, confined to his *ghetto*, and marked off from the rest of the community by a peculiar dress. The orthodox Christian, belonging to that well-defined type of prosperous men of the world who have in all ages tended to be more clerical than the clergy, loathes the misbeliever. The member of *la haute finance*, exporting valuables to all quarters of the globe, despises the local money-lender who locks up his savings in cash or precious stones. This feeling is intensified by the attitude of the age towards usury, which was condemned as sinful by the Church, and confined to those who like the Jews were outside its pale. Antonio, prodigal in hate, as in friendship, has showered upon Shylock every form of insult in the most public fashion, and the latter has borne it outwardly with a patient shrug. But within him too there burns the scorn of the Jew, the member of the sacred nation, for the Gentile, and of the shrewd bargainer for the simple-minded man who

Lends out money gratis and brings down

The rate of usance here with us in Venice. [1.3.44-5]

It is thus a moment of keen personal triumph to Shylock when Bassanio's impulsive action puts his enemy for the first time within his power, and disregarding the young nobleman's impatience to have the business settled out-of-hand, he makes the most of this unexpected advantage, slowly pondering over the nature of the security offered, and emphasizing the risks to which Antonio's seemingly solid fortunes are exposed. At this juncture the merchant himself enters, and like his kinsman tries to drive matters at once to a point, but all the more Shylock persists in prolonging the interview. Every word

that he speaks flashes a light upon some national peculiarity: his affection for his 'tribe,' his distinctive diet, his familiarity with the Old Testament. And with marvellous skill Shakespeare makes one of the Jew's scriptural allusions the starting-point of a discussion, which helps to account for the proposal of such an unheard-of forfeiture as a pound of flesh.<sup>3</sup> Shylock, in defence of usury, cites the patriarchal example of Jacob, and the profit that by his clever trick he made out of Laban's flock. Antonio's retort 'Is your gold and silver ewes and rams?' is entirely in the spirit of his age, whose hostility to usury was based on the idea that metal, unlike living creatures, had no natural power of increase. Shylock does not vex himself with such metaphysical distinctions: he only knows that he can make money breed as fast as cattle. But the ironical query has suggested to him a grimly humorous form of retaliation, which however he prefaces by a contrast between Antonio's former persecution and his present appeal for money. Stung out of his self-control the merchant turns upon him fiercely:

I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too. [1.3.130–317]

Thus once again, and yet more defiantly than before, Antonio in his self-sufficiency throws out a challenge to fortune, and in the very moment of borrowing denounces anew the iniquity of making barren metal 'breed.' But Shylock is ready with the soft answer that turns away wrath:<sup>[4]</sup> he will adopt the merchant's principles, and take no 'doit of usance,' but instead, 'in a merry sport,' Antonio must agree, in case of default, to the forfeiture of a pound of his flesh – flesh, on his own showing, being the only legitimate form of interest. The financial purist cannot well demur to conditions which by ironical logic spring from his cherished precepts, and, in spite of Bassanio's protests, the momentous bargain is struck.

To fill up the interval between the signature of the bond and its forfeiture, Shakespeare has introduced the underplot of Jessica and Lorenzo, which further serves to throw a harsh light upon Shylock's domestic relations. Though the dramatist had, as has been shown, opportunities for studying Judaism from the outside, it is unlikely that he can have known much of its family life, and his picture of it is strangely untrue to facts. Through the centuries of persecution the Jewish home maintained much of its scriptural beauty, and was the focus of affections all the more intense because confined to this narrow radius. It has been argued that Shakespeare was aware of this, and that he purposely represented Shylock as devoid of the distinctive virtues of his race, in order to heighten the impression of his villainy. But this seems an over-refinement of criticism, and had such been the dramatist's aim, he would scarcely have admitted the one saving touch of tenderness in the reference to Leah and her cherished gift of a turquoise ring. But however Shylock may have treated his dead wife, to his daughter and his servant he makes his home a 'hell,' and they are both preparing to give him the slip. Launcelot, whom his master grudges food, clothing, and sleep, transfers his services after a comical exercise in casuistry to the open-handed Bassanio, while Jessica makes an assignation with Lorenzo, a member of the same fashionable set. When she asserts, in defence of her conduct to Shylock, that though she is a daughter to his blood she is not to his manners, she doubtless speaks a truth. But in her own way Jessica is no less distinctively Jewish

Frederick Samuel Boas

than Shylock. She belongs to the artistic type of the Hebrew race, which has given so many poets and musicians to the world, and she is steeped in Oriental opulence of sensibility and dreamy voluptuous charm. Such a nature recoils instinctively from the harsh surroundings of a home, unsweetened by feminine influences, darkened by the spirit of mistrust, and bare of every element of beauty. Yet modern sentiment finds it more difficult than Elizabethan prejudice to condone her filial breach in the elopement with Lorenzo, and even if her flight be excused, the theft of her father's stones and ducats jars unpleasantly with preconceived ideas of the conduct proper to a heroine of romance. It has been said that the episode of the elopement was inserted in order to create a partial revulsion of feeling in favour of the Jew. 'Jessica at home makes us hate Shylock: with Jessica lost we cannot help pitying him.'<sup>[5]</sup> But we believe that no such effect was intended by Shakespeare, and that, in any case, it would have failed with an audience of his day. The groundlings were far more likely to yell with vociferous laughter as they listened to Salanio's account of the dog Jew flying through the streets, with all the boys of Venice at his heels, and lamenting with 'confused passion' the double loss of his ducats and of the daughter whom he ranks on the identical level of a property.

It is to be noticed that Shylock at this crisis at once puts the law in motion against the runaways, and that the Duke, on his appeal, hurries to the harbour to seek for them on board of Bassanio's ship. This procedure naturally reminds Antonio's friends that in case of his default, the same engine of the law will be at Shylock's service, and that the Jew has now fresh reason for seeking revenge upon his Christian foes. Salanio murmurs anxiously

Let good Antonio look he keep his day,  
Or he shall pay for this. [2.8.25-6]

and Salarino's answer contains the first hint of the merchant's losses at sea. In a subsequent conversation between the two quidnuncs we hear more definitely of the wreck of one of Antonio's ships on the Goodwins, and we are prepared for yet further disaster in Salarino's ejaculation, 'I would it might prove the end of his losses' [3.1.19]. All the more short-sighted is it of the pair at this juncture to irritate Shylock into fury by taunting him with Jessica's elopement, and then to question him about Antonio's misfortunes. Writhing under the sense of accumulated insults and wrongs, the down-trodden man may well glut himself with the prospect of a terrible revenge, should the merchant fail to meet his bond. And in justifying that revenge by Christian example Shylock rises to the dignity of a well-nigh tragic figure. The magnificent outburst in which he vindicates against a brutal fanaticism the essential equality of human conditions in Jew and Christian is born of the blood and tears of centuries of martyrdom: it is the exceeding bitter cry, not so much of the solitary usurer as of the entire Hebrew race turning on its bed of pain. It is wrung forth not only by the taunts of Antonio, but

By the torture, prolonged from age to age,  
By the infamy, Israel's heritage,  
By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace,  
By the badge of shame, by the felon's place,

*Shakespeare's concession to bigotry, 1896*

By the banding-tool, the bloody whip,  
And the summons to Christian fellowship.<sup>[6]</sup>

It must have sounded strangely in the ears of those who had shrieked, as the noose tightened round the neck of Dr. Lopez, 'He is a Jew'.<sup>[7]</sup> Indeed it scarcely harmonizes with the general impression which the character of Shylock is intended to leave, or with his treatment at the close of the play. But the inconsistency is the measure of Shakespeare's greatness. Marlowe and others found it easy to fall in with the standard of their age, and to draw Jews who were monsters in human form. Shakespeare too was sufficiently a man of his time to gratify the popular taste by the spectacle of a Jewish villain, but, as is the case with consummate genius, he was carried beyond himself by the irresistible sway of his own creation. Shylock is no automaton, but a being of flesh and blood, and the fierce pressure of his agony forces to the surface from depths still unpetrified by wrong done or suffered this swollen gush of elemental human passion.

With the entry of Tubal however, and the announcement that Jessica has not been overtaken at Genoa, Shylock sinks back into the stony-hearted usurer, and the sympathy that has been aroused by his majestic vindication of Judaism is quenched by the unutterable horror of his imprecation: 'I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!' [3.1.92-3] Tubal, who for no very apparent reason enjoys torturing Shylock as much as his avowed enemies, keeps him swaying between hysterical grief and joy as he plies him alternately with anecdotes of Jessica's wanton extravagance and news of fresh disasters to Antonio. The mention of divers of the merchant's creditors that swear he cannot choose but break, prepares us for his complete ruin, and Shylock's commission to his tribesman to fee him an officer a fortnight before the day, with the savage declaration that he will have the heart of Antonio if he forfeit, shows us the Jew battenning on the prospect of the bloody revenge that is all but within his grasp.

At this point it is necessary to turn back and trace briefly the progress of the other main plot. Hitherto the two stories have rather run side by side than been blended, yet Antonio's danger springs directly out of Bassanio's scheme to win Portia, the heiress of Belmont, and heroine of the tale of the caskets. Portia, like the merchant who, on her account, though without her knowledge, has been brought to the edge of destruction, is the owner of vast wealth. But while the commercial magnate has to risk his treasure on the high seas, the mistress of a landed estate can encircle herself with all the visible emblems of wealth – a stately palace, spreading gardens, the refinements of music and of art. Amidst such surroundings Portia's nature has expanded into a rich and rounded fullness which draws tributes of admiration from all who behold her. Bassanio compares her to Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia; Morocco speaks of her as this shrine, this mortal breathing saint, and Jessica protests that the poor rude world hath not her fellow. Throughout the drama she shows that she is worthy of these lofty eulogies. To other women Shakspeare has given in larger measure some single quality of head or of heart, but none unites so many and such opposite gifts in harmoniously balanced perfection. She is overflowing with light-hearted mirth, and yet rises to the full height of the most solemn issues. She combines deep sensibility with stately reserve, and incisive wit with poetical ardour of imagination. She has the shrewdness of a woman of the world, and the

## Frederick Samuel Boas

bashful delicacy of a maiden. She is equally unfaltering in passive submission to an arbitrary decree, and in the energetic action that cuts the knot of an unexampled crisis.

A woman so favoured by fortune and of such rare parts would naturally draw many suitors to Belmont, even if by the strange terms of her father's will every wooer had not an equal chance of winning her. For the future of this incomparable creature has been seemingly placed at the mercy of capricious fate. Whoever can choose aright among three caskets of gold, silver, and lead, is to have her to wife. Such a decree seems the very climax of lunacy, and yet Nerissa is the poet's interpreter when she speaks of it as an inspiration of a holy man before his death. There can be little doubt that Shakspeare, as *Romeo and Juliet* shows, was more affected by the mediaeval idea of the influence of fortune upon human affairs than has generally been allowed. Nerissa is again his mouthpiece in the words:

The ancient saying is no heresy, –  
Hanging and wiving goes by destiny [2.9.82–3]

The idea appears in contrasted forms in the two main plots. Antonio defies fortune and is punished for his presumption: Portia bows cheerfully to her authority, and has an ample reward. Yet the goddess is not here represented as acting in arbitrary defiance of the laws that govern human conduct. Rather we are shown how a result, apparently dictated by mere chance, may yet, when narrowly tested, prove to be due to the working of permanent moral principles.

The choice of the suitors for Portia's hand, though the element of luck is allowed to count for something, is regulated in the main by their characters.<sup>[8]</sup> A large group of them, in fact, never go so far as to risk the choice at all. Of these we hear in the opening dialogue between Portia and Nerissa. They are representatives of six different nations, and in every case they are merely types of the peculiar foibles of their countrymen. Not one of them has enough of manly resolution to venture on an experiment which, in case of failure, debars them from marriage for ever. Morocco is made of sterner stuff and is not daunted by these stringent conditions. With the characteristic disdain of a Sultan for 'shows of dross' he turns hurriedly from the leaden casket; he pauses long before the silver, with its motto, 'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves', and barbarian pride is just turning the scale against a lingering relic of modesty, when his eye is caught by the gold with its offer of 'what many men desire'. At once his glowing Oriental imagination is captivated by the vision of Portia as the world's desire, and with grandiloquent figures upon his lips he unlocks the casket, only to learn that 'all that glitters is not gold' [2.7.13–77]. Arragon is the typical Spanish Don steeped in the prejudices and pride of his class. He too at once sets aside the leaden casket, and instead of being fired by the wish to possess what many men desire, he scorns 'to jump with common spirits', or to bow before the idols of the crowd. He loftily decides to 'assume desert', and opens the silver casket, to find in it a fool's head [2.9.19–78]. Both these suitors are treated by Portia with calm and stately courtesy, but when Bassanio, who has already won her heart, arrives at Belmont, she cannot hide her agitation. Though she does not swerve an inch from her rigid fidelity to the terms of the will, her appeals to her lover to delay his choice, her partial confession of her feelings, and her excited plays upon words are all

significant of her inward tumult. The music that she calls for, though she is at pains to defend it on other grounds, is really meant to allay by its soothing strains the riot of her own heart, during the interval of suspense. But her trust that the character of the chooser dictates the choice finds expression in the words: 'If you do love me, you will find me out'. Bassanio's meditations are partially drowned by the music, but, from what we overhear, the gold suggests to him the deceitfulness of 'outward shows' or ornament in every sphere of life. The silver is rejected for the not very cogent reason that it is a 'pale and common drudge 'tween man and man' [3.2.73-148]. But the meagre lead appeals to the plain, straightforward soldier who, in spite of superficial follies, is sound at heart, and whose professional instinct is stirred by the threatening challenge to give and hazard all he hath. Portia's trust proves to be not misplaced, and she is at last free to bestow herself, and all that is hers, upon Bassanio. Her speech [3.2.149-74] might serve as the 'great charter' of that conception of married life according to which woman stoops to conquer, and secures most complete emancipation by submitting herself to her husband to be directed 'as from her lord, her governor, her king' [3.2.165].

In this ideal self-surrender the 'caskets' episode reaches its climax, and at this crisis it is brought into direct relation with all the other stories combined in the play. It puts forth the germ of a fresh underplot, which is to be developed later, in Portia's gift of her ring to Bassanio, and it annexes, as it were, the earlier underplot of the elopement through the arrival at Belmont of Lorenzo and Jessica. But, above all, it enters into the closest union with the other main plot of the Pound of Flesh, for at this moment the news is brought of that complete ruin of Antonio to which we have been so skilfully led up. All his ventures have failed; his bond to the Jew is forfeited, and his only wish is to see Bassanio before his death. Thus Bassanio's love for Portia has been the cause of Antonio's downfall: it is therefore in the strictest poetic justice that Portia's love for Bassanio should be the means of his salvation. In the ecstasy of that new-born joy, which is wont to deaden the ear to all echoes from the outer world, she has the rare self-forgetfulness to realize that there are crises in which the call of friendship is imperious and she bids Bassanio hasten to his friend's side, with gold to pay the debt twenty times over. But the woman upon whom the law of inheritance had laid so inexorable a hand, who, in her own phrase, had 'stood for sacrifice' while her fate was being decided, is impelled by a passionate feeling of sympathy for another victim of the law to throw herself in person between him and his doom. In her execution of this enterprise she shows to the full the perfect balance of her qualities. She enters with zest into the fun of the adventure in her wager with Nerissa, that when they are accoutred like young men she'll prove the prettier fellow of the two, but she lays her plans in the most business-like spirit when she fortifies herself by an opinion on the case from Bellario, the learned jurist of Padua.

Yet Antonio is, to all appearance, beyond help. The Duke, who had already, on Shylock's demand, attempted the arrest of Lorenzo and Jessica for theft, is equally bound, as a constitutional ruler, to entertain his plea against the merchant. The foundations of Venetian prosperity, based upon international traffic, would be shaken, if partiality were shown in a suit between a native and an alien. Appeals to mercy, offers of twice the principal, are in vain. The passion of revenge has triumphed over the meaner passion of avarice in Shylock's breast, and with the inbred Jewish worship of legalism he takes his stand with fanatical tenacity upon the city's charter. He has the law upon his



## Frederick Samuel Boas

side, and that is enough. The only reason that he will condescend to give for his eagerness, to have 'a weight of carrion flesh,' is that it is his 'humour,' which is an unaccountable element in all men. There is nothing, he claims, to choose between him and those who appeal to him for mercy: slaveowners are estopped<sup>[9]</sup> from raising objections to the doctrine of property in dearly bought human flesh. The Duke has no answer to this overwhelming *argumentum ad hominem*, and Antonio shows that he has given up all hope. The merchant is an apt illustration of Bacon's dictum, that 'prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue'.<sup>[10]</sup> The weight of his misfortunes has crushed out of his nature the arrogant self-sufficiency that was its single blemish, or rather this has been softened into dignified readiness to meet his fate. What a change from the supercilious tone of the merchant's earlier speeches to the humble confession:

I am a tainted wether of the flock,  
Meetest for death: the weakest kind of fruit  
Drops earliest to the ground; and so let me [4.1.114–16].

It is at this stage that Portia enters the court in disguise with her letter of recommendation from Bellario. She knows that she is mistress of the situation, and she does not precipitate the *dénouement*. On the contrary, she manipulates Shylock's opportunities of retreat from the position that he has taken up. She renews the appeal for mercy in a strain of majestic eloquence whose echoes have swelled throughout the world. She tenders him thrice the value of his loan. But Shylock is inflexible, and Portia, after searching the bond for a possible flaw, declares that the law must take its course. Yet even after this she still prolongs the strain of suspense, and the treatment of the whole situation, as Moulton has well pointed out, is highly characteristic of Shakespeare. The dramatist never emphasizes in his tragedies the physical horrors of death, or harrows the audience with the spectacle of long-drawn agony. But in the present case the result is not to be tragic, and thus Portia is allowed to linger over the details of the judicial murder in a way that would be intolerable were the crime actually committed. She bids the merchant lay bare his bosom for the knife; she asks if there are balances ready to weigh the flesh, and a surgeon to stop the wounds. She calls upon Antonio for his last speech – a noble expression of contentment with his fate and unflinching love to his friend. But with marvellous art the exquisite pathos of the merchant's words is made the source of a humorous relief. For Bassanio is so affected by Antonio's farewell that he protests his readiness to sacrifice everything, even his wife, in order to save his friend. The mock-lawyer catches at the opening for a piece of unprofessional merriment:

Your wife would give you little thanks for that  
If she were by, to hear you make the offer [4.1.288–9]

And Nerissa follows suit in respect of a similar declaration by Gratiano. But these gay sallies have a reflex serious effect. They deepen Shylock's distrust of Christian husbands, and recall the bitter memory of his daughter's flight. Impatiently he demands sentence. With due legal formality Portia awards him the pound of flesh, but as he swoops upon

his victim, knife in hand, she stays the uplifted stroke by the condition that he must not shed a drop of blood. Shylock had appealed to the letter, and by the letter he shall be judged.

The tables are thus completely turned, and the dramatic effect is overwhelming. But the plea is so transparent a quibble that it has been by no means universally upheld in posterity's court of appeal. To maintain that Shylock's defeat is the triumph of Christian conciliatory love, of mediating mercy over law, is absurd. Rather it may be said that the issue over the body of Antonio is fought out between the two great legal systems of antiquity. Shylock's claim is urged in the stubborn spirit of the narrowest Jewish legalism; Portia's saving plea is grounded upon the equally slavish letter-worship of the Roman law, though, as Simrock has pointed out, this verbalism pushed 'to the extreme of *jus strictissimum*' was often made, as in the case before us, the agent of *aequitas* in opposition to *jus strictum*. Further, it is in the spirit of Roman law, and not of Christianity, that as Shylock is about to leave the court, without either his forfeiture or his principal, Portia confronts him with the statute, doubtless unearthed by Bellario in his legal researches, which enacts that an alien convicted of an attempt against the life of a citizen incurs the forfeiture of all his goods and the capital penalty. Nor is the 'mercy' extended to Shylock such as to convince him of a fundamental difference of spirit between the old and the new dispensations. His life is indeed pardoned, but he has to hand over one half of his fortune to Antonio 'in use' for Lorenzo and Jessica, and further to record a gift in their favour of all that he leaves at death. Yet more cruel is his enforced immediate conversion to Christianity. 'This', as Elze has well said, 'is no longer poetic justice or tragical retribution, it is mental and moral annihilation, the inevitable consequences of which must lead to physical death as well'. In including this among the articles of Shylock's pardon, Shakspeare has shown himself scarcely at all in advance of his age, whose average attitude is faithfully reflected in Gratiano's brutal jeers and suggestion of 'a halter gratis' as the only mercy for the Jew. The crowd in the Globe theatre doubtless roared hilariously as the baffled wretch slunk out of the court, but Shakespeare has had to pay the penalty of what can be at best called a concession to the bigotry of the day. His other villains, Richard III, Iago, meet, as all the world acknowledges, no more than is their due, but in the case of Shylock there are many who agree with the young lady who, according to Heine, cried out at the end of this act, 'The poor man is wronged'.<sup>[11]</sup> To adopt a phrase lately used in a different connexion, Shylock stands at the bar of poetic justice 'half-way between a martyr and a criminal,' and in the unsatisfactory impression left on modern readers at the close of the trial-scene, Shakspeare has suffered the nemesis which in the long run always overtakes the artist who from conviction or opportunism ministers to the prejudices of his age.

The relief needed after the prolonged tension of the battle for the merchant's life, has been provided in the merry episode of the rings which Portia and Nerissa wheedle out of their husbands, as reward for their legal services. The bantering reproaches that follow, on the return to Belmont, bring into prominence again the lighter side of Portia's nature, repressed during the solemn crisis in the court-house. The heroine drops again into the gay girl-wife, and the perfect balance of her character is thus preserved. But even more restful than the silvery ripple of Portia's laughter is the lyrical softness of the moonlight confidences between Lorenzo and Jessica in the gardens of Belmont. It would

Frederick Samuel Boas

almost seem as if in *The Merchant of Venice* Shakspeare was intent on drawing materials from every race and epoch. From the passionate strife between the spirit of Jewish and Roman codes, he bears us into the very heart of Greek romance, flinging its choicest secrets, like waters from a classic fountain, into the spiced air of the Italian night. And when music, breathed to the stars, adds the last touch of enchantment to the scene, it is the voice of Greek philosophy in its most sublime flight that speaks through Lorenzo's lips:

Sit, Jessica. Look, how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:  
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims. [5.1.58–62]

The discords of human life are heard no more, as we linger on the moonlit bank at Belmont, and seek to catch the faint echoes upon earth of the choral music of the spheres. (217–34)

## 45 Georg Brandes, Shylock 'a monster of passionate hatred, not avarice'

1898

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From *William Shakespeare: A Critical Study*, tr. William Archer and Diana White (2 vols., London 1898).

Georg Morris Cohen Brandes (1842–1927), the great Danish literary critic, philosopher, and historian, received his PhD at the University of Copenhagen, where he became a professor in 1902. From a Jewish background, he renounced Judaism and became an atheist. The influence of Nietzsche led to him abandoning Romantic radicalism, and he adopted an ideology of aristocratic hero-worship and individualism. His *William Shakespeare: A Critical Study* first appeared in Danish in 1895–6. Brandes was a prolific writer, whose works include *Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (first English edition in 6 vols., London, 1901–5).

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[From Volume I, Chapter 21]

The great value of *The Merchant of Venice* lies in the depth and seriousness which Shakespeare has imparted to the vague outlines of character presented by the old stories, and in the ravishing moonlight melodies which bring the drama to a close.

In Antonio, the royal merchant, who, amid all his fortune and splendour, is a victim to melancholy and spleen induced by forebodings of coming disaster, Shakespeare has certainly expressed something of his own nature. Antonio's melancholy is closely related to that which, in the years immediately following, we shall find in Jaques in *As You Like It*, in the Duke in *Twelfth Night*, and in Hamlet. It forms a sort of mournful undercurrent to the joy of life which at this period is still dominant in Shakespeare's soul. It leads, after a certain time, to the substitution of dreaming and brooding heroes for those men of action and resolution who, in the poet's brighter youth, had played the leading parts in his dramas. For the rest, despite the princely elevation of his nature, Antonio is by no means faultless. He has insulted and baited Shylock in the most brutal fashion on account of his faith and his blood. We realise the ferocity and violence of the mediaeval prejudice against the Jews when we find a man of Antonio's magnanimity so entirely a slave to it. And when, with a little more show of justice, he parades his loathing and contempt for Shylock's money-dealings, he strangely (as it seems to us) overlooks the fact that the Jews have been carefully excluded from all other means of livelihood, and have been systematically allowed to scrape together gold in order that their hoards may always be at

## Georg Brandes

hand when circumstances render it convenient to plunder them. Antonio's attitude towards Shylock cannot possibly be Shakespeare's own. Shylock cannot understand Antonio, and characterises him in the words – 'This is the fool that lent out money gratis' [3.3.2].

But Shakespeare himself did not belong to this class of fools. He has endowed Antonio with an ideality which he had neither the resolution nor the desire to emulate. Such a man's conduct towards Shylock explains the outcast's hatred and thirst for revenge.

Shakespeare has lavished peculiar and loving care upon the figure of Portia. Both in the circumstances in which she is placed at the outset, and in the conjuncture to which Shylock's bond gives rise, there is a touch of the fairy tale. In so far, the two sides of the action harmonise well with each other. Now-a-days, indeed, we are apt to find rather too much of the nursery story in the preposterous will by which Portia is bound to marry whoever divines the very simple answer to a riddle – to the effect that a showy outside is not always to be trusted. The fable of the three caskets pleased Shakespeare so much as a means of expressing and enforcing his hatred of all empty show that he ignored the grotesque improbability of the method of selecting a bridegroom.

His thought seems to have been: Portia is not only nobly born; she is thoroughly genuine, and can therefore be won only by a suitor who rejects the show for the substance. This is suggested in Bassanio's long speech before making his choice [3.2.73–107]. If there is anything that Shakespeare hated with a hatred somewhat disproportionate to the triviality of the matter, a hatred which finds expression in every stage of his career, it is the use of rouge and false hair.<sup>[1]</sup> Therefore he insists upon the fact that Portia's beauty owes nothing to art; with others the case is different: [Quotes 3.2.89, 92–6]. And he deduces the moral: –

Thus ornament is but the guiled shore  
To a most dangerous sea. [3.2.97–8]

Before the choice, Portia dares not openly avow her feelings towards Bassanio, but does so nevertheless by means of a graceful and sportive slip of the tongue: [Quotes 3.2.14–18]. Bassanio answers by begging permission to make instant choice between the caskets, since he lives upon the rack until his fate is sealed; whereupon Portia makes some remarks as to confessions on the rack, which seem to allude to an occurrence of a few years earlier, the barbarous execution of Elizabeth's Spanish doctor, Don Roderigo Lopez, in 1594, after two ruffians had been racked into making confessions which, no doubt falsely, incriminated him. Portia says jestingly

Ay, but I fear you speak upon the rack,  
Where men enforced do speak any thing. [3.2.32–3]

and Bassanio answers – 'Promise me life, and I'll confess the truth.' [3.2.34] When the choice has been made and has fallen as she hoped and desired, her attitude clearly expresses Shakespeare's ideal of womanhood at this period of his life. It is not Juliet's passionate self-abandonment, but the perfect surrender in tenderness of the wise and

delicate woman. For her own sake she does not wish herself better than she is, but for him 'she would be trebled twenty times herself.' She knows that she is 'an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd' [3.2.159–65]. In such humility does she love this weak spendthrift, whose sole motive in seeking her out was originally that of clearing off the debts in which his frivolity had involved him. It thus happens, quaintly enough, that what her father thought to prevent by his strange device, namely, that Portia should be won by a mercenary suitor, is the very thing that happens – though it is true that her personal charms throw his original motive into the background.

In spite of Portia's womanly self-surrender in love, there is something independent, almost masculine, in her character. She has the orphan heiress's habit and power of looking after herself, directing others, and acting on her own responsibility without seeking advice or taking account of convention. The poet has borrowed traits from the Italian novel in order to make her as prompt in counsel as she is magnanimous. . . .

Portia's nature is health, its utterance joy. Radiant happiness is her element. She is descended from happiness, she has grown up in happiness, she is surrounded with all the means and conditions of happiness, and she distributes happiness with both hands. She is noble to the heart's core. She is no swan born in the duck-yard, but is in complete harmony with her surroundings and with herself. [Portia's characteristics.]

It harmonises with her whole nature when she says: 'The brain may devise laws for the blood; but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree: such a hare is madness, the youth, to skip o'er the meshes of good counsel, the cripple' [1.2.18–27]. Such phrases must be conceived as springing from a delight in laughter and sport for the sport's sake; otherwise they would be stiff and cumbrous. In the same way, such a sally as this

Your wife would give you little thanks for that  
If she were by to hear you make your offer [4.1.288–9]

must be taken as springing from a gleeful assurance of victory, else it might seem to show callous indifference to Antonio's apparently hopeless plight. There is an innate harmony in Portia's soul; but it is full-toned, complex, and woven of strongly contrasted elements, so that it requires some imagination to represent it to ourselves. There is something in the harmonious subtlety of her physiognomy which reminds us of Leonardo's female heads. Dignity and tenderness, the power to command and to obey, acuteness such as thrives in courts, and simple womanliness, an almost inflexible seriousness and an almost mischievous gaiety, are here cunningly commingled and combined.

How Shakespeare himself would have us regard her may be gathered from the enthusiasm with which he makes Jessica describe her to her lover [3.5]. When one young woman so warmly eulogises another, we may safely assume that her merits are unimpeachable. 'It is very meet,' she says [Quotes 3.5.73–83].

The central figure of the play, however, in the eyes of modern readers and spectators, is of course Shylock, though there can be no doubt that he appeared to Shakespeare's contemporaries a comic personage, and, since he makes his final exit before the last act, by no means the protagonist. In the humaner view of a later age, Shylock appears as a half-pathetic creation, a scapegoat, a victim; to the Elizabethan public, with his rapacity and his miserliness, his usury and his eagerness to dig for another the pit into which he

## Georg Brandes

himself falls, he seemed, not terrible, but ludicrous. They did not even take him seriously enough to feel any real uneasiness as to Antonio's fate, since they all knew beforehand the issue of the adventure. They laughed when he went to Bassanio's feast 'in hate, to feed upon / The prodigal Christian' [2.5.14–15]; they laughed when, in the scene with Tubal, he suffered himself to be bandied about between exultation over Antonio's misfortunes and rage over the prodigality of his runaway daughter; and they found him odious when he exclaimed, 'I would my daughter were dead at my foot and the jewels in her ear!' [3.1.88–91] He was, simply as a Jew, a despised creature; he belonged to the race which had crucified God himself; and he was doubly despised as an extortionate usurer. For the rest, the English public . . . had no acquaintance with Jews except in books and on the stage. From 1290 until the middle of the seventeenth century the Jews were entirely excluded from England. Every prejudice against them was free to flourish unchecked. [Discusses prejudice.]

It is the high-minded Antonio himself who proposes that Shylock shall be forced to become a Christian. This is done for his good; for baptism opens to him the possibility of salvation after death; and his Christian antagonists, who, by dint of the most childish sophisms, have despoiled him of his goods and forced him to forswear his God, can still pose as representing the Christian principle of mercy, in opposition to one who has taken his stand upon the Jewish basis of formal law.

That Shakespeare himself, however, in nowise shared the fanatical belief that a Jew was of necessity damned, or could be saved by compulsory conversion, is rendered clear enough for the modern reader in the scene between Launcelot and Jessica (3.5), where Launcelot jestingly avers that Jessica is damned. There is only one hope for her, and that is, that her father may not be her father: [Quotes 3.5.13–6]. And Jessica repeats Launcelot's saying to Lorenzo: [Quotes 3.5.32–6]. No believer would ever speak in this jesting tone of matters that must seem to him so momentous.

It is none the less astounding how much right in wrong, how much humanity in inhumanity, Shakespeare has succeeded in imparting to Shylock. The spectator sees clearly that, with the treatment he has suffered, he could not but become what he is. Shakespeare has rejected the notion of the atheistically-minded Marlowe, that the Jew hates Christianity and despises Christians as fiercer money-grubbers than himself. With his calm humanity, Shakespeare makes Shylock's hardness and cruelty result at once from his passionate nature and his abnormal position; so that, in spite of everything, he has come to appear in the eyes of later times as a sort of tragic symbol of the degradation and vengefulness of an oppressed race.

There is not in all Shakespeare a greater example of trenchant and incontrovertible eloquence than Shylock's famous speech: [Quotes 3.1.58–73].

But what is most surprising, doubtless, is the instinct of genius with which Shakespeare has seized upon and reproduced racial characteristics, and emphasised what is peculiarly Jewish in Shylock's culture. While Marlowe, according to his custom, made his Barabas revel in mythological similes, Shakespeare indicates that Shylock's culture is founded entirely upon the Old Testament, and makes commerce his only point of contact with the civilisation of later times. All his parallels are drawn from the Patriarchs and the Prophets. With what unction he speaks when he justifies himself by the example of Jacob! His own race is always 'our sacred nation' [1.3.48], and he feels that 'the curse

has never fallen upon it' [3.1.85–6] until his daughter fled with his treasures. Jewish, too, is Shylock's respect for, and obstinate insistence on, the letter of the law, his reliance upon statutory rights, which are, indeed, the only rights society allows him, and the partly instinctive, partly defiant restriction of his moral ideas to the principle of retribution. He is no wild animal; he is no heathen who simply gives the rein to his natural instincts; his hatred is not ungoverned; he restrains it within its legal rights, like a tiger in its cage. He is entirely lacking, indeed, in the freedom and serenity, the easy-going, light-hearted carelessness which characterises a ruling caste in its virtues and its vices, in its charities as in its prodigalities; but he has not a single twinge of conscience about anything that he does; his actions are in perfect harmony with his ideals.

Sundered from the regions, the social forms, the language, in which his spirit is at home, he has yet retained his Oriental character. Passion is the kernel of his nature. It is his passion that has enriched him; he is passionate in action, in calculation, in sensation, in hatred, in revenge, in everything. His vengefulness is many times greater than his rapacity. Avaricious though he be, money is nothing to him in comparison with revenge. It is not until he is exasperated by his daughter's robbery and flight that he takes such hard measures against Antonio, and refuses to accept three times the amount of the loan. His conception of honour may be unchivalrous enough, but, such as it is, his honour is not to be bought for money. His hatred of Antonio is far more intense than his love for his jewels; and it is this passionate hatred, not avarice, that makes him the monster he becomes.

From this Hebrew passionateness, which can be traced even in details of diction, arises, among other things, his loathing of sloth and idleness. To realise how essentially Jewish is this trait we need only refer to the so-called Proverbs of Solomon. Shylock dismisses Launcelot with the words, 'Drones hive not with me' [2.5.48]. Oriental, rather than specially Jewish, are the images in which he gives his passion utterance, approaching, as they so often do, to the parable form. (See, for example, his appeal to Jacob's cunning, or the speech in vindication of his claim, which begins, 'You have among you many a purchased slave' [4.1.90].) Specially Jewish, on the other hand, is the way in which this ardent passion throughout employs its images and parables in the service of a curiously sober rationalism, so that a sharp and biting logic, which retorts every accusation, with interest, is always the controlling force. This sober logic, moreover, never lacks dramatic impetus. Shylock's course of thought perpetually takes the form of question and answer, a subordinate but characteristic trait which appears in the style of the Old Testament, and reappears to this day in representations of primitive Jews. One can feel through his words that there is a chanting quality in his voice; his movements are rapid, his gestures large. Externally and internally, to the inmost fibre of his being, he is a type of his race in its degradation.

Shylock disappears with the end of the fourth act in order that no discord may mar the harmony of the concluding scenes. By means of his fifth act, Shakespeare dissipates any preponderance of pain and gloom in the general impression of the play.

This act is a moonlit landscape thrilled with music. It is altogether given over to music and moonshine. It is an image of Shakespeare's soul at that point of time. Everything is here reconciled, assuaged, silvered over, and borne aloft upon the wings of music.



## Georg Brandes

The speeches melt into each other like voices in part-singing: [Quotes 5.1.1–10] and so on for four more speeches — the very poetry of moonlight arranged in antiphonies.

The conclusion of *The Merchant of Venice* brings us to the threshold of a term in Shakespeare's life instinct with high-pitched gaiety and gladness. In this, his brightest period, he fervently celebrates strength and wisdom in man, intellect and wit in woman; and these most brilliant years of his life are also the most musical. His poetry, his whole existence, seem now to be given over to music, to harmony. (189–98, 201)

## 46 A. W. Verity, Shylock and modern criticism

1898

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From the 'Introduction' to *The Merchant of Venice*, The Pitt Press Shakespeare, ed. A. W. Verity (Cambridge, 1898).

Prolific Shakespearean editor of editions aimed at high schools and those preparing for university entrance, A. W. Verity (1863–1937) was a product of Rugby and Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1886 Verity's 'The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Earlier Style' won the Harness essay prize at Cambridge for its pioneering account of Marlowe's stylistic influence on Shakespeare. Verity edited *The Pitt Press Shakespeare for Schools* (13 vols., 1890–1905): his *Merchant of Venice* was still in print in 1953.

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There is a tendency in modern criticism as in historical writings to rehabilitate the great 'villains' and represent them as much less black than tradition has painted them; and Shylock,<sup>1</sup> whom one's youth was taught to detest, has found apologists who try to make out quite a good case on his behalf. According to this comparatively modern reading of his character and action, he is a man 'more sinned against than sinning'; the representative of an oppressed race who prosecutes his implacable suit less from motives of base personal malice and self-interest<sup>2</sup> than from a lofty, impersonal patriotism which animates him to avenge his nation's wrongs in his own; a victim of maltreatment who claims sympathy instead of the execration usually accorded him. There is, of course, an element of truth in this interpretation. It gives an aspect of Shylock which should not be lost sight of. No doubt, he has suffered greatly at the hands of the Christians, especially of Antonio [1.3.98–137], and seen his fellow-countrymen suffer. No doubt, his personal hatred of Antonio is intensified by a religious, patriotic hatred for the Christian adversary who has insulted Shylock's 'sacred nation' as well as himself, and represents the passions and prejudices with which it has waged its agelong conflict. And as Shylock stands there before the court – unflinching before his enemies and insistent on his bond – one cannot withhold a grudging tribute of admiration for his indomitable tenacity of purpose and self-reliance.

But when due recognition has been paid to his force of character and devotion to his nation, and perhaps to the memory of his wife [3.1.121–2], and every allowance made for wrongs that he and his 'tribe' have endured, yet there is surely a solid remainder of evil which justifies the popular detestation of Shylock as a very embodiment of cunning and cruelty, avarice and lovelessness: as the schemer who plots his rival's death under a

## A. W. Verity

show of friendship [1.3.127, 168], and knows not the words mercy and pity; as the usurer who lives on extortionate 'usances' and 'forfeitures'; as the father who in the play speaks no word of love to his child, and whose treatment of her is, surely, shown by his words [3.1.88–9] that he would gladly see his daughter dead at his feet, so the jewels were in her ear, the ducats in her coffin, and by her words [2.3.2] that home<sup>3</sup> for her has meant 'hell'; as the seared, loveless being of whom everyone speaks ill, except the 'good Tubal' (and even he, for all his 'goodness,' seems to enjoy torturing his 'friend'). Of course, one pities the poor wretch as he staggers from the court with 'death' written on his brow (for renunciation<sup>4</sup> of his faith must be as death to him): *sunt lacrimae rerum*,<sup>[5]</sup> and the sight of suffering, deserved or undeserved, will touch the heart of man to the end of things. But pity is not quite the same as sympathy, and one can but feel that the rough-handed justice of life has meted to Shylock his own measure to others. The opposite feeling, surely, would be inconsistent with the general tenour of the play, since it would prejudice us against Portia, through whom Shylock's defeat comes.

The play has been called 'a plea for toleration.' So it is – not because we are meant to sympathise with Shylock in the sense of taking his part and regarding him as an ill-used victim, but because the piece holds the mirror up to truth and shows the results of intolerance: what persecution does: how it debases national character, intensifying its evil qualities and turning even its good into evil. The true way, Shakespeare's way (I am convinced), of regarding Shylock's character is that of the following criticism.

'The Christian who looks frankly and faithfully at this work will not find matter for exultation or for ridicule, but only for shame and sadness. Shylock had been made the hard, savage relentless creature we see him by long and cruel oppression.<sup>6</sup> He inherited a nature embittered by centuries of insult and outrage, and his own wretched experience had only aggravated its bitterness. "Sufferance" had been, and was, the badge of all his tribe; it was his badge. As fetters corrode the flesh, so persecution corrodes the heart. Shakespeare, truly detesting this dreadful being, yet bethinks him, we say, how he became so. He was once a man, – at least, his breed was once human; and Shakespeare recognized in the Jew splendid capacities and powers, however, so far as he knew the race, misapplied and debased.'

As everyone in the play speaks ill of Shylock, so everyone save Shylock speaks well of 'the Merchant of Venice,'<sup>7</sup> [Provides examples.] As regards Shylock, one could wish Antonio's treatment of him different; still, it must be judged by the standard of his time.<sup>8</sup> Feeling in all matters of religious difference, especially feeling towards non-Christians, was such<sup>9</sup> as an age of tolerance finds hard to understand; while usury ... we must remember, was then accounted an odious offence.

## 47 C. H. Herford, 'two communities which meet but never mingle'

1900

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From *The Merchant of Venice* edited by C. H. Herford (London, 1900).

Charles Harold Herford (1853–1931), prolific critic, biographer, and scholar, was educated in Manchester and at Trinity College, Cambridge. He had chairs of English Literature at University College, Aberystwyth (1887–1901) and the University of Manchester (1901–21). He was for many years the literary critic for *The Manchester Guardian*. Herford edited the ten-volume 'Eversley' edition of *The Works of Shakespeare* (1899–1900) and individual volumes in the 'Warwick Shakespeare'. His other works on Shakespeare include *Shakespeare's Treatment of Love and Marriage* (1921), *A Sketch of Recent Shakespearean Investigation, 1893–1923* (1923), and *A Sketch of the History of Shakespeare's Influence on the Continent* (1925).

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[Herford's 'Introduction' to *The Merchant of Venice* draws attention to a feature which he believes is largely missing from Shakespeare's other plays – a preoccupation with 'wealth' and 'opulence'.]

All discussion of the origin of *The Merchant of Venice* has to reckon at the outset with a brief notice by Stephen Gosson of the lost play called *The Jew*. [Discusses Gosson.] A converted player, bitterly hostile to the stage, he excepts from his general anathema some four plays as 'without rebuke': 'The two prose books played at the Belsavage, where you shall never find a word without wit, never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vaine. *The Jew*, and *Ptolome*, shown at the Bull: the one representing the greediness of worldly chusers, and bloody minds of usurers; the other, very lively, describing how seditious states . . . are overthrown; neither with amorous gesture wounding the eye, nor with slovenly talk hurting the ear of the chaste hearers.'<sup>1</sup>

This brief notice tells us exceedingly little; but just enough to preclude the assumption that the plot of the *Merchant* took shape essentially in Shakespeare's hands. [Surveys the plots of tales containing Jewish merchants, and Gosson's *School of Abuses*.]

The immense artistic transformation which Shakespeare wrought in his materials we cannot measure with precision; but it is certain that no previous drama is so alive in every line with Shakespearean quality; and much of what is most Shakespearean in it presupposes literary and social influences more recent than 1579. In particular, the intense and terrible vitality of the figure of Shylock, beside whom Portia herself has almost the effect of a glorious picture, announces clearly enough the powerful impression made upon Shakespeare by the Jewish character as he saw it in contemporary

English life, and by Marlowe's grandiose incarnation of all its Machiavellian ferocity in the *Jew of Malta*. His intimate feeling for Hebraic characteristics has often fortified the theory that Shakespeare had seen the Continent, or even Venice itself. But, as Mr. Lee has shown,<sup>2</sup> the law which had for centuries banished the Jew from the realm was in the later years of Elizabeth entirely ignored. The Government itself eagerly employed their technical knowledge,<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth and her court confided in a Jewish doctor, needy London resorted to the Jewish money-lender, and the Jewish vendor of old clothes was already a typical figure of the London streets. The rapid rise of the general scale of living, the growth of luxury and social ambition in all classes, made what was still branded as 'usury' a social need, and the Jews who swarmed in the great mercantile centres of the Continent, above all in Venice, flocked to London to supply it.

The author of *The Three Ladies of London* (pr. 1584) significantly makes 'Usury,' sometime servant of 'old Lady Lucre of Venice,' pass over to seek service with her grand-daughter 'Lucre,' in London, having heard that

England was such a place for Lucre to bide  
As was not in Europe and the whole world beside.<sup>4</sup>

It is curious that the actual Jewish usurer, Gerontus, who figures in this play, is so far from anticipating the Shylock-type that he freely resigns both interest and principal to prevent his debtor, a wily Christian merchant, from abjuring his Christianity! Early in the next century English usurers were said (Webster, *The White Devil*) to be more extortionate than Jewish, — like the Italianate Englishman, surpassing his master.

But this was not the normal temper; and a few years later the mild Jew, Gerontus, was utterly effaced in the popular imagination by the spectacle of the two monstrous Jewish criminals, Barabas and Lopez. Marlowe's play was inspired by no Christian fanaticism. His Humanist thirst for colossal passions and energies found in the fierce intensity of Jewish race-pride and race-hatred, as in Tamburlaine's thirst for conquest and Faustus's thirst for power, the making of a Titanic tragic figure; and he threw himself into the exposure of Barabas's crimes with a frenzied impetus which doubtless impaired the poetic grandeur of his work, but even heightened its inflammatory virulence. Some four years later Roderigo Lopez, the Queen's Jewish physician, was charged with being concerned in a Spanish plot to poison her.<sup>5</sup> He was probably innocent, but Essex did his utmost to bring the charge home. Witnesses were got to testify to it on the rack, 'where men enforced do speak anything,' as Portia, perhaps significantly, is made to say [3.2.35]; and, in fine, Lopez was put on his trial in February 1594, and hanged at Tyburn amid the yelling execrations of the mob, in May. How heavily the supposed crime of Lopez told to the disadvantage of Judaism at large is shown by the series of vindictively anti-Jewish plays which in the ensuing months filled the benches and the treasury of the London theatres. The old *Jew* of Gosson's day was revived, and, during the remainder of the year, shared with Marlowe's *Jew* the chief honours of the stage controlled by Philip Henslowe. In May, Marlowe's *Jew* was entered on the Stationers' Register (though not printed till 1633), as well as the Gerontus ballad on the bond story. New plays on Jews and usurers were in brisk demand; one such was probably the lost *Venetian Comedy*, which Henslowe enters as 'new' in August.<sup>6</sup> Under such conditions the great rival company was not

likely to rest idle, and Shakespeare, before all things a man of his age, did not refrain from turning the temporary sensation into matter for all time.

Not, however, by any deliberate approach to modern tolerance and humanity. The deliberate strokes of Shakespeare, so far as we can trace them, tend rather to make the vengeance which finally overwhelms Shylock more severe, and its justice more apparent. The Jew of the novel is foiled, like Shylock, by the quibble about shedding no blood; but the law, having foiled him, is satisfied. His attempt to commit a crime under shelter of the forms of law has been met by a still more stringent application of them than his own; equity is secured, and the plaintiff loses his suit and retires. But to Shakespeare's ethical sense this solution was inadequate. The plaintiff had planned a crime; his proper place was at the bar, and there accordingly he is in effect transferred when, as he is bursting indignantly from the court, he is checked by Portia's 'Tarry, Jew, the law hath yet another hold on thee' [4.1.346-7]. The statute which she proceeds to quote against the alien who plans the death of any citizen is apparently Shakespeare's invention; it puts forward for the plain understanding the real meaning of Shylock's act and the real ground of the technical quibble which foiled it. But it also demanded a harsher penalty, and the total loss of what he values more than life is only averted by a *soi-distant* exercise of Christian mercy, and that at the price of resigning his Jewish faith.

But, severely as Shakespeare judged Shylock, he entered into his situation with a marvellous intimacy of understanding which the modern world has excusably mistaken for sympathy. Marlowe painted the crimes of his Barabas, apparently, with a fierce delight in their anarchic ferocity. But his sympathy does not make us acquainted with Barabas as we are acquainted with Shylock; we do not hear in his anger or in his agony, as we hear in Shylock's, the cry of 'the martyrdom which for eighteen centuries had been borne by a whole tortured people.' Nor is there any approach to the imaginative insight with which, in the opening scenes, Shakespeare pictures the intercourse of two communities which meet but never mingle – the rich, despised, indispensable alien and pariah, clinging with the fanatical tenacity of his race to his rights, his moneys, and his religion, and the aristocratic caste, generous, emancipated, splendid, profuse, and needy. Out of this wonderfully life-like work the fantastic fable of the bond story starts with illusive reality. The casket story, even more fabulous, is perhaps less artfully assimilated. Portia's fate belongs to fancy. For all explanation we are put off with Nerissa's light assurance that Portia's father devised it on his deathbed, where 'good men have holy inspirations' [1.2.27-8]. What Shakespeare meant by this fantastic addition to the bond story is a problem which cannot be avoided if he did add it, but loses much of its urgency if the casket episode already belonged to the old play. Certainly, the whole bent of his art in this drama suggests that he was trying to make somewhat reluctant fantastic materials plausible and veracious, not at all to reinforce them with other materials still more fantastic. The romantic quality is incompletely disguised rather than deliberately assumed. It is not necessary, then, to discover in the casket story a profound inner connection with the bond story, to regard them as variations on the theme of 'the vanity of appearances,' or 'the relation of man to possessions.' But it is not to be denied that Shakespeare has communicated to both stories a mental atmosphere charged with the sense of wealth. Different ways of regarding and using wealth enter largely into the psychology of every character. Antonio lends, Bassanio borrows, Portia gives, and Jessica

conveys; but all handle it with an aristocratic magnificence. The play that pleased Gosson may be surmised to have exposed the 'worldly chusers' in the interest of Puritan asceticism and austerity; but there is no shadow of asceticism in Portia's disdain for Morocco, and the significance of Bassanio's choice lies less in his ignoring outward show (which he was far from doing), than in his being ready, for love's sake, to 'give and hazard all he hath' [2.7.9].

*The Merchant of Venice*, beyond any other of Shakespeare's plays, suggests both a genial relish for opulence (and we know that in these years he was making and spending abundantly) and a familiarity with a splendid and elegant society. Some motives and situations of the earlier comedies of courtly life, especially *The Two Gentlemen*, are repeated, but there is a wonderful advance in intimacy of knowledge as well as in ripeness of art. The critical review of Portia's lovers in 1.2. is obviously a reworking of the scene between Julia and Lucetta [*Two Gent.* 1.2], but there the maid does the criticism, here the mistress. . . . And the whole episode of Jessica, gracefully interwoven as a third story with the fortunes of Shylock and Bassanio, is far less a story of passionate love than of the charm which the world of 'high living and high thinking,' where Portia moves supreme, exercises upon the susceptible child of an alien race. The elements of the situation were perhaps due to Marlowe; there is no trace of it in the novel, and we may surmise, from Gosson's approval, that no such amorous adventure as Jessica's elopement occurred in the old play. Barabas's daughter Abigail also loves a Christian, Don Mathias; but she is her father's accomplice, not his betrayer, and the most obvious verbal similitude, his 'O girl! O gold! O beauty! O my bliss!'<sup>[7]</sup> is spoken in ecstasy, not in anguish. She is an unhappy instrument in his desperate game, forced to love where he chooses, and deprived of her lover when it is no longer convenient to keep him alive. Abigail is a pathetic figure, though her creator, in his orgies of crime and bloodshed, has no leisure to make her pathos eloquent. Shakespeare deprived Jessica of any such appeal. Shylock was to stand alone, in gaunt solitude, unloving and unloved. Even the beautiful intimacies of many an outward sordid and miserly Jewish home – a trait which can hardly have escaped Shakespeare – are denied him. His household, upheld by fear, crumbles to pieces, and the captive spirits of grace and laughter, the 'beautiful pagan' and the 'merry devil' who robbed her 'hell' of some taste of tediousness, fly to their proper abodes. The modern world cannot quite forgive Jessica for deserting her father, still less for taking his ducats; but Shakespeare easily condones these incidents of an emancipation to which she establishes her full right by the native ease with which she moves in the new world as if to the manner born – an adept in its splendid extravagance and in its light badinage, but quick to take the impress of its serious enthusiasms and its generous virtue. It is not for nothing that the most splendid burst of poetry in the play is addressed to Jessica's ear, and the loftiest tribute to Portia uttered by her lips. (121–2, 125–31)

## 48 Stopford A. Brooke, 'some faint sympathy' for Shylock

1905

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From *On Ten Plays of Shakespeare* (London, 1905).

Born in County Donegal, the Reverend Stopford Augustus Brooke (1832–1916) graduated in 1856 from Trinity College, Dublin. In 1857 he was ordained as an Anglican priest and achieved distinction as a preacher, becoming in 1872 Chaplain-in-Ordinary to Queen Victoria. Not long after, having lost his belief in the resurrection, he became a free-thinker, and in 1880 left the Anglican Church. He continued to preach, but as a Unitarian, while publishing profusely. His *Primer of English Literature* between the years of 670 and 1832 sold more than half a million copies, and he wrote extensively on the Romantics and Victorians. *On Ten Plays of Shakespeare* was first given as a series of public lectures, and published in 1905 to great success, yielding a sequel, *Ten More Plays of Shakespeare* (1913).

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[Surveys the plot of *The Merchant of Venice*.]

The play opens with the sadness of Antonio, striking the keynote of the tragic in the tale. It is perhaps the sadness of presentiment; presentiment of which Shakespeare was so fond; which he so often, with his tendency to mysticism, introduced into his plays. Antonio does not know why he is so sad. He is yet to learn the reason. It is the shadow of the future moving towards him; and Shakespeare wakens thus the curiosity and interest of his audience. It is not anxiety for his merchandise that makes Antonio sad. He denies that imputation. It is not the sadness of love. 'Fie, fie' [1.1.47], the dignified gentleman answers to that accusation. The sorrows and joys of love are both behind him.

The causeless sadness wearies him, Antonio says. And it may be that Shakespeare wished to sketch in him the merchant, who, engaged for many years in large affairs of trade, feels weariness of this life steal upon him. It is not, then, the sadness which is the cause of his weariness; it is the weariness which makes the sadness. Antonio is tired of the world, and these words are full of that obscure disease [Quotes 1.1.77–9]. His cry is still stronger in the judgment-hall, but with more reason. The very pleadings of the court for mercy to him weary his impatience with life. Let me have done with living [Quotes 4.1.82, 118].

Nor is his farewell to Bassanio less charged with the apathy of life. With this grey, melancholy middle-age is contrasted Gratiano, his dependant, but his friend; the embodiment of riotous youth, overflowing with life like a sapling in spring. He is too wild even for Bassanio, who begs him to tame his spirits before he goes to Belmont.



## Stopford A. Brooke

Nay, answers Gratiano, 'but I bar to-night: you shall not gauge me by what we do to-night' [2.2.208]. He cannot hold his tongue in the judgment-hall, and his outbreaks are in detestable taste. He speaks 'an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in Venice' [1.1.112-13]. Nerissa will tone him down a little, when he marries her. They are well matched. She also has a tongue of her own. But in spite of this gallop of speech over infinite nothings, Gratiano, in defence of himself, has plenty of good sense. Not one of the folk in this play is without the active intelligence of the New Learning. His view of the transiency of love is set forth admirably and in good poetry [2.6]. His answer to Antonio's cry that his part on the world's stage is a sad one is full of that wisdom of youth which is so much wiser than the wisdom of a wearied age [Quotes 1.1.79-102]. [On Antonio's magnanimity and generosity.]

Only at one point does Antonio jar upon us – in his intolerance of Shylock, which is carried beyond our sense of decency. He spits on him and spurns him, calls him dog, misbeliever, cut-throat, cur. But this is of the time at which he lived. It was the common usage; and Antonio was not beyond his age. Moreover, a great part of it Shylock deserved.

Opposite Antonio, at all points contrasted with him, Shylock is set. Mean, mercenary, ungenerous, ignoble in thought and deed, consumed with evil passions – he is the darkness to Antonio's light. They clash: in the struggle Antonio is, day by day, pressed down into misery; but when Shylock's evil is at that point of triumph, it is utterly overthrown. And there is the centre of the play. There the ancient contention of darkness and light, of summer and winter, of good and evil, the root of a million million shapes of art, is presented in another shape before us.

Shylock is not only Shylock: he is the personification, in Shakespeare's intention, of the evil side of the Jewish nation. And, in Shakespeare's mind, the evil side was rooted in love of money. It was in the carelessness and contempt of gain for gain's sake that Antonio found the greatness of his character. It was in the sordid care for money that Shylock lost his soul. Out of this filthy desire were born hatred, malice, cruelty, revenge, and envy – envy of Antonio's greatness of mind, hatred of his generosity, revenge on him for his scorn of usury. At last, as greater serpents devour the less, these dreadful passions in him devour even the love of money. The offer of thrice his money does not tempt Shylock away from his revenge. The baser passion is despised in the kingdom of evil by the aristocrats of that kingdom, hatred and vengeance. It is only when Shylock knows that he cannot gratify them, that his love of money returns, and he leaves the court more ignoble than he was when he was feeding fat his grudge against Antonio.

Shakespeare goes to the heart of Shylock in his first meeting with Antonio [Quotes 1.3.35-7]. This hate and malice double and treble: these passions are always their own fuel. Moreover, they gather fuel from every circumstance, as love gathers love. The great passions scoop all the world into themselves.

As on the Rialto, so in his home his soul is in his moneybags. His daughter cannot bear living with him. His servant thinks himself famished and runs away, like his daughter. He hates the feast he is bid to, but goes to feed on the prodigal Christian. He detests masques, pageants, music, and joy. Yet, he is sensitive enough to have presentiments, like Antonio. The spirit in a man is deeper than his character, and feels, in another dimension, by a consciousness beyond our tabernacle, what is coming. Such a

*'some faint sympathy' for Shylock, 1905*

spirit, thought Shakespeare, is even in the evil man. 'There is some ill,' cries Shylock, 'a-brewing towards my rest' [2.5.17 and Quotes 2.5.36–7].

Then fresh circumstance – Jessica's flight with Lorenzo doubles his rage. It is increased by her becoming a Christian, and still more by the loss of his money and jewels. This maddens his evil passions into fury. When serpents are hatching, the sand grows hot around them, hurries their growth, sharpens their poison [Quotes 2.8.12–22].

But Shakespeare is not content to picture his rage by another man's mouth. He brings it, with Shylock himself, upon the scene; and few things more wonderful have ever been briefly written of many broken, varied passions, confused by their own fury, and storming through a man's soul, than the interview of Tubal and Shylock.

All this infernal fire seethes in him, till at last Antonio is in his hands; and it motives, sufficiently to satisfy what is just in art, the inexorable thirst of his revenge in the scene in the court. Without this preparation, his height of malice and fury would seem immoderate –

So can I give no reason, nor I will not. . . .

What! wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice? [4.1.59, 69]

These are terrible sentences, and they are matched by those that follow, till he leaps forward with the knife to the breast of Antonio: 'Most learned judge! A sentence! come, prepare!' [4.1.304] Then, at the very height of his passion, on the very finest edge of his revenge, he is defrauded of his desire. Baffled by his own passions, hurled from his dark heaven to his deepest hell, he passes from the court in a dreadful loneliness; so baited by his foes that we feel half inclined to take his part. To take his goods was just, and half of them goes to his daughter. To make him a Christian on pain of death was unjust and unfair to Christianity.

It is like Shakespeare to gather some vague pity round him at the last. Moreover, we are prepared beforehand even for that. Shylock is made bad by the degradation of the world, the love of money. But he is made more than bad by untoward circumstance. One man, who has no care for money but flings it away, stands in his path and loathes him as a Jew. His daughter robs him, flies from him with a spendthrift Christian, and becomes a Christian. There is some excuse for his overtopping hatred. In an odd recess of our nature, it is possible to give it a faint sympathy. Then, he is once, at least, not thinking of himself, but of his nation and his religion. He is not only Shylock, he is a Jew. He hates Antonio, for he is a Christian. The sorrows of his race, the injustice done his people for ages are in his heart, and he adds them to his personal hatred. Moreover, even in his rage, he has his tender memories of the past. Perhaps only Shakespeare would then, midst of Shylock's sordid soul, bid arise the vision of Leah, the sweetheart of his youth: 'Thou torturest me, Tubal; it was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor: I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys' [3.1.120–3].

We pity him then in his torment, but Shakespeare makes a bolder claim on our pity. Shylock appeals to humanity itself against the vast injustice meted out to his race. We are Jews, but we are men. I will avenge my nation and myself [Quotes 3.1.49–50, 65–6].

This is his challenge to humanity, and fierce as it is, it stirs our pity and our sense of justice.

## Stopford A. Brooke

In the midst of this whirlpool of rage and sorrow, Shakespeare, with his dramatic habit of relieving and enlivening his audience, introduces Launcelot Gobbo, the peasant-servant, the humourist of the piece. His father, a poor peasant of the mainland, brings a basket of doves as a suitable present to Shylock. Launcelot, now of the town, is far beyond that naivete. The city has given him wit and individuality. He is able to imagine two persons in himself, the fiend and his conscience, and to conceive of himself as a third who judges between the other two. Jessica finds him a merry devil, and he is as self-contented as Autolycus, but no rogue. The humorous strife he pictures in himself between his conscience and the fiend, his jaunty play with his sand-blind father, are a happy change, for the moment, from the furious hatred of Shylock and the heavy fates hanging over Antonio. Yet Shakespeare, always careful for the knitting of his play into unity, links Launcelot to the Jew, to Lorenzo and to Jessica; and then, having bound him up with the Jew story, now binds him up with the casket story. He sends him to Belmont as one of Bassanio's servants.

At Belmont we meet Portia, the queen of the play, the Muse of Wisdom and of Love. Her wisdom, we understand, is partly hereditary: it is the wisdom of her father's goodness. The fantastic lottery he devised, in the Three Caskets, for his daughter's marriage, is felt, even by Nerissa, to be wise. The right casket, she thinks, will never be chosen rightly, but by one who shall rightly love, who 'shall give, and hazard, all he hath' [2.7.9] a keen definition of the true lover; and Bassanio, the true lover, understands it. But Portia's wisdom is, above all, the wisdom of fine womanhood. Underneath her distinct type, and unaffected by her wealth and rank, the instincts natural to pure womanhood direct her speech and action. She is as natural as Eve in Paradise. And it is by these instincts, that, in moments of crisis, she acts with a noble promptitude. When she hears Antonio's letter telling of his cruel fate, touched with sorrow, she breaks out with her native impulsiveness [Quotes 3.2.299]. Her passionate pity forgets her marriage.

When Bassanio is gone, when all the rest are confused, she sees in a moment the right thing to do, and does it instantly. She carries out her plan with a gracious audacity, and is so gay in her travesty of herself as a man – as Rosalind was – that she makes fun of herself with Nerissa. Yet, the steadfast weight of her character always tells on her company. Respect and honour follow her. The princes bow to her will. The love she so frankly confesses to Bassanio does not lessen, but increases, his reverence for her. That light girl, Jessica, loves her and thinks that 'the poor, rude world / Hath not her fellow' [3.5.82–3]. Her servants worship her; and Nerissa, in her close confidence, at home with all her thoughts, never varies in respect for her. Lorenzo, full of reverence, is struck by her intelligent judgment of affairs, by the nobility of her quick unselfish action in all that concerns Antonio and her husband. She knows, as few women do, what a friendship between one man and another is, and acts for it, even though it separates her from Bassanio on her wedding day [Quotes 3.4.1–4]. A great lady, of a great house, her manners are those of well-bred society. It is a gross mistake when the actress who represents her forgets this, and, when Portia is gay, makes her skip about the stage as if she were Nerissa. Because she is merry, it does not follow that she is skittish. She ought always to keep her dignity on the stage, and the stately manners of her rank. With what graceful courtesy she receives the princes of Morocco and of Arragon; how full of

*'some faint sympathy' for Shylock, 1905*

respect they are, even when they are disappointed! Yet she is as natural as the day, as unconventional as Rosalind, though she is so much older; and as free of her tongue as that delightful girl. Her intellect is not as keen and swift as Rosalind's; it is more the intellect of a highly educated person who has great practical ability, than a naturally fine intellect like Rosalind's. She has the training of the New Learning: is not without its knowledge of the classics, nor without its philosophic moralities, nor without its love of music. . . .

Her philosophic turn is always womanly. It does not argue, but speaks on the impulse of the hour, touched into sudden thought by some impression from nature or human life. Quick on the touch her natural wisdom begins to glow. A happy goodness then inspires her soul into speech, as when her unpremeditated appeal for mercy enchants the court of law. . . .

Never was a more charming lawyer; she is easily counsel, jury, and judge; and all the men show dull before her mastery. She alone is the overthrower of Shylock, the saviour of Antonio. She knots together in this judgment scene the two parts of the play. The woman of the caskets solves the question of the Jew and his victim. Everything in the drama radiates to this scene, and Portia is the centre of the radiation.

What I have said of her belongs chiefly to her womanhood as it appears openly to the world. But she is far more than these externals, though they are part of her womanhood. They suit her like well-fitting garments, but they scarcely reveal her inmost self. . . . But we have not pierced as yet to the inmost shrine of her nature, where Love sits and commands her. She would not be a true Italian, not a woman of her time, nor the complete woman she is, had she not felt through all her nature the lifting wave of passion. Her confession of love to Bassanio, before he chooses from the casket, might seem too frank were it not that they had often met before, as Shakespeare is at pains to tell us, and interchanged 'speechless glances'; were it not that Bassanio has declared his love again and again before he runs his risk of failure. Her speech to him is an answer, not a proposal. Yet, though warm with love, it is full of a noble restraint. She says enough to let Bassanio be sure she loves him, but she keeps back much, for if he were to choose wrongly she must say farewell to him for ever. Yet we feel, while she speaks, that she has faith true love will solve the riddle rightly. This little speech is a masterpiece.

Afterwards, when her lover has chosen and he is hers, the humility of love enters into her soul and makes it the home of grace, dignity, and happiness. She lays herself, her heart, her spirit, her home at his command. It might seem as if she had lost her individuality too much, were it not that Bassanio's reverence for her is deepened by the yielding of her love. It is the giving of love, not the giving up of personality. She claims, not long after, full equality with him in affairs, and she is more than his equal. Only love makes Portia yield herself, and in the yielding she retains her dignity and her distinctiveness. But the cry, where we reach to her very centre, is that she utters to herself alone when she sees Bassanio choose the right casket, and knows that she will have her life in having her love. No one hears it; it is the voice of lonely passion, and no words of love are more intense in Shakespeare – all the more intense for her call for temperance in that she feels. This cry comes out of the white fire in the innermost chamber of Portia's soul. She sees him touch the leaden casket where her portrait is, and to herself she speaks [Quotes 3.2.108–14]. There is the essence of the woman.

In the trial scene she is the mouthpiece of Bellario, but her speech on the excellence

Stopford A. Brooke

of mercy is her own. It is excellent, but it owes its astonishing vogue more to the religious form it takes than to any unequalled supremacy in its poetry. There are many passages in Shakespeare far beyond it in high imagination. We are glad when the judgment scene is over, and she becomes the Portia whose quiet wisdom says to Nerissa, as she comes into her park beneath the moon –

How many things by season season'd are  
To their right praise and true perfection! [5.1.107–8]

Farewell, then, to Portia. She will live as long as the stage lives, and, after that, in the hearts of men who like a woman to be better than themselves.

Lastly, there is the little pretty idyll at the end, a pleasant relief from the heated airs of the judgment-hall. We slip from Venice and the crowd, from trade and its angers, from the tragic fates of men, into the moonlit gardens of Belmont, into the laughing, loving company of Jessica and Lorenzo. Shakespeare was still, in this early play, the dramatist of love – of love with a hundred facets, like a diamond. It was not now so much the passion itself that he described as the various forms the passion took. Here, having represented in Portia and Bassanio love in its stateliness of manners and of thought, in its recognition of duty and great affairs as moderating its intensity, he represents a lighter phase of love – not stately and without any relation to duty or society, not immoderate because so light, having the passionateness of youthful life but no more than that – in Jessica and Lorenzo. These gay and airy creatures, the butterflies of the play, dart in and out of the scenes, flitting, with a touch of pleasure, from character to character; quite irresponsible, not conscious of a conscience as yet, all for love and joy and for both without a thought of the past or the future; not knowing where they are going, drifting by chance to Belmont; but so charming, so honest in their lightheartedness and loving that Portia hands over to them the care of her household, that every one is fond of them. They deserve, though they have done nothing to deserve it, the fortune of the Jew. It will not make them more happy or less happy than they are. They will spend or give it all away. [Discusses the final act.]

The conventional poetic note which we have observed here and there in *Romeo and Juliet*, and which tragedy may excuse, may be said to have wholly disappeared in this play. Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano and the rest speak among themselves the language of men of the world, engaged in great or small affairs. Antonio's high-moving phrases, when they occur, are natural enough to his sentimental character. When Bassanio and Lorenzo talk to their sweethearts, their speech, of course, lifts itself into poetic forms; and it is the same with Portia, who speaks in gay prose when she is not deeply moved. Salarino's description of the possible loss of Antonio's ships is heightened by his imaginative turn; but otherwise we may say that in this play, and for the first time, the conversation is entirely natural and easy, in harmony with the character of the speakers and with the various situations. Shakespeare has simplified his methods.

The characters, not only of the chief but of the lesser personages, are clearly divided from one another. No one could confuse Gratiano with Salarino whose half-poetic fancy divides him from his companions; or Salanio, who is of a less intelligent type, with Salarino. Each stands separate.

As to Bassanio, much more might be made of him on the stage than is usual among actors. To conceive him rightly one ought to know something of the social life of Venice when the city was not only great but magnificent. Bassanio is not only young, handsome, with love-inspiring eyes, and impetuous (he will not wait a moment, even at Portia's request, to make his choice of the caskets); he is also a splendid noble, whose train and liveries are gorgeous, who comes to woo Portia in all the glory of young Venice. A fine splendour ought to belong to his representation. Along with that, the actor ought to conceive his soul. He is essentially loveable. Men like Antonio love him; Portia loves him, Nerissa thinks no one so worthy of Portia. He is himself capable of true and passionate love; yet, to rescue his friend, he leaves Portia upon his wedding day. Moreover, he is not the splendid lover only; he is also one who has considered the world in quiet thought. His speech over the caskets is that of a man who has seen and brooded over many characters, and the two illustrations he uses in talking to Portia are both drawn from public affairs, as if he were at home in them. They lower, it is true, the note of passion which ought then to prevail, but they also slide into the scene the image of the Venetian state which is deliberately impressed upon the play. There is a certain conventionalism in his speech when he unveils 'fair Portia's counterfeit,' but he makes up for that afterwards when his modesty is made certain of her love for him. He is worth an actor's study.

A word may be said concerning the representation of Shylock. I suppose it is the tradition to represent him as a decrepit, old, and dirty Jew, in worn and almost ragged clothes, with a senile stoop and manner – I have seen him look like Fagin on the stage. The Duke calls him 'old Shylock' [5.1.175], but to be old is not to be decrepit. He is in full possession of his faculties; he can dine out; he is active on the Rialto; his stormy passion of wrath and revenge is not that of a feeble old man, but of a man of sixty or so who may be called old, but whose blood is hot and his will resolute.

He is a miser, or rather a gold-breeder, but he is not a ragged miser, nor a dirty one. I am sure Shakespeare meant him to be clean and decently dressed, and respected by his countrymen on the Rialto. The Christians might call him dog, but Tubal and the rest knew better. Though he keeps Lancelot's extravagant temper in order, he does not really stint his food. Loss of jewels and money maddens him, but other folk than misers are affected in the same way. His miserliness has been exaggerated into an extreme, and it is plain that his love of money is absorbed by his hatred and his love of vengeance.

At first he is only the business man who makes money breed as Jacob made his ewes. Then suddenly it occurs to him that he will take the chance of entrapping Antonio; and then hate conquers money-getting. Moreover, the Jew in him arises, and money-getting is also lost in the desire to avenge the cause of Israel against the Christian. Both of those passions mingle in him, one personal, one national, and strengthen one another. Then, he is uplifted, far above the usurer and the vulgar Jew, on to the tragic plane. The servility of the Jew is killed. His speech gains nobility; it is resolute and strong. Only to Tubal, his countryman, does he reveal any weakness after his first outburst of rage in the streets. He claims the law; he appeals to the Duke, he puts the whole of Venice into action and disturbance. He attacks the jailer in the streets for permitting Antonio to take the air. The fury of his passion has made him for the moment another man. He ought to tower in the court. Bated breath and whispering humbleness or mean cunning have

## Stopford A. Brooke

nothing to do with his appearance. His revenge should straighten his back, and put flame in his eyes, and dignify his port. The more he towers above the rest, the more dramatic his sudden fall may be made; the fiercer, the more absorbing is his passion, the more it forgets everything but itself, the more the actor has to do when his revenge is cut away from under his feet. When the actor makes him an object of pity during the judgment scene, he misses Shakespeare's aim. When the judgment is given, and not till then, pity may be claimed; but it is pity greatly modified by horror at the image he has presented of unrelenting and furious revenge. I do not believe that Shakespeare meant us to have more pity for Shylock than may be felt for him after his speech in which the Jew appeals to the Christian as man to man: 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' [3.1.59] Nor do I think that his last speech is the speech of a broken man. Even after his terrible overthrow, enough of the swell of his rage and hatred lasts to take him with some tragic dignity out of the court. He accepts his fate, but it is with flashing eyes, and his 'I am not well' need not contradict this. He flings it to them as an excuse for departure.

I pray you give me leave to go from hence;  
I am not well. Send the deed after me,  
And I will sign it. [4.1.395-7]

When Shylock breaks down, it is when he is alone in his empty house. And Shakespeare leaves that to our imagination. (134-42, 147-54)

## 49 Charles Knox Pooler, Shylock 'a man of one idea'

1905

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From 'Introduction', *The Merchant of Venice*, edited by Charles Knox Pooler (London, 1905), the Arden Shakespeare.

The Reverend Charles Knox Pooler (1860–[1937?]), educated at Trinity College, Dublin, lectured at the Universities of Birmingham and Bristol, and finally settled in Belfast. He produced various editions for the London publishers Methuen, including *Shakespeare's Poems* (1911, 1928), the *Sonnets* (1918, 1943), and *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry VIII* (1915) – still in print in 1936.

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[The following extract is taken from the fifth 'revised' edition (1927).]

To sum up, in the study of the growth of Shakespeare's art, *The Merchant of Venice*, as it stands, must be regarded as the work of his second period. Like earlier plays, it shows traces of Marlowe's influence, but the influence is on the subject and not on the style. The many classical allusions are no longer far-fetched and dear-bought; and as for the rhymes, there are more in *Macbeth*. If an occasional line is undramatically beautiful, as 'A day in April never came so sweet' [2.9.93], there is also, in a perfectly appropriate setting, 'Only the blood speaks to you in my veins' [3.2.176], the most adequate expression of young love in literature; and the verse, in general, is on its way from the lyrical monotony of the past to the triumphant change and movement of its prime. . . .

*The Plot.* – Ulrici adopted Schlegel's conjecture that the story of the caskets is a counterpoise to the story of the bond, 'the one is made probable by the other'.<sup>[1]</sup> . . . We do not so reason in other matters. The narrator (or author) of one fish story may counterpoise it by a second without materially increasing his credit.

It would be otherwise if the stories were connected, and the one supplied details tending to substantiate the other, or if the scene were fairy-land, where anything may happen.

Shakespeare's art is of another kind. The stories were sufficiently credible for his purpose. The common consent of mankind was in their favour. They were both of unknown antiquity, they were both widely distributed. In Persia, and India, in Italy, France, and England, they had been told and re-told. Unless what is probable enough for a sermon is too improbable for a play, their presence in certain forms of the *Gesta* – that great repository of pulpit anecdotes – is sufficient evidence of their acceptance by the general. Even if they were more extravagant than they are, Shakespeare's treatment would make them credible. It is, of course, unlikely that a good husband should be



## Charles Knox Pooler

discovered by his choice of an inscription. Portia doubts it, but we sympathise with her and hope. We have compared Bassanio with his rivals, and the comparison is in his favour. Portia's eyes have told him tales. For his sake, and hers, and no less for the sake of Antonio, who is risking his property and his life, we trust that the test will be successful. . . . The inscriptions are intended to discriminate between more eligible suitors. The proof that they can do so is the fact that they do. Morocco chooses the golden casket, Arragon the silver, but neither contains fair Portia's counterfeit.

This gradual working on our hopes and fears, these evidences . . . are the work of Shakespeare's genius, not the mere accumulation of improbabilities to impose upon our credulity. In Shakespeare's setting, the incidents are credible; outside it they are fables. We do not believe in the witches or in Ariel, outside of *The Tempest* and *Macbeth*.

So, too, with regard to the bond. We may concede something to the antiquity of the story, something to its diffusion, but Shakespeare does not rely on this. Would such a bond be sealed? Would it be acted on? A cautious man of business would hardly seal it. But the penalty is represented as a jest. It prevents Antonio from breaking a custom. And he has argued with Shylock, perhaps influenced him, should he not have a missionary's faith in his convert? 'This Hebrew will turn Christian' [1.3.178] is said in jest, but there is surely hope of a man who will take no interest. Behind all this, there is our knowledge of Antonio's character. He almost parades his melancholy, he allows those who had grown strange to his kinsman to discuss it. His generosity towards Bassanio has become a habit. Such a man may be incapable of the deliberate and judicious friendship which weighs and measures. So, too, Shylock's malignity may stand within the eye of reason. He is in the mood in which an angry man attributes his misfortunes to his chief enemy. Antonio insulted him in the act of borrowing, and repeated previous insults by his threats. Yet without further provocation Shylock might have relented. But further provocation followed. His daughter was stolen; he was mocked in his distress. The very bitterness of his isolation incites him to revenge. For he has no friend. Other Jews may be meet to be sent on errands. He may discuss with them in private his plans of vengeance. But neither in the Court nor in the streets of Venice does any Jew stand by him, as Bassanio by Antonio, or Gratiano by Bassanio. Thus the conduct of Shylock though not justified is explained, whereas in Ser Giovanni's story, the Jew has no wrongs to avenge. Again, Antonio's melancholy is not merely in harmony with the rest of the play, not merely a note of character, or a foreboding warranted by what ensues: it is, unlike Ansaldo's, essential to the plot, or at least an important element of its unity. Managers may neglect the fifth Act, the groundlings may listen to it with impatience, but without it the tale is imperfect.

Some commentators have surmised that this melancholy is constitutional; others that it is the sorrow of one who has loved and lost, and that 'Fie, fie!' [1.1.46] being interpreted is the cry of a wounded spirit; but to Antonio his melancholy is something new: he has much ado to know himself, and to his friends he seems marvellously changed. The fear that Bassanio's love for Portia may lessen his affection for himself is a sufficient cause, and there is no other. His anxiety is shown by the fact that no sooner were they alone than he asked about the lady whom Bassanio had promised to tell him of. When they parted, his head was averted, and his eyes were full of tears. His supreme sacrifice was not the risk of his life, but of Bassanio's love. 'I think,' said Solanio, 'he only

loves the world for him' [2.8.50]. When his ships have miscarried, and his creditors grow cruel, and the bond is forfeit, his one wish is to see him before he dies. Yet even here there is something of the suspicions of jealousy, 'if your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter' [3.2.321–3]; and again in the trial scene: 'Commend me to your honourable wife . . . bid her be judge / Whether Bassanio had not once a love' [4.1.273–7]. It is his chief recompense to hear that for his sake Bassanio would give up Portia herself, and when Portia proves his saviour, makes him a mediator between herself and her husband, and shows that she has been mindful of even his material interests by bringing him the news that his ships are safe, we may be sure that his sorrow has passed away, in the thought that he has not lost but found a friend.

The excellence of the plot and the truth of the characterisation have caused the play to be regarded by one critic as a comedy of intrigue and by another as a comedy of character. With respect to the aim of its author and its central motive, it has been called a study of friendship, a study of Christian love, a study of the relation of man to wealth, and of law to equity, '*summum jus summa injuria*'. It is, in fact, a study of life, and life has more than one lesson. The plot arises out of the natural action of persons of various character under given circumstances. We may dismiss, for example, the notion that Shylock is a type of his race. *The Merchant* is no mere study of Jewish character, with or without a plea for toleration. Tubal and Chus are Hebrews, Jessica is a Hebrew, but Tubal is no more Shylock than Jessica is a type of the Jewish daughter. We can no more account for Shylock by a study of Jewish history than for Shakespeare by a study of our own. So far as he is persecuted for his religion, he may be taken as typical of his great nation, but he leaves its ranks when he plans a murder. What is true of him is not true of all Jews or of most Jews. He becomes a man of one idea, he broods over his wrongs in secret. Even in public he cannot help speaking of his vengeance, and filling the streets with threats and clamour. Like some of the heroes of Greek tragedy, he labours for his own destruction. That the best feelings of human nature are arrayed against him is due to his own acts. Strangers become his enemies, and his overthrow is effected by the energy of a lady and the skill of a lawyer whom in all probability he has never seen.

It will not be necessary to repeat what has already been well said of the various characters . . . but we may notice how often one character throws light upon another. Portia gains by the contrast with Nerissa, Lorenzo and Bassanio by the contrast with Gratiano. To Gratiano, indeed, commentators have been more than kind. He has been represented as talkative but witty, impulsive but good-hearted, a genial friend, a perfect gentlemen . . . but even in Shakespeare he is odious. Portia may well have trusted the nature that could tolerate the intolerable. He treated Antonio in his hour of weariness with merciless hilarity, vinegar upon nitre. The crackling of thorns under a pot is about him, and worse: Portia in her own house was obliged to rebuke his grossness. He screamed derision at the fallen Shylock, and his last words are of such a nature that even Steevens<sup>[2]</sup> passed them without comment. (xviii, xlix–liv)

## 50 Otto Jespersen, Shylock's language

1905

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From *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (Leipzig, 1905), Chapter IX: 'Shakespeare and the Language of Poetry', pp. 211–34.

Otto Jespersen (1860–1943), Danish philologist, Professor of English Language and Literature at Copenhagen University (1893–1925), revolutionized language teaching. *How to Teach a Foreign Language* (English trans., 1904), a pioneering instance of the 'Direct Method' reform, was followed by a series of synchronic and diachronic studies that set new scholarly standards, including *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (1905; tenth edn, 1982), *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* (1909), and *Philosophy of Grammar* (1925). He also invented 'Novial', an international language with its own grammar and lexicon.

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In this chapter I shall endeavour to characterize the language of the greatest master of English poetry and make some observations in regard to his influence on the English language as well as in regard to poetic and archaic language generally. But it must be distinctly understood that I shall concern myself with *language* and not with literary *style*. It is true that the two things cannot be completely kept apart, but as far as possible I shall deal only with what are really philological as opposed to literary problems. (211)

[Discusses the estimated size of Shakespeare's vocabulary.]

The greatness of Shakespeare's mind is therefore not shown by the fact that he was acquainted with 20,000 words, but by the fact that he wrote about so great a variety of subjects and touched upon so many human facts and relations that he needed this number of words in his writings.<sup>1</sup> His remarkable familiarity with technical expressions in many different spheres has often been noticed, but there are other facts with regard to his use of words that have not been remarked or not sufficiently remarked. His reticence about religious matters, which has given rise to the most divergent theories of his religious belief, is shown strikingly in the fact that such words as *Bible*, *Holy Ghost* and *Trinity* do not occur at all in his writings, while *Jesus* (Jesu), *Christ* and *Christmas* are found only in some of his earliest plays; *Saviour* occurs only once (in *Hamlet*), and *Creator* only in two of the dubious plays (*3 Henry VI* and *Troilus*).

Of far greater importance is his use of language to individualize the characters in his plays. In this he shows a much finer and subtler art than some modern novelists, who make the same person continually use the same stock phrase or phrases. Even where he resorts to the same tricks as other authors he varies them more; Mrs. Quickly and

Dogberry do not misapply words from the classical languages in the same way. The everyday speech of the artisans in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is comic in a different manner from the diction they use in their comedy, which serves Shakespeare to ridicule some linguistic artifices employed in good faith by many of his contemporaries (alliteration, bombast). Shakespeare is not entirely exempt from the fashionable affectation of his days known as Euphuism,<sup>2</sup> but it must be noticed that he is superior to its worst aberrations and he satirizes them, not only in *Love's Labour's Lost*, but also in many other places. Euphuistic expressions are generally put in the mouth of some subordinate character who has nothing to do except to announce some trifling incident, relate a little of the circumstances that lead up to the action of the play, deliver a message from a king, etc. It is not improbable that the company possessed some actor who knew how to make small parts funny by imitating fashionable affectation, and we can imagine that it was he who acted Osric in *Hamlet*, and by his vocabulary and appearance exposed himself to the scoffs of the Danish prince. . . . But the messenger from Antony in *Julius Caesar* (3.1.122) speaks in a totally different strain and gives us a sort of foretaste of Antony's eloquence. And how different again – I am speaking here of subordinate parts only – are the gardeners in *Richard the Second* (Act 3, sc. 4) with their characteristic application of botanical similes to politics and vice versa. And thus one might go on, for no author has shown greater skill in adapting language to character. (214–16) . . .

Shylock is one of Shakespeare's most interesting creations, even from the point of view of language. Although Sir Sidney Lee has shown that there were Jews in England in those times and that, consequently, Shakespeare need not have gone outside his own country in order to see models for Shylock, the number of Jews cannot have been sufficient for his hearers to be very familiar with the Jewish type, and no Anglo-Jewish dialect or mode of speech had developed which Shakespeare could put into Shylock's mouth and so make him at once recognizable for what he was. I have not, indeed, been able to discover a single trait in Shylock's language that can be called distinctly Jewish. And yet Shakespeare has succeeded in creating for Shylock a language different from that of anybody else. Shylock has his Old Testament at his fingers' ends, he defends his own way of making money breed by a reference to Jacob's thrift in breeding parti-coloured lambs, he swears by Jacob's staff and by our holy sabbath, and he calls Lancelot 'that foole of Hagers off-spring.'<sup>3</sup> We have an interesting bit of Jewish figurative language in 'my houses eares, I meane my casements' (2.5.34). Shylock uses some biblical words which do not occur elsewhere in Shakespeare: *pilled* ('The skilful shepheard pil'd me certain wands,' cf. *Genesis XXX, 37*); *synagogue*, *Nazarite* and *publican*. But more often Shylock is characterized by being made to use words or constructions a little different from the accepted use of Shakespeare's time.<sup>4</sup> He dislikes the word *interest* and prefers calling it *advantage* or *thrift* ('my well-worne thrift, which he cal's interrest': 1.3.52), and instead of *usury* he says *usance*. Furness quotes *Wylson On Usurye*, 1572, p. 32, 'usurie and double usurie, the merchants termyng it *usance* and double *usance*, by a more clenlie name' – this word thus ranks in the same category as *dashed* or *d-d* for damned: instead of pronouncing an objectionable word in full one begins as if one were about to pronounce it and then shunts off on another track. . . . Shylock uses the plural *moneys*, which is very rare in Shakespeare, he says an *equal* pound for 'exact', *rheum* (rume) for 'saliva', *estimable* for 'valuable,' *fulsome* for 'rank' (the only instance of that signification discovered by the

## Otto Jespersen

editors of the *NED*); he alone uses the words *eaneling* and *misbeliever* and the rare verb *to bane*. His syntax is peculiar: we *trifle* time; *rend out*, where Shakespeare has elsewhere only *rend*; I have no mind *of* feasting forth to-night (always *mind to*); *and so following*, where *and so forth* is the regular Shakespearian phrase. I have counted some forty such deviations from Shakespeare's ordinary language and cannot dismiss the thought that Shakespeare made Shylock's language peculiar on purpose, just as he makes Caliban, and the witches in *Macbeth* use certain words and expressions used by none other of his characters in order to stamp them as beings out of the common sort. (218–20)

## 51 Sir Walter Raleigh, Shylock more sinned against than sinning

1907

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From *English Men of Letters: Shakespeare* (London, 1907).

Sir Walter Alexander Raleigh (1861–1922) was the son of a Congregationalist minister. Educated at University College, London and at King's College, Cambridge, he taught in India, Oxford, and Manchester, before holding chairs at University College, Liverpool, and Glasgow University. In 1904 he became Professor of English Literature at Oxford and a Fellow of Magdalen. Raleigh edited *Johnson on Shakespeare* (1908), wrote the introduction to *Shakespeare's England* (1916), and gave the British Academy Shakespeare lecture, *Shakespeare and England* (1916). He was knighted in 1911.

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From the evidence of the plays it has been argued that Shakespeare must have travelled. Doubtless he often went with his company of actors on their summer tours among provincial towns. It is unlikely that he ever crossed the Channel, or visited Scotland. Certain of his allusions, in *Hamlet* and the Italian plays, show some detailed local knowledge of Elsinore and of Italy. The name Gobbo, for instance, which he gives to the clown in *The Merchant of Venice*, is the name of an ancient stone in the market-place of that city; and when he speaks of the common ferry as 'the tranect,' the word seems to be a mistake or misprinted adaptation of the Italian word *traghetto*. But this is nothing: Venice, in her ancient glory, attracted crowds of travellers; and, without troubling himself to put a question, Shakespeare must have heard innumerable stories and memories from that centre of life and commerce. . . . (57–8)

In *The Merchant of Venice* the whole action of the play passes on the confines of tragedy, and is barely saved from crossing into the darker realm. On the leaden casket is engraved the motto of Shakespeare's philosophy: 'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.' [2.7.11] Bassanio is not called upon to pay the full debt; but the voice of tragedy has been heard, as it is heard again in the passion of Shylock. The first breathings of tragic feeling, which are found even in the gayest of the early comedies, steadily increase in volume and intensity, until the storm rises, and blows all laughter out of the plays, except the laughter of the fool. It is as if Shakespeare were carried into tragedy against his will; his comedies, built on the old framework of clever trick and ludicrous misunderstanding, become serious in his hands; until at last he recognises the position, cuts away all the mechanical devices whereby the semblance of happiness is vainly preserved, and goes with open eyes to meet a trial that has become inevitable. . . . (132–3)

## Sir Walter Raleigh

The diverse interpretations given by notable actors to the part of Shylock have their origin in a certain incongruity between the story that Shakespeare accepted, and the character of the Jew as it came to life in his hands. Some actors, careful for the story, have laid stress on revenge, cunning, and the thirst for innocent blood. Others, convinced by Shakespeare's sympathy, have presented so sad and human a figure that the verdict of the Court is accepted without enthusiasm, Portia seems little better than a clever trickster, and the actor of Gratiano, who is compelled to exult, with gibe and taunt, over the lonely and broken old man, forfeits all favour with the audience. The difficulty is in the play. The Jew of the story is the monster of the mediaeval imagination, and the story almost requires such a monster, if it is to go with ringing effect on the stage. Shylock is a man, and a man more sinned against than sinning. He is one of those characters of Shakespeare whose voices we know, whose very tricks of phrasing are peculiar to themselves. Antonio and Bassanio are pale shadows of men compared with this gaunt, tragic figure, whose love of his race is as deep as life; who pleads the cause of a common humanity against the cruelties of prejudice; whose very hatred has in it something of the nobility of patriotic passion; whose heart is stirred with tender memories even in the midst of his lament over the stolen ducats; who, in the end, is dismissed, unprotesting, to insult and oblivion.

I pray you give me leave to go from hence:  
I am not well. Send the deed after me,  
And I will sign it. [4.1.399–401]

So ends the tragedy of Shylock, and the air is heavy with it long after the babble of the love-plot has begun again. The Fifth Act of *The Merchant of Venice* is an exquisite piece of romantic comedy; but it is a welcome distraction, not a full solution. The revengeful Jew, whose defeat was to have added triumph to happiness, keeps possession of the play, and the memory of him gives to these beautiful closing scenes an undesigned air of heartless frivolity. (149–51)

## 52 Theodore Watts-Dunton, 'untrammelled' as against 'plot-ridden' characters

1907

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From *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. With Annotations and a General Introduction by Sidney Lee. Volume IV. The Merchant of Venice with a Special Introduction by Theodore Watts-Dunton* ... (London and New York, 1907).

Walter Theodore Watts-Dunton (1832–1914), was a lawyer, novelist, poet, and critic. Following school in Cambridge he was articled to his father, became a solicitor, and practised for a while in London. He gave up the law for literary journalism, writing first for the *Examiner* and then in 1876 for the influential *Athenaeum* which he wrote for until the turn of the century. He befriended several distinguished writers and artists, including Swinburne (who lived in his home from 1879 until his death in 1909), George Borrow, D. G. Rossetti, and others.

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[Watts-Dunton defines the kind of 'theatric structure to which the play belongs' as that in which] the *peripeteia* is so powerful and so important – where the expectance of the audience is from the first so keen that elaborate and deliberate characterisation is out of place – out of place because it cools the imagination of the spectator, makes him feel that the dramatist himself is, as mere story teller, losing his interest in the climax of his own story. Now, of this latter kind of drama *The Merchant of Venice* is the very type. As regards any play in which a striking and absorbing *peripeteia* is kept constantly in sight, it is pertinent to ask, 'How many characters here are of necessity plot-ridden? – and which are they?' In the case of *The Merchant of Venice* the answer is, 'All are more or less plot-ridden but one – Shylock.' Almost as untrammelled by plot as Hamlet himself is Shakespeare's wonderful Jew.

About the other characters in the play we have not room to say much. Yet a word or two must be said about Antonio and that 'sadness' of his which he and his friends are at so much pains to bring prominently into notice as soon as the play begins. 'In sooth, I know not why I am so sad,' [1.1.1] he begins by saying. But the student of Shakespeare never doubts the cause of that sadness. Inasmuch as this kind of descriptive character painting properly belongs to flexible drama – to loose comedies and chronicle plays – and not to plays like *The Merchant of Venice* the student of Shakespeare asks at once why Antonio's sadness is here introduced with such emphasis by a great master of stage-craft except for some purposes of plot. Although at first sight this sadness may seem not to be needed for moving on the mechanism of the story, the dramatic student knows that it will soon be found working very vigorously towards that end, for the work is the work



of Shakespeare. He expects that ... the melancholy of Antonio so elaborately dwelt upon in the opening lines of a play like this – a play with a *vis matrix* so powerful – would not be introduced by a great master of theatric means and ends save for the purpose of the plot. And when he remembers that the dramatist is Shakespeare, he never doubts that the sadness is an indication that the merchant is going to be a plot-ridden character upon whom the protagonist is to act. For it is one of the specialities of Shakespeare's art that in order to understand the character of the protagonist and his springs of action you must also understand the other characters upon whom his energies are to exert themselves. It is this, indeed, which knits Shakespeare's dramatic world into one web – it is this which makes that web immortal. [Provides instances from other plays.]

And consider the colossal character of the protagonist in *The Merchant of Venice* – this Jew, panting for revenge, turned into a fearless, raging wolf by the abduction, and (to him) prostitution of his only child whose love he prized even more than the stolen ducats. Suppose that the merchant upon whom he was to act had been of the same light strain as Gratiano, as Lorenzo, as Bassanio, or even as Portia, what worthy and adequate material would there have been for the tremendous worker of the tragic mischief to work upon? If Antonio, the victim of Shylock's rage, were like these airy Venetian patricians, would not the Jew's mighty malice have lost half its effect? In such a case, would it not have appeared that the semi-tragic intensity of the dramatic action had been set a-working in order to break upon a wheel one of the feckless butterflies of pleasure-loving Venice? The fact, then, seems to be that Shakespeare felt that another serious character besides Shylock was needed – imperatively demanded – to give the proper importance to the protagonist Shylock himself. He felt that the Jew's figure was too tragic to be sent alone into this playful country of comedy where the language was that of badinage, the atmosphere that of the dalliance and amusement of Belmont's moonlit banks. Hence the merchant is sad by compulsion of plot. And in delineating that sadness, there seems to have been nothing left to the dramatist but to treat him as he might have been treated in flexible drama or in a prose sketch by Dekker, delineate him in a leisurely way as a melancholy man and set the characters talking about his sadness – delineate him thus for the reason that an ordinary light-hearted Venetian would not have made a sufficiently important anvil for Shylock's tremendous hammer to fall upon.

And if the mainspring of the play – the terrible revenge of the Jew – compelled Antonio to be plot-ridden, what about the other characters? What about Portia ...? Is she a plot-ridden character too? Not entirely plot-ridden, perhaps, yet in many ways so trammelled that even she is too often found acting and speaking for no other purpose than to carry on the story. Even she does not always show that freedom and *abandon* of nature which makes Desdemona, Ophelia, Cordelia, Imogen, living women – more living than most of the women surrounding us in real life. Fascinating as is the sweet lady of Belmont ... even she is weighted as regards thorough characterisation by heavy conditions of plot – the heaviest of all being that she has to marry Bassanio in order that the comedy, which had already become too serious, should end with the marriage bells. Although Antonio speaks of his friend as standing ever 'within the eye of honour,' [1.1.137] we must needs ask, Can a man really marry a girl because she is 'richly left' [1.1.161] and yet be a fit lover for a heroine – and such a heroine as in her essence is

Portia? The selfishness of Bassanio's prototype, Giannetto, towards Ansaldo in 'Il Pecorone' was as nothing when compared with Bassanio's selfishness in letting his friend enter into such a bond in order to marry a girl because she is 'richly left.' . . .

[Shylock's] first appearance is as the Jew of the popular imagination – the Jew as Marlowe might have painted him. But, as the play goes on the character seems to be struggling with his creator, and at last conquers him, seems to tear through the web of the plot and speak for himself. At the opening of the play it is evident that when Shakespeare set to work upon some old play, probably 'The Jew' at 'The Bull,' his feeling about Shylock was not very distinguishable from Marlowe's feeling about Barabas. At first, before his imagination is thoroughly aroused, it is dominated by reminiscences either of Barabas or of some other Jew in some earlier play. [Quotes 1.3.42–3.]

To say this is not to impeach Shakespeare's goodness of heart – not to impeach his moral nature. To us in these days it seems, no doubt, that among all the spectacles of human wickedness, malignity, and folly which have been making 'the angels weep' for ages upon ages, the most ghastly of all, the most humiliating of all, and yet the most grotesque of all is that long record of the persecution of the Jews the monstrous scripture of which is traced in the past by the idiot fingers of Superstition in letters of blood and fire. To us, no doubt, it seems that, grievous as were the wrongs of Europe's other *raças maudites*, the crowning martyrs of man's cruelty, folly, and wickedness were Shylock's brethren – the race, that is, from whose loins sprang He whom their crazy persecutors called – even while they heaped the fagots for the *auto-da-fé* – 'The Saviour of the World.' But we must remember that, although to the honour of our country History must declare that England's cruelty to the Jews was less hideous than that of any other country in Europe, it was still, in Shakespeare's time, hideous beyond words – shameful beyond words. Scarcely any atrocity was so great that it would not be charged against a Jew – scarcely any cruelty would be considered excessive as a punishment for the crime of being a Jew. 'A man is more like the age in which he lives than he is like his own father and mother,' says the Chinese aphorism, and it would be surprising, indeed, if we were to find even Shakespeare to be uninfluenced by the wicked folly of anti-semitism which was in the very air he breathed. The popular idea of a Jew in England was still the idea of Marlowe. The Jew, as he represented antichrist and all that was hostile to human kind, had no rights at all. Shakespeare was influenced by these prejudices when he sat down to write *The Merchant of Venice* as every line in the opening of the play shows. But mark the Nemesis which comes to him who allows personal bias to cripple the wings of his imagination! In consequence of this anti-semitism Shakespeare makes mistakes in the opening scenes – mistakes which show a failure of vision such as he could never have made had he given full play to his imagination and allowed himself to live for the time being in the character he was delineating. Whenever this bias of the period declares itself in the play we get a failure in dramatic vision. Before his imagination had free play, – before the 'divinity' had seized his soul and bent it to his will, he gives us relative vision only. Let one instance of this suffice. It is made evident that the idea of utilising the loan as a means of revenge flashed across the mind of Shylock the moment that the bondman's name was suggested by Bassanio. This being so, the last thing that so wary a dealer as he would do would be to let the proposed borrowers know his murderous feelings

about Antonio. He would wait until he should get them well into his net, for these borrowers were no children, as he well knew; they were accomplished men of the world – one of them a successful and therefore an acute merchant on the Rialto. But the absolute vision of his creator is not yet awake. Consequently this is what Shylock is made to say to the borrowers (or rather this is what he is made to yell to them in a frenzy of passion, if we are to believe the actors who take this part). [1.3.106–29]

Unless these words were intended to be uttered in the pretended playful way which might possibly come to so subtle a mind as Shylock's before proposing the bond 'in sport' they seem to be so extremely undramatic as uttered at such a moment that, were it not for Antonio's reply we might be almost inclined to suspect that Shakespeare originally wrote them to be muttered aside. We feel that Bassanio and Antonio, not being idiots, could not have believed the bond to be given 'in a merry sport,' and up to this point we refuse to give the dramatist our entire imaginative belief. But whatever Shakespeare might have intended when he began to delineate Shylock he ended by almost making him the representative of a great race wronged. Not that the spectator sees less clearly than he saw before the cruelty of Shylock's yearning for the pound of his enemy's flesh; but by that instinct of universal sympathy which in Shakespeare, when his imagination is fully aroused, seems sometimes unconscious and involuntary, he made the spectator at the same time see and understand another cruelty – a cruelty greater than Shylock's own – that of the race to which his persecuting bondman belonged. And as the dramatic action goes on, the marvellous imagination of the dramatist becomes more and more aroused as scene after scene comes up in which the wrongs done to Shylock by his Christian foes accumulate.

And why is Jessica made such an impossible Jewess? Why is this daughter of a race with whom filial affection is a religion – this representative of Jewish girls in whose mouths the words 'old man and old woman' are not words of contemptuous tolerance, as with the girls of the Gentiles, but words of honour and reverence, – why is she painted as a . . . young ingrate who lacks all feeling of filial affection, whose callousness for her living father is equalled by her callousness for the memory of her dead mother? It is because the dramatist has subtle uses for her that he makes her the most plot-ridden character of the entire play. She forsakes her father and the religion of her race in order that Shylock's awful malice may be, if not justified, at least explained. When we hear her say to her abductor, as she hands him the stolen ducats, [Quotes 2.6.49–50] and when afterwards we hear Venice ring with gibes at Shylock because he is so wronged, so forsaken and so lonely, – when we hear how [Quotes 2.8.23–4] we sympathise with him even while we rejoice to see his vengeance frustrated. From this point there are in the play no more failures of vision as regards Shylock. The Jew makes us feel as we would have felt had we been that wronged father. By the very ring of the words, in his great invective in the third act we are captured, our reason is made to stand convinced. [Quotes 3.1.58–73] And when the news is forced upon the old man that his beloved child is so lost to all womanliness as to have bartered her dead mother's turquoise for a monkey, and we hear the father's pitiful exclamation, [Quotes 3.1.110–11] then at last the triumph of the rageful Jew is complete, – the creature of the poet's own genius has conquered the poet. . . .

Although *The Merchant of Venice*, then, for the reasons given above, does not as a

*'untrammelled' as against 'plot-ridden' characters, 1907*

whole rank among Shakespeare's great dramas, it is made by Shylock as important as any one of the greatest in aiding us to gauge the range of the dramatist's sympathetic vision. Not more surely does Hamlet show us the unique intelligence of Shakespeare trying in vain to solve the insoluble problem of the universe – not more surely does Othello show the same intelligence confronting the direst of all the soul's conflicts, when 'To be wroth with one we love / Doth work like madness in the brain,'<sup>[1]</sup> than *The Merchant of Venice* shows that same intelligence confronting another spectacle as wonderful as these – the spectacle of the human race immeshed – strangled in the web of racial and social sophisms which it has been weaving for itself ever since civilisation began. Had this play never been written – were there no Shylock in the varied roll of Shakespearean characters, the sweep of the 'oceanic mind'<sup>[2]</sup> could not have been revealed to us as fully as now it stands revealed. (xix–xxiv; xxvi–xxx)

## 53 E. K. Chambers, the opposing principles of Love and Hate

1908

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From *The Merchant of Venice*. The Red Letter Shakespeare (London, 1908).

Sir Edmund Kerchever Chambers (1866–1954), distinguished scholar and civil servant, was educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Although receiving a first-class degree in the Greats, he was unsuccessful in gaining an Oxford Fellowship, and joined the Board of Education where in 1921 he rose to the rank of second secretary. He became an outstanding literary scholar, producing reference works that have not yet been superseded. His four-volume *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford, 1923) continues his earlier two-volume *Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford, 1903). His *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (2 vols., Oxford, 1930) remains invaluable. First President of the Malone Society (1906–39), he frequently contributed to its series of play texts and dramatic documents. Chambers wrote introductions to all the plays in his Red Letter Shakespeare edition (39 vols., 1904–8). These introductions were reprinted, with some slight stylistic changes, in his *Shakespeare: A Survey* (London, 1925), from which the following extract is taken.

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The melancholy of Antonio is a perpetual undertone in the gaiety and the tribulation of *The Merchant of Venice*. It claims your pondering in the first significant words of the play; nor is its meaning, there or elsewhere, clearly or explicitly set forth. Solanio and Salario, with the natural assumption of poor men, that a rich man must be at least as much concerned about his riches, as themselves are at their want of riches, have an obvious explanation ready to hand, and Antonio merely replies that it is not his merchandise that makes him sad. Gratiano, since he must always be talking, thinks, or pretends to think, that his friend is deliberately affecting the serious pose proper to persons of importance; and him too Antonio puts by with a smile. Gratiano is not of those to whom one reveals the heart's secrets. So that you are left to guess whether there is a heart's secret here at all, or whether Antonio is sincere when he declares that he is no more able than another to tell what stuff his melancholy is made of, whereof it is born. The current explanation has it that he is quite sincere, and that a vague uneasiness stands for a premonition of the disaster which is shortly to overtake him. Such a device falls altogether within Shakespeare's dramatic methods. [Cites instances from *Richard II*, 2.2.10–12, and *Romeo and Juliet*, 5.1.1–10.] Yet a difference is to be observed. *Richard the Second* and *Romeo and Juliet* are to issue tragically; and therefore the preluding touches which tune the spectator

to the sense of tragedy are justified. They have their appointed and logical place in the pattern. With *The Merchant of Venice* it is otherwise. Heart-strings shall be wrung in the process of the story, but it is not, as a whole, written in the key of tragedy. It stands under the domination of Portia, the first and most triumphant of Shakespeare's questing heroines, and its atmosphere is throughout in harmony with Portia's sunny hair, and Portia's sunny wit, and Portia's sunny temper, rather than with the grey twilight of Antonio's mood. . . .

In the long history of the soul of man, the dramatic instinct seems to have worked its way to two or three types of outlook upon the world which it mirrors; and for each of them the ambiguous term 'comedy' has its distinct meaning. There is the drama of amusement, the drama of ideas, and the drama of emotion. The drama of amusement asks the name of comedy for the give and take of dialogue and the tangle of intrigue with which it entertains the spectator. But the drama of amusement is too purely external to take rank as art in the higher sense in which art is before all things an expression of the personality of the artist. The higher drama, on the other hand, differentiates itself, according as it expresses one or other side of such a personality. It is the medium through which the dramatic artist conveys to the audience his ideas about life, or it is the medium through which he conveys to them his emotions about life. Comedy, in what I accept as the primary sense of the word, is the characteristic form taken by the drama of ideas. Such is the comedy of Aristophanes and of Molière. . . . In its urban forms it is still essentially an analysis, a criticism, of life. And, therefore, it is really no paradox to say that comedy is often one of the most serious and even didactic of utterances. The comic dramatist has reflected upon life and condemns it. He lays his finger upon its follies and weaknesses. He strips it bare for you, a wheel of fortune, a dance of fools, a show of jerking puppets. His cap and bells hides this deliberate intention. His bauble conceals a scalpel. 'He uses his folly as a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit' [*As You Like It*, 5.4.106].

Is it, then, this primary type of comedy to which *The Merchant of Venice* belongs? Are we to find in it the critical outlook, the play of bitterness or of humour or of irony upon life? Up to a point the intention of the piece can, no doubt, be so formulated. Take it as a series of variations on the obvious comic theme of the hollowness of appearances; and the choice of the caskets, the deception of Shylock, even the disguise of the wives and their stratagem with the rings, fit naturally enough into such a design. Nor can one fail to notice how well a good deal of the dialogue lends itself to such an interpretation. Gratiano chaffs those

That therefore only are reputed wise  
For saying nothing [1.1.196-7]

Arragon scorns 'the fool multitude that choose by show' [2.9.26]. Bassanio sermonizes upon 'beauty purchased by the weight,' upon golden locks that are 'the dowry of a second head,' 'the beauteous scarf veiling an Indian beauty' [3.2.89, 96, 98-9], and upon other illustrations of his thesis that 'the world is still deceived with ornament' [3.2.74]. Certainly here is one element in the structure of the play. But as certainly, I think, when you have disengaged and fixed this element, you have not really accounted for the

whole. For you have not accounted for the other element of emotion; and although, no doubt, as you watch *The Merchant of Venice*, you feel the gathering conviction that 'the outward shows are least themselves' [3.2.73], yet after all this feeling is only subordinate to the swing and sway of your sympathies with the trapping of Antonio and the rout of Antonio's oppressor by Portia's divine and generous wit. In virtue, then, of its emotion, the play falls outside the range of comedy in the sense in which comedy is the vehicle of the drama of ideas; since to such comedy it is vital that it should remain unemotional, should see all things in the dry light of reason unperverted by the heart, and should hold the sympathies aloof that its flight may be all the more deadly to the brain.

It is probable enough that *The Merchant of Venice* has a divided purpose. Literary types rarely offer their pure form in concrete examples. But in the total impression left by the play it is the emotional and not the critical attitude towards life which predominates. . . . [It is not a 'comedy of ideas' but a 'comedy of emotions', or 'tragicomedy' in Elizabethan terminology.]

If, then, *The Merchant of Venice* is to be regarded as primarily a tragicomedy, a drama of emotional stress with a happy ending, and only secondarily a comedy, a drama of the criticism of life, the next question which claims an answer is: What precisely is the emotional issue which is raised and which demands our sympathies in the play? It is probably true of all emotional drama that it tends to present its issue as a conflict, for this is an obvious and natural scheme for the arrangement of human characters set over against each other and answering speech by speech upon the narrow boards of a stage. It is certainly true of the Elizabethan drama, which had always behind it the tradition of the morality, with its serried array of vices and of virtues, warring for the soul of man. The theme of *The Merchant of Venice*, in particular, is readily to be formulated as a conflict. It is a conflict in the moral order, between the opposing principles of Love and Hate. That Shylock, whetting his knife upon his soul, stands for the principle of Hate is plain enough. Hate, indeed, is almost the first word that we have from his mouth –

I hate him for he is a Christian [1.3.42]

And when he thinks himself on the point of victory and is pressed to give a reason for his action, he will give none –

More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing  
I bear Antonio [4.1.60–1]

Of course Shylock's hate is to be explained and traced to its roots some of which, at least, lie rather in what he has suffered than in what in himself he is. Shakespeare aimed to make a man and by no means a mere moral abstraction. But it is impossible to understand the play without careful guard against that favourite modern heresy of interpretation which sees so deep into the heart of Shylock that, in fact, it converts him from the villain into the hero. . . . I am not concerned to deny that Shakespeare himself was led by the logic of facts, and in the teeth of his own dramatic arrangement, to give some handle for this misunderstanding of Shylock. One cannot forget the famous vindication of Hebrew humanity with which the wanton raillery of the silly Salarino gets

*the opposing principles of Love and Hate, 1908*

its answer [3.1.53–73]. Certainly Shakespeare saw all round his Shylock. But the play becomes a chaos if the qualifications of Shylock's villainy are allowed to deflect the perception of the fact that after all it is he and none other who stands for the villain in its structure. One must, of course, exercise a little of the historic imagination in judging of an Elizabethan play. There has been a certain evolution of the moral sentiments in the course of three centuries. To the modern *ethos* Antonio spitting upon the usurer's gaberdine is almost a more distasteful figure than the usurer himself, and the notion that even a proven criminal may justly be compelled to change his religion as the price of his life is intolerable. But one is not to suppose that the Elizabethan audience saw things after this kind. . . . [It may] be assumed that the temper of the play chimed in with a popular sentiment towards the chosen people which, in England at least, hardly finds an echo to-day outside the limits of Whitechapel. Nor is the interpretation of Shylock the only case, even in this single comedy, in which the historic imagination is called for. Put Jessica or Bassanio to the test of the finer ethical ideals, and you will find it difficult to justify the conduct of the one in robbing her father's jewel-chest to pay the expenses of her elopement, or the conduct of the other in setting out to retrieve his wasted fortunes by the adventure of a gilded bride, until you remember that *The Merchant of Venice* is not in the realistic manner, and that, with whatever sound humanity it states its main issue, it makes no effort to depart from many of the world-old conventions of romance which it found in its sources among the *novelle*. For Bassanio it may perhaps be added, that 'fair speechless messages' [1.1.164] had already passed between his eyes and Portia's in the days of his bravery, and that he may not have been quite so worldly an adventurer as he chose to represent himself as being to Antonio.

One cannot fail to see that, if Shylock embodies the principle of Hate, Antonio and Portia between them embody that of Love. Antonio will put his 'uttermost' at the service of his friend, and even when he is in the snare, will hold all debts cleared between them if he might but see Bassanio at his death. Portia, in her turn, has, as Lorenzo tells her – 'A noble and a true conceit / Of god-like amity' [3.4.2–3]. For love's sake she defers the consummation of her wedding rites and essays a doubtful enterprise to purchase –

The semblance of her soul  
From out the state of hellish cruelty [3.4.20–1].

Her glorification of 'the quality of mercy' in the trial-scene is the spiritual counterpart to Shylock's dogged insistence on the rights of Hate; and her ultimate triumph, all the more perhaps for the obvious legal quibbles on which it is based, is nothing else than the triumph of Love, in the deliberate preference of equity to rigid justice. For moral and epilogue of the whole you may take the exquisite lines which she speaks as she treads once more her terraces of Belmont in the white moonlight –

How far that little candle throws his beams!  
So shines a good deed in a naughty world. [5.1.90–1].

And what of Antonio's melancholy all this while? What place has it in the happy



ending which this most delectable lady has brought about, with all its after-mirth? Antonio, as I read him, does not put off his melancholy. He bows his thanks over Portia's hand, and stands silent and gravely smiling through the greater part of the frolic with the rings. Even the return of his argosies, inevitable in the winding up of a tragicomedy, leaves him still, I fancy, a sombre figure in the background. For, in fact, Antonio's melancholy preceded the loss of his riches, and I think that it has had very little to do with that, or with the fear of death either, all the time. At the beginning of the play he was going to lose something much dearer to him than riches, his friend Bassanio. Bassanio had just broken to him his intended marriage, and this it was that made him sad. He was not likely to explain to Gratiano or Salarino, but directly they had gone out he turned to Bassanio and showed on what his mind was running in the quick enquiry – [Quotes 1.1.119–121]. Consider, again, the scene described by Salarino at Bassanio's embarking, still before any question of the miscarriage of his vessels can have come to his ears, how – [Quotes 2.8.46–9]. 'I think he only loves the world for him' [2.8.50], says Salarino. Bassanio was merely voyaging a few miles from Venice, but it was to his wedding, and Antonio knew well how hardly the closest intimacies of bachelors survive the coming of a woman's love.

... Antonio's whole attitude is out of harmony with the sunny atmosphere which reigns throughout, and which has its justification in the happy ending to which the audience are presently to be wafted. I am inclined to doubt whether this particular point in the play was intended for the audience at all, and is not rather the intrusion of a personal note, an echo of those disturbed relations in Shakespeare's private life of which the fuller but enigmatic record is to be found in the *Sonnets*. Shakespeare, too, like Antonio, had lost a friend, and had lost him through a woman; nor does it seem to me to be inconsistent with any view which Shakespeare can be supposed to have taken of his art, that he should reserve something behind the arras of a play for his own ear, for the secret consolation of his private trouble. (106–17)

## 54 Algernon Swinburne, Shylock less sinned against than sinning

1909

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From *Shakespeare: Written in 1905 and Now First Published* (London, 1909).

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), poet, critic, and dramatist, was educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. A friend of many of the leading intellectuals of his age, including William Morris, George Meredith, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Edward Burne-Jones, Swinburne wrote several works on Shakespeare. These include ‘The Three Stages of Shakespeare’ (*The Fortnightly Review*, 1875–6), which formed the foundation for his *A Study of Shakespeare* (1880; rev. edn, 1895), and *The Age of Shakespeare* (1908). The following year he published *Shakespeare*, written in 1905, from which the following extract is taken.

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*The Merchant of Venice* is perhaps the greatest and most perfect example of tragi-comedy on record. The tragic figure of Shylock, less sinned against than sinning, is thrilled and vivified by comic as well as terrific touches of character and emotion. His incontinence of lamentation and of rage is not less grotesque than piteous: his atrocity outweighs the balance of his injuries. But here as always Shakespeare is ahead of all men: his plea for righteousness, his claim for manhood, his appeal for charity, could not have been so keen, so profound, so durable in the final impression of their force if they had been put into the mouth of a good Jew, a moral and sentimental sufferer, as now that they find fierce and tigerish utterance from the bloodthirsty lips of a ravenous and murderous usurer. That truth should speak through Shylock was a conception beyond reach of any other dramatist or poet that ever lived. And apart from this dark and splendid central figure, which disappears only to make way for the loveliest imaginable scene of laughter and of love, the charm of the whole poem is actually greater than even the interest of it. Every figure is in its way equally winsome: every scene of laughing prose or smiling poetry is equally delightful. (32)

## 55 William Poel, Shakespeare's Jew and Marlowe's Christians

1909

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From 'Shakespeare's Jew and Marlowe's Christians', in *The Westminster Review*, January 1909; repr. in Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (London, 1913), pp. 69–84.  
For Poel, see No. 40.

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In the opinion of Heinrich Heine, Shylock, as a typical study of Judaism, was merely a caricature.<sup>[1]</sup> If this is a correct estimate of the character, then Shakespeare's Jew is the Elizabethan Christian's notion of an infidel in much the same way as the modern stage Paddy is the Englishman's idea of an Irishman. Shakespeare, in fact, thrusts the conventional usurer of the old Latin comedy into a play of love and chance and money-bags in order to serve the purpose of a stage villain, and calls him a Jew. Shylock is an isolated figure, unsociable, parsimonious, and relentless, who tries to inflict harm on those who envy him his wealth and hate him for his avarice.

Perhaps it is this marked isolation in which the dramatist has placed Shylock that tempts the modern actor to represent him as a victim of religious persecution, and therefore as one who does not merit the misfortune that falls upon him. In this way the figure becomes tragic, and, contrary to the dramatist's intention, is made the leading part; so that when the Jew finally leaves the stage, the interest of the audience goes with him. But if Shakespeare intended his comedy to produce this impression, he was at fault in writing a last act in which every character that appears is evidently not aware that Shylock's defeat was undeserved; nor is there any evidence to show that Shakespeare designed his comedy as a satire on the inhumanity of Christians. How then has it been brought about that, while the exigencies of the drama require Shylock to be the wrongdoer, he now appears on the stage as the one who is wronged?

In the first place, a change of opinion in a nation's religion or politics causes a change in the theatre. New plays are written to give expression to the new sentiment, and the old plays, when revived, must be modified or readjusted to bring them in touch with the new opinions. To meet this marked change in public taste managers and actors are forced to abandon convention. It is useless at such a time to quote authorities. Public opinion is arbitrary, and the genius of a Macklin or a Kean would fail to arouse interest if it were out of sympathy with the newly awakened conscience. A popular actor is tempted, therefore, to show the old figure in the light of the new sentiment, and his impersonation is then set up as a model to which every contemporary candidate for favour is expected to conform.

*Shakespeare's Jew and Marlowe's Christians, 1909*

It must be conceded, also, that our playgoers are rarely familiar with the text of Shakespeare's plays, and thus increased opportunity is given to the actor to overrule the author. Yet this does not explain why an interpretation, quite unjustified by the text, should find favour with many dramatic critics. If a sound judgment and true taste are to prevail among playgoers, criticism should dissociate history from sentiment and discriminate between old conventions and modern innovations. Few critics, however, care to separate themselves from the opinions of their day; in fact, so far as Shakespeare's plays are concerned, newspaper criticism is often limited to the business of reporting. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the chorus of unanimous approval with which the Press, as well as the public, hailed the new Shylock in the picturesque and sympathetic rendering given at the Lyceum in the early eighties.<sup>[2]</sup>

Even if it be admitted that the terms of opprobrium with which Shylock is accosted by all the Christians in Shakespeare's comedy are unnecessarily harsh, even if it be granted that to Gratiano, Solanio, and Salarino he is the 'dog Jew' [2.8.14], meaning a creature outside the pale of heaven, yet if we read between the lines it is evident that religious differences are not the chief grievance. Shylock is a Jew, therefore a money-lender; a moneylender, therefore rich; rich, yet a miser, and therefore of little value to the community, which remains unbenefited by his usurious loans. This, in the eyes of the Christian merchants, is the real significance of the word Jew. The Catholic Church, by forbidding Christians to take interest, had unintentionally given the Jews a monopoly of the money-market, but with it that odium which attaches to the usurer. This point of view can be specially illustrated by Marlowe's Barabas, in *The Jew of Malta*, the precursor of Shylock. Barabas makes no secret as to the unpopularity of his profession:

I have been zealous in the Jewish faith,  
Hard-hearted to the poor, a covetous wretch,  
That would for lucre's sake have sold my soul.  
A hundred for a hundred I have ta'en;  
And now for store of wealth may I compare  
With all the Jews in Malta. [4.1.54-9]

His riches are blessings reserved exclusively for his race:

And thus are we on every side enriched:  
These are the blessings promised to the Jews. [1.1.103-4]

Rather had I a Jew be hated thus,  
Than pitied in a Christian poverty: [1.1.112-13]

Aye, wealthier far than any Christian. [1.1.126]

What more may Heaven do for earthly man  
Than thus to pour out plenty in their laps. [1.1.105-6]

This, then, was the Christian notion of the Jew in Shakespeare's time, and while we

have no reason for supposing that it was Shakespeare's also, there is enough evidence to show that for the purpose of his story the dramatist adopted the prevalent opinion that the Jew was a man who lived solely for his wealth. In the face of this knowledge it is difficult to understand the opinion of some commentators that Shylock was intended as a protest against Marlowe's 'mere monster'. The similarity between Shylock and Barabas has been pointed out by Dr Ward.<sup>[3]</sup> Both love money, both hoard their wealth, both starve their servants to save expense, both defend their religion as well as their usury, both love to despoil the Christians and taunt them with their lack of fairness. Of course, every good critic admits that there are two sides to an argument. Even Sir Walter Scott, when reviewing a book, confesses to his son-in-law that his criticism might have been very different were the mandate *déchirer*. And those who want to defame Shylock's character will not find it a difficult thing to do. The following illustration of the character is given after the manner of a schoolboy's paraphrase:

Shylock thinks it folly to lend money without interest. Jacob was blessed for thriving, even if he prospered by cunning means, and to thrive by any means short of stealing is to deserve God's blessing. Shylock can make money as quickly as ewes and rams can breed. He will show how generous he can be towards Christians by lending Antonio money without asking a farthing of interest, provided Antonio consents, by way of a joke, to lose a pound of his flesh if he should fail to repay the money on a special day; and this pound to be taken from any part of his body which Shylock may choose, meaning, no doubt, nearest to the heart, so as to ensure death. Yet Bassanio need have no anxiety about the safety of his friend's life, because human flesh is not a marketable commodity like mutton or beef.

Shylock has a servant who eats too much, and is so lazy that the Jew is glad to part with him to the impecunious Bassanio, in the hope that Launcelot will help to squander his new master's 'borrowed purse'. For a similar reason he will himself go to Bassanio's feast, although his religion forbids him to eat with Christians. His daughter is not to have any pleasure from the masque, but to shut herself up in the house that no sound of Christian masquerading may reach her ears. His last words to her are in praise of thrift.

The Jew's first exclamation on hearing that Jessica cannot be found is that he has lost a diamond worth 2,000 ducats. He would like to see his daughter dead at his feet if only he can have again the jewels that are in her ears, and find the ducats in her coffin. It is heartrending to think how Jessica has been squandering his treasures, and of the additional loss to him in having to pay Tubal for trying to find the girl; yet it is gratifying to hear of Antonio's misfortunes; and since the merchant is likely to become bankrupt it will be well to fee an officer in readiness to arrest him the moment the time of the bond expires. If only Antonio can be got out of the way, Shylock will be able to make as much money as ever he likes. With this thought to console him he goes to the synagogue to say his prayers.

When Antonio is arrested, Shylock demands the utmost penalty of the law because of a 'lodged hate and a certain loathing' he bears the bankrupt. No amount of money will tempt him to forgo his rights, and the letter of the law must

be observed in every detail; not even a surgeon must be allowed on the spot in the hope of saving this lend-you-money-for-nothing merchant's life. When Portia frustrates his purpose and he finds the law against him, he can still ask that the loan be repaid 'thrice' (Portia and Bassanio thought 'twice' a sufficiently tempting offer). And when Portia points out that, as an alien, who has deliberately plotted to take the life of a Christian, Shylock's own life is forfeited, as well as the whole of his wealth, he still demands the return of his principal.

Now if we go back to the Latin Comedies and consider the origin of the money-lender, we find a type of character similar to that of Shylock. Molière's Harpagon, who is modelled on the miser of Plautus,<sup>[4]</sup> has a strong resemblance to Barabas and to Shylock, although Shylock is undoubtedly the most human. Reference has already been made to the likeness between Barabas and Shylock, and it needs but a few illustrations to show the resemblance between the English and the French miser. Both are money-lenders, who when asked for a loan declare that it is necessary for them to borrow the sum required from a friend. Sheridan makes little Moses do the same.<sup>[5]</sup> Harpagon exclaims to his servant: 'Ah wretch you are eating up all my wealth', and Shylock says the same thing to Launcelot. [2.5.56] Harpagon's 'It is out of Christian charity that he covets my money' is not unlike the reproach of Shylock, 'He was wont to lend out money for a Christian courtesy!' [3.1.49] And 'justice, impudent rascal, will soon give me satisfaction!' is with Shylock 'the Duke shall grant me justice!' [3.3.8] While if we compare the words which Molière puts into the mouths of those who revile the miser, they suggest the taunts thrown at Shylock. 'I tell you frankly that you are the laughing-stock of everybody, and that nothing delights people more than to make game of you'; has its equivalent in the speech 'Why, all the boys in Venice follow him,' [2.8.23-4] etc. And 'never does anyone mention you, but under the name of Jew and usurer,' tallies with Launcelot's 'My master is a very Jew' [3.1.59-73]. Other instances might be quoted.

Of course it cannot be overlooked that Shakespeare has given Shylock one speech of undoubted power which silences all his opponents. For while the Christians are unconscious of any wrongdoing on their side towards the Jew, Shylock complains loudly and bitterly of the indignities thrust upon him by the Christians, and that often-quoted speech beginning 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' [3.1.59-73] he complains with an insistence which certainly claims consideration. Now in so far as Shylock resents the want of tolerance shown him by the Christians, he is in the right and Shakespeare is with him; but when he tries to justify his method of retaliation and schemes to take Antonio's life, not simply in order to revenge the indignities thrust upon him, but also that he may put more money into his purse, Shylock is in the wrong and Shakespeare is against him. For it is obvious that Shylock does not seek the lives of Gratiano, Solanio, or Salarino, the men who called him the 'dog Jew,' or the life of the man who ran away with his daughter, but of the merchant who lends out money gratis, who helps the unfortunate debtors, and who exercises generosity and charity. Whatever blame attaches to the Christians on the score of intolerance, Antonio is the least offender, except in so far as it touches Shylock's pocket. And when Shylock the usurer asserts that a Christian is no better than a Jew, he forgets that Christianity, in its original conception and purpose,

## William Poel

forbade the individual to prey on his fellow-creatures; and this is the Christianity which Antonio practises.

Finally it is the intention of the comedy, as Shakespeare has designed it, to illustrate the consequence of a too rigid adherence to the letter of the law. The terms of the bond to which Shylock clings so tenaciously, and for which he demands unquestioning obedience, ultimately endanger his own life and with it the whole of his property. Shylock falls a victim to his own plot in the same way that Barabas tumbles into his own burning caldron; but the Christians spare the Jew's life and half his wealth is restored to him. And restored to him by Antonio 'the bankrupt,' [4.1.112] who is still himself greatly in need of money. That Shylock must in return for this mercy deny his faith is not in the eyes of the Christian a punishment or even an act of malice, but a means of salvation.

The basis, then, of Shakespeare's comedy, it is contended, is a romantic story of love and adventure. It shows us a lovable and high-minded heroine, her adventurous and fervent lover, and his unselfish friend, together with their merry companions and sweethearts. And into this happy throng, for the purpose of having a villain, the dramatist thrusts the morose and malicious usurer, who is intended to be laughed at and defeated, not primarily because he is a Jew, but because he is a curmudgeon; thus the prodigal defeats the miser.

If we look more closely into the two plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare, and compare not only Barabas with Shylock, but also Marlowe's Christians with those of Shakespeare, we find a dissimilarity in the portraiture of the Christians so marked that it is impossible to ignore the idea that Shakespeare, perhaps, wished to protest not against Marlowe's 'inhuman Jew,' but against his pagan Christians. The variance, in fact, is too striking to be accidental, as the following table will show:

### THE FAMOUS TRAGEDY OF THE RICH JEW OF MALTA.

[1]The play is named after the Jew who owns the argosies.

[2]The Christians take forcible possession of all the Jew's wealth.

[3]The Jew upbraids the Christians for quoting Scripture to defend their roguery.

[4]The Christians break faith with the Turks, and also with the Jew.

[5]The Jew's daughter Abigail rescues her father's money from the Christians.

[6]The Jew's servant helps his master to cheat the Christians.

[7]Two Christians try to cajole the Jew of his daughter, and die victims to his treachery.

[8]Abigail becomes a Christian and is poisoned by her father.

### THE MOST EXCELLENT HISTORY OF THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

[1]The play is named after the Christian who owns the argosies.

[2]The Christians ask a loan of the Jew on business terms.

[3]The Christian upbraids the Jew for quoting Scripture to defend his roguery.

[4]A Christian Court upholds the Jew's claims to his bond.

[5]Jessica gives away her father's money to the Christians.

[6]Launcelot leaves his master to join the Christians.

[7]Lorenzo elopes with Jessica, and finally inherits the Jew's wealth.

[8]Jessica becomes a Christian and is happy ever after.

*Shakespeare's Jew and Marlowe's Christians*, 1909

[9]The Jew is the means of saving the Christians from the Turks.

[9]Portia saves the Christian from the Jew.

[10]The Christians are accessory to the Jew's death, which is an act of treachery on their part.

[10]The Christians spare the Jew's life, which is an act of mercy on their part.

... Now in so far as *The Jew of Malta* makes fun of friars and nuns, it would be considered legitimate amusement by a Protestant audience. ... But Marlowe goes further than this. He attacks Christianity wantonly and aggressively, not only by portraying Barabas's contempt for the Christians, but by making the Christians contemptible in themselves and wanting in all those virtues which were upheld in the newly accessible Gospels. They are without honour and chivalry or any sense of justice or loyalty. They are false and treacherous to Jew and Turk alike, and Barabas can well say of them:

For I can see no fruits in all their faith,  
But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride,  
Which methinks fits not their profession. [1.1.114–16]

Further, the Christians take by force the Jew's money to pay the city's tribute to the Turks, which after all is not paid, the Christians keeping the money for themselves. It is but the bare truth that Barabas states when he mutters:

Who, of mere charity and Christian truth,  
To bring me to religious purity,  
And as it were in catechising sort,  
To make me mindful of my mortal sins,  
Against my will, and whether I would or no,  
Seized all I had, and thrust me out o' doors. [2.3.71–6]

And Marlowe also makes Barabas say, indignant at the Christians' hypocrisy:

Is theft the ground of your religion? [1.2.96]  
What, bring you scripture to confirm your wrongs?  
Preach me not out of my possessions. [1.2.110–11]

Scepticism is rampant throughout *The Jew of Malta*, and Marlowe flaunts his opinions before a theatre full of Christians. Not that it is contended that Marlowe was himself an atheist, but in *The Jew of Malta* he seems, perhaps out of a spirit of retaliation for the wanton attacks made upon him, to be bent on exposing to ridicule the upholders of the orthodox faith. In Marlowe's *Faustus* the good angel, the aged pilgrim, and the final repentance satisfy the religious conscience, but his later play has no such compensations. The boast of Barabas that, 'some Jews are wicked as *all* Christians are,' [1.2.113] passes unchallenged.

Now it is unlikely that any member of Elizabeth's Court, any Protestant nobleman who was responsible for upholding the reformed faith, much less that any Catholic,



## William Poel

could have been present at the performance of this play without protesting against the poet's attitude towards Christianity. Nor is it probable that the Lord Chamberlain's servants would overlook Marlowe's taunts at the national religion spoken from the citizens' playhouse. So that the poet-player whose sonnets were being circulated in the houses of the nobility, whose patron was the Earl of Southampton, the friend of Essex, and who had begun to be talked about at Court, might with advantage to himself expose the other side of the picture, and defend the abused Christians.

It remained then for Shakespeare to show that Christians, if they hated the infidel, were not in themselves contemptible. In addition to her many fascinations of mind and person, Portia possesses in an eminent degree a sense of honour and a love of mercy. The obligations imposed upon her by her father are religiously observed. Even when her lover is choosing the caskets, and a glance would have put him out of his misery, her attitude towards him is uncompromising. Later on she upholds the Jew's plea for justice, while at the same time she urges the more divine attribute of mercy.

Where Shakespeare, however, differs from Marlowe most strikingly is in the character of the Merchant after whom the comedy is named. Barabas has boasted that

he from whom my most advantage comes  
Shall be my friend.  
This is the life we Jews are used to lead. [5.2.113–15]

Then he naïvely adds:

And reason, too, for Christians do the like. [5.2.116]

Now the dearest object of affection in the world for Antonio is Bassanio, and it is the knowledge that his beloved friend has a rival for his love in Portia, which causes Antonio's sadness; yet he not only gives up his companion ungrudgingly to the enjoyment of greater happiness, but provides him with the necessary means; and for this purpose he signs a perilous bond with his bitterest foe. Of necessity he dislikes Shylock, whose debtors he has so often saved from ruin. With Jessica's flight he had nothing to do. He certainly never sanctioned it. Moreover, when misfortune comes upon him he has no desire to escape from the penalty of the bond, and when he himself is in poverty he saves from a similar calamity a man who hates him. In face of these facts it is difficult to understand why Heine should consider Antonio unworthy to tie Shylock's shoelaces!

Again, Bassanio is often called a fortune-hunter, but without justification. He knew that he enjoyed the esteem and affection of Portia while her father was yet alive. The 'speechless messages' [1.1.164] of her eyes invited his return to Belmont. On his arrival he finds that she can no longer dispose of herself, and yet, unlike most of the other suitors, he does not on that account withdraw: he wins her because he loves her and knows that love is worth more than gold or silver. When he hears of Antonio's danger he rushes to his friend's side to offer his own life to save him. It is to be noticed also that Portia's esteem for Antonio's openly proclaimed virtues is drawn from a comparison with those of Bassanio. They are by no means contemptible.

Jessica, again, who must be counted among the Christians, finds life at home too

hopelessly rigid to be longer endured. There is not a word in the text to justify the belief that her father loves her, apart from his own needs. She is expected to guard his gold and silver and to listen to his discussions with Tubal and Chus about the hated Antonio and his bond. So the girl must look after herself if she is to enjoy happiness in the future. Lorenzo knows that to allow Jessica to forsake her father and to rob him is a sin towards Heaven. He prays for punishment to be withheld because she has married a Christian, and, to his credit, it must be acknowledged that he is unconscious of any hypocrisy. As for the 'braggart' Gratiano and the remaining Christians, we tolerate them because they love Antonio, the man who of all others most deserves our respect. Perhaps as Christians they insist too much on their moral superiority, but this is natural after Marlowe's play had been seen on the stage.

Of course, there are critics who will hold that Marlowe's Christians, in some respects, are more life-like than Shakespeare's. Perhaps if *The Merchant of Venice* had been written while Marlowe was alive, he would have challenged Shakespeare to uphold that in matters of conduct where money interests were involved there was any marked distinction between the morals of the believer and the unbeliever. Marlowe might have contended that out of one hundred Christians ninety-nine would act as his Governor of Malta has done, though he was a Knight of St. John. . . .

Shakespeare, probably, would have answered Marlowe's objection with the assurance that there still remained the odd Christian out of every hundred to be reckoned with, and that he himself was more interested in showing the world what men ought to be like than what they actually were. But if Shakespeare preferred to live outside the walls of reality, he did so only in imagination, for he must have had a very practical knowledge of men's dealings with each other. No doubt our great dramatist was not eager to break with conventions or to imitate Marlowe by saying unpalatable truths about the Christians at a time when he himself was still seeking the favour of Elizabeth's Court. (69-84)

## 56 E. E. Stoll, Shylock a comic villain

1911

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From 'Shylock', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 4 (1911), pp. 236–79.

Elmer Edgar Stoll (1874–1959), an undergraduate at Harvard, received his PhD from Munich University in 1904. Most of his lengthy career was spent at the University of Minnesota where he was Professor of English. Stoll wrote prolifically on Shakespeare, his works including *Othello: An Historical and Comparative Study* (Minneapolis, MN, 1915); *Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study* (Minneapolis, MN, 1919); *Shakespeare Studies, Historical and Comparative in Method* (New York, 1927; rev. edn, 1942); *Poets and Playwrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Spenser, Milton* (Minneapolis, MN, 1930); *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare: A Study in Dramatic Contrast and Illusion* (Cambridge, 1933); *Shakespeare and other Masters*, (Cambridge, 1940); and *From Shakespeare to Joyce* (New York, 1944). Eschewing biographical and subjective approaches, Stoll believed that drama must be placed within the context of the times in which it was written and theatrically produced. In his 'Anachronism in Shakespeare Criticism', *Modern Philology*, 7 (April 1910), Stoll wrote: 'Criticism forgets that Shakespeare wrote in the sixteenth century', arguing that 'The function of criticism is not to make the poet in question the contemporary of the reader, but to make the reader for the time being a contemporary of the poet' (p. 1). Stoll subsequently enlarged this essay in his *Shakespeare Studies*: see No. 63 below.

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### *Shylock*

His beard was red; his face was made  
Not much unlike a witches.  
His habit was a Jewish gown,  
That would defend all weather;  
His chin turned up, his nose hung down,  
And both ends met together.

So Shylock was made up, according to the report of the old actor Thomas Jordan in 1664, on a stage that was still swayed by the tradition of Alleyn and Burbage. Macklin kept all of this – nose and chin enough he had of his own – when, in the forties of the

eighteenth century, he ventured a red hat in early Venetian style for the old 'orange-tawney',<sup>1</sup> into the bargain. 'By Jove! Shylock in a black wig!' exclaimed a first-rater as Kean, seventy years after, appeared in the wings of Drury Lane for his first performance. And the part was played by Sir Henry Irving, in our day, in a grey beard and a black cap. Changes in costume (on the stage at least) are but the outward and visible tokens of change. Macklin's grotesque ferocity gave place to Kean's vast and varied passion, and it, in turn, to Macready's and Irving's Hebraic picturesqueness and pathos. Taste had changed, and racial antipathy, in art if not in life, had faded away. Maklin, in an age when a part must be either comic or tragic, and not both together, dropped the butt and kept the villain, and this he played with such effect that the audience shrank visibly from him, during the play and after it, King George II lost sleep. Kean made the Jew an injured human being, and outraged father. And Macready and Irving lifted him, in the words of Edmund Booth, 'out of the darkness of his native element of revengeful selfishness into the light of the venerable Hebrew, the martyr, the avenger'.<sup>[2]</sup>

With this movement criticism has kept pace, or has gone before. Macklin's conception is in sympathy with Rowe's; Kean's with Hazlitt's and Skottowe's; and Macready and Irving take the great company of the later critics with them in their notions of racial pathos, and despite the declarations of a Spedding, a Furnivall, and a Furness,<sup>3</sup> in their plea for toleration. Few critics have recognized the prejudices of the times, the manifest indications of the poet's purpose, and his thoroughly Elizabethan taste for comic villainy. The few are mostly foreigners – Brandes, Brandl, Creizenach, Morsbach, and Sarcey. Others take account of this point of view only to gainsay it. 'We breathed a sigh of relief', says the *New York Nation* (as if the worst were over) in a review of Professor Baker's book on Shakespeare [15 August 1907], 'when we found him confessing his belief that Shakespeare did not intend Shylock to be a comic character'; and the distinguished critics Bradley and Raleigh may be supposed to have done the same. As much as fifteen years ago Professor Wendell expressed the opinion that Shylock was rightly represented on the stage in Shakespeare's time as a comic character, and rightly in our time as sympathetically human; but the dramatist's intention he left in the dark. Undertaking, perhaps, to abolish this antinomy and to bridge the gap between Shakespeare's time and ours, Professor Schelling perceives in Shylock, quite subtly, a grotesqueness bordering on laughter and a pathos bordering on tears.<sup>4</sup>

The dramatist's intention – that, I must believe, is the only matter of importance. A work of art is not merely a point of departure for the mind which perceives it, like the preacher's text. It is not a sacred relic, a lover's token, a fetish, which conjures up more or less irrelevant spiritual and ecstatic states. Yet such it is ordinarily taken to be. 'A work of art is what it is to us', wrote a distinguished man of letters not long since, 'not what it was a hundred years ago, or two hundred years ago, or even to its author. His view of it does not concern us except as a scientific curiosity. Does it move us, does it help us, does it delight us here and now? If not, it has artistically no value.' Certainly, as for the last; but the fact that it does move us, help us, and delight us, is not all that determines artistic value. If it were, many qualities and distinctions that are the substance of criticism, would fade away. The unique quality of a work of art, the thing which the impressionistic critic is supposed above all to seek and strive for, – wherein does it reside if not in the author's intention as cause, in our bosom as effect? And the critic who is unwilling

to be delighted today with that at which others shall be offended tomorrow, will not disdain to look narrowly, in the light of history, to see whether his delight has a cause, or whether, proceeding only out of his own bosom, it is irrelevant and vain. It may very well be, as M. Anatole France insists, that critical metaphysics aside, we are all reasonably aware, in principle if not in practice, of the difference between getting an idea from an author and getting it from ourselves; and if the author is to say one thing, that his Shylock is a villain, having, according to his word, already made him such, and we are to take it that he says that Shylock is a martyr and an avenger, it matters little, it seems to me, who it is that is helping, moving and delighting us, Shakespeare or Kotzebue. Our passions and preconceptions overwhelm the poet. And he now is Dowden, Swinburne, Bradley, Raleigh, indeed, not himself. Yet who cares, or ever cared, to read the sonnets of Michelangelo's brother's grandson? Given to the world for the poet's own, they were an adaptation to the taste of a later age. Scholarship, half a century ago, rescued the poet himself,<sup>5</sup> and the taste of the ages may adapt itself to him. Scholarship is all that can rescue Shakespeare.

To get at Shakespeare's intention is, after all, not hard. As with popular drama, great or small, he who runs may read – he who yawns and scuffles in the pit may understand. The time is past for speaking of Shakespeare as impartial or inscrutable; study of his work and that of his fellows as an expression of Elizabethan ideas and technique is teaching us better. The puzzle whether the *Merchant of Venice* is not meant for tragedy, for instance, clears up when, as Professor Baker suggests, we forget Sir Henry Irving's acting, and remember that the title, and the hero, is not the 'Jew of Venice' as he would lead us to suppose, that the play itself is, like such a comedy as *Measure for Measure* or *Much Ado*, not clear of the shadow of the fear of death, and that in closing with an Act where Shylock and his knife are forgotten in the unraveling of the mystery between the lovers and the crowning of Antonio's happiness in theirs, it does not, from the Elizabethan point of view, perpetrate an anticlimax, but, like many another Elizabethan play, carries to completion what is a story for story's sake. 'Shylock is, and has always been, the hero', says Professor Schelling. But why, then, does Shakespeare drop his hero out of the play for good before the fourth Act is over? It is a trick which he never repeats – a trick, I am persuaded, of which he is not capable.

Hero or not, Shylock is given a villain's due. His is the heaviest penalty to be found in all the pound of flesh stories, including that in *Il Pecorone*, which served as a model for this. Not in the Servian, the Persian, the African version, or even that of the *Cursor Mundi* does the money-lender suffer like Shylock – impoverishment, sentence of death, and an outrage done to his faith from which Jews were guarded even by decrees of German Emperors and Roman pontiffs. It was in the old play, perhaps, but that Shakespeare retained it shows his indifference to the amenities, to say the least, as regards either Jews or Judaism. Shylock's griefs excite no commiseration; indeed, as they press upon him they are barbed with gibes and jeers. The lot of Coriolanus is not dissimilar, but we know that the poet is with him. We know that the poet is not with Shylock, for on that head, in this play as in every other, the impartial, inscrutable poet leaves little or nothing to suggestion or surmise. As is his custom elsewhere, by the comments of the good characters, by the method pursued in the disposition of scenes, and by the downright avowals of soliloquy, he constantly sets us right.

All the characters who come in contact with Shylock except Tubal, among them being those of his own house – his servant and his daughter – have a word or two to say on the subject of his character, and never a good one. And in the same breath they spend on Bassanio and Antonio, his enemies, nothing but words of praise. Praise or blame, moreover, is, after Shakespeare's fashion, usually in the nick of time to guide the hearer's judgment. Lest the Jew should make too favorable an impression by his Scripture quotations, Antonio observes that the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose; lest the Jew's motive in foregoing interest, for once in his life, should seem like the kindness Antonio takes it to be, Bassanio avows that he likes not fair terms and a villain's mind; and once the Jew has caught the Christian on the hip, every one, from Gaoler to Duke, has words of horror for him and of compassion for his victim. As for the second artifice, the ordering of the scenes is such as to enforce this contrast. First impressions are momentous, every playwright knows (and no one better than Shakespeare himself), particularly for the purpose of ridicule. Launcelot and Jessica, in separate scenes, are introduced before Shylock reaches home, that, hearing their story, we may side with them, and, when the old curmudgeon appears, may be moved to laughter as he complains of Launcelot's gormandizing, sleeping, and rending apparel out, and as he is made game of by the young conspirators to his face. Still more conspicuous is this care when Shylock laments over his daughter and his ducats. Lest then by any means the tender-hearted should grieve, Salanio reports his outcries – in part word for word – two scenes in advance, as matter of mirth to himself and all the boys in Venice. And as for the third artifice, that a sleepy audience may not make the mistake of the cautious critic and take the villain for the hero, Shakespeare is at pains to label the villain by an aside at the moment the hero appears on the boards:

I hate him for he is a Christian,  
But more that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis, and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice [1.3.42–45]

Those are his motives, confessed repeatedly [1.3.43f; 3.1.55f, 133; 3.3.2, and Antonio's words at 1.3.22ff]; and either one brands him as a villain more unmistakably in that day, as we shall see, than in ours. Of the indignities which he has endured he speaks, too, and of revenge; but of none of these has he anything to say at the trial. There he pleads his oath, perjury to his soul should he break it, his 'lodged hate', or his 'humor'; but here to himself and to Tubal – 'were he out of Venice I can make what merchandise I will' [3.1.134] – he tells, in the thick of the action, the unvarnished truth. As with Shakespeare's villains generally, Aaron, Iago, or Richard III, only what they say concerning their purposes aside or to their confidants can be relied upon; and Shylock's oath, or his horror of perjury, is belied . . . by his clutching at thrice the principal when the pound of flesh escapes him, just as is his money-lender's ruse of borrowing the avowed cash from 'a friend' (noted as such by Moses in the *School for Scandal*)<sup>[6]</sup> by his going home 'to purse the ducats straight.' His arguments, too, are given a specious, not to say grotesque, coloring. Hazlitt and other critics say that in argument Shylock has the best of it: 'What if my house be troubled with a rat / And I be pleas'd to give *ten* thousand ducats / To

have it banned?' [4.1.44–6]. This rat is a human being, but the only thing to remark upon in Shylock's opinion, is his willingness to squander ten thousand ducats on it. Even in Hazlitt's day, moreover, a choice of 'carrion flesh' in preference to ducats could not be plausibly compared as a 'humor' with an aversion to pigs or the bag-pipe, or defended as a right by the analogy of holding slaves [see 4.1.50, 55–60, 90; 3.1.54]; nor could the practice of interest-taking find a warrant in Jacob's pastoral trickery while in the service of Laban; least of all in the day when Sir John Hawkins, who initiated the slave-trade with the Earls of Pembroke and Leicester and the Queen herself for partners, bore on the arms which were granted him for his exploits a demi-Moor,<sup>7</sup> proper, in chains, and in the day when the world at large still held interest-taking to be but theft. Very evidently, moreover, Shylock is discomfited by Antonio's question 'Did he take interest?' for he falters and stumbles in his reply – 'No, not take interest, not as you would say, / Directly, interest', – [1.3.76] and is worsted, in the eyes of the audience if not in his own, by the use of the old Aristotelian argument of the essential barrenness of money,<sup>[8]</sup> still gospel in Shakespeare's day in the second question:

Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams? [1.3.90]

For his answer is meant for nothing better than a piece of complacent shamelessness:

I cannot tell: I make it breed as fast [1.3.91]

Only twice does Shakespeare seem to follow Shylock's pleadings and reasonings with any sympathy – 'Hath a dog money?' in the first scene in which he appears, and 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' in the third act – but a bit too much has been made of this. Either plea ends in such fashion as to alienate the audience. To Shylock's reproaches the admirable Antonio, . . . praised and honored by every one but Shylock, retorts, secure in his virtue, that he is just as like to spit on him and spurn him again. And Shylock's celebrated justification of his race runs headlong into a justification of his villainy: – 'The villainy which you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction' [3.1.76]. 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' [3.1.61] and he proceeds to show that your Jew is no less than a man, and as such has a right, not to respect or compassion as the critics of a century have had it, but to revenge. Neither large nor lofty are his claims. Quite as vigorously and, in that day, with as much reason, the detestable and abominable Aaron defends his race and color, and Edmund, the dignity of bastards. The worst of his villains Shakespeare allows to plead their cause: their confidences in soliloquy, if not, as here, slight touches in the plea itself, sufficiently counteract any too favorable impression. This, on the face of it, is a plea for indulging in revenge with all its rigors; not a word is put in for the nobler side of Jewish character; and in lending Shylock his eloquence Shakespeare is but giving the devil his due.<sup>9</sup>

By all the devices of Shakespeare's dramaturgy, then, Shylock is proclaimed, as by the triple repetition of a crier, to be the villain, a comic villain, though, or butt. Nor does the poet let pass any of the prejudices of that day which would heighten this impression. A miser, a moneylender, a Jew, – all three had from time immemorial been objects of popular detestation and ridicule, whether in life or on the stage. The union of them in

one person is the rule in Shakespeare's day, both in plays and in 'character'-writing: to the popular imagination a moneylender was a sordid miser with a hooked nose. So it is in the acknowledged prototype of Shylock, Marlowe's 'bottle-nosed' monster, Barabas, the Jew of Malta. Though more of a villain, he has the same traits of craft and cruelty, the same unctuous friendliness hiding a thirst for a Christian's blood, the same thirst for blood outreaching his greed of gold, and the same spirit of unrelieved egoism which thrust aside the claims of his family, his nation, or even his faith. If Barabas fawns like a spaniel when he pleases, grins when he bites, heaves up his shoulders when they call him dog, Shylock, for his part, 'still bears it with a patient shrug' [1.3.110], and 'grows kind' [1.3.179], seeking the Christian's 'love' in the hypocritical fashion of Barabas with the suitors and the friars. If Barabas ignores the interests of his brother Jews, poisons his daughter, 'counts religion but a childish toy', and, in various forms, avows the wish that 'so I live perish may all the world,' Shylock has no word for the generous soul but 'fool' and 'simpleton', and cries, 'fervid patriot' that he is, 'martyr and avenger': 'A diamond gone, cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfort! The curse never fell upon our nation until now. I never felt it till now' [3.1.58-9]. Such is his love of his race, which Professor Raleigh says, is 'deep as life' [No. 51]. And in the next breath he cries, 'the affectionate father': 'Two thousand ducats in that; and other precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear . . . and the ducats in her coffin' [3.1.80-2]. This alternation of daughter and ducats itself comes from Marlowe's play, as well as other ludicrous touches, such as your Jew's stinginess with food and horror of swine-eating, and the confounding of Jew and devil. This last is an old, wide-spread superstition: on the strength of holy writ the Fathers, with the suffrage in late years of Luther, held that the Jews were devils and the synagogue the house of Satan. In both plays it affords the standing joke, in the *Merchant of Venice* nine times repeated. 'Let me say Amen betimes', exclaims Salanio in the midst of his good wishes for Antonio, 'lest the devil cross my prayer, for here he comes in the likeness of a Jew' [3.1.19-20]. And in keeping with these notions Shylock's synagogue is, as Luther devoutly calls it, *ein Teufelsnest*,<sup>[10]</sup> the nest for hatching his plot once he and Tubal and the others of this 'tribe' can get together. 'Go, go, Tubal', he cries in the unctious of his guile, 'and meet me at our synagogue; go, good Tubal, at our synagogue, Tubal!' [3.1.119-20] It is highly probable, moreover, that Shylock wore the red hair and beard . . . from the beginning, as well as the bottle-nose of Barabas. So Judas was made up from of old, and in their immemorial orange-tawny, highcrowned hats, and 'Jewish gaberdines', the very looks of the two usurers welcomed horror and derision. In both plays the word Jew, itself a badge of opprobrium, is constantly in use instead of the proper name in question and as a byword for cruelty and cunning.

In other Elizabethan plays the Jew fares still worse. . . . [Stoll discusses the presentation of the Jew in the anonymous play *Timon*, Mammon in Jack Drum's *Entertainment*, Pisaro in Haughton's *Englishmen for my Money*, Zariph in Day's *Travels of Three English Gentlemen*, and with earlier examples: Wilson's *Three Ladies of London* (1583), the anonymous *Selimus* (1588), Rowley's *Search for Money* (1607), and the English mystery plays.]

In the Elizabethan drama and character writing, then, the Jew is both money-lender and miser, a villain who hankers after the Christians' blood, a gross egoist, even an atheist, though charged with dealings with the devil, and at the same time a butt, a



hook-nosed niggard. A similar spirit of rude caricature and boisterous burlesque, with even less of characterization, prevails in the treatment of the Jews in early popular drama on the Continent. Such is the soil from which the figure of Shylock grew. For everything in Shakespeare is a growth, and strikes root deep in the present and the past, in stage tradition and in human life. The tradition having been examined, it now remains only to examine the opinions, or antipathies, of the time. . . . (249)

[Stoll surveys anti-Semitism in Europe from the Middle Ages to the 17th century among leading lawyers, theologians, and scholars, including Luther, Giordano Bruno, Coke, Jeremy Taylor, Robert South, and in popular opinion, expressed as 'abhorrence and inhuman contempt and ridicule' (249–61).]

Shylock, we do not forget, was also a usurer. Dr. Honigmann, who is of those who interpret the *Merchant of Venice* as a plea for toleration, says that in Shakespeare's day the word did not carry with it any stigma. Never was opinion more mistaken. By laws civil and ecclesiastical, usury – that is, the exaction of interest of any sort – was a crime. With expanding trade and manufacture the practice was widening, but no one approved of it in principle. . . . (261) [Instances given.]

. . . Shylock was both money-lender and Jew. In him are embodied two of the deepest and most widely prevalent social antipathies of two thousand years, still sanctioned, in Shakespeare's day, by the teachings of religion. What was religious in them Shakespeare probably shared, like any other easy-going churchman, but all that was popular and of the people was part and parcel of his breath and blood.

It is impossible to undertake a minute and particular refutation. To show that Shakespeare is entering a plea, Shylock has on the one hand been conceived as a good man, much abused; and on the other hand as a bad man made bad. The misconception in the first case is so gross – as Professor Schelling has said, so preposterous – that we will not linger upon it. It is the result of reading Shakespeare as if he wrote but yesterday. Shakespeare, as we have seen, takes pains with first impressions and general effects, and is careless of detail: if the detail is important, it is repeated or expatiated upon. Modern poets, as Browning, Ibsen and Maeterlinck, frame characters and plots that are problems and puzzles, in which detail is everything. . . . If we lose a word or a look, we lose the meaning of the whole. Turning straight from these to Shakespeare, we are likely to lose the meaning of the whole in our eagerness to catch every wandering word or look. Clues to the situation are found in matters such as the bits of satire in which Shylock, like Barabas, lets fling at the ways of Christians, which one might as wisely take for one's leading-strings as the gibes of Mephistopheles in *Faust*;<sup>11</sup> or such as the Christians' willingness to feast with the Jew, Launcelot's scruples against running away from him, or the Jew's opinion of Launcelot as a lazy and gluttonous fellow. It is by this process of making the big little and the little big, as in the reflection of a convex mirror, this process of reading into Shakespeare a lot of considerations of which he knew nothing, and reading out of him all his minor improbabilities and inconsistencies, that [some critics] arrive at the conception of Shylock as advocate and avenger, – injured by a daughter ill brought up, they say, by this Launcelot, actuated by a sense of justice, swearing his oath in a paroxysm of moral self-coercion like another William Tell, hating Antonio, not because he is a Christian, but because by lending money gratis he deprives Hebrews of the means of livelihood, and inveigling him into signing the bond that he may humble

him and then by an act of generosity heaps coals of fire on his head! One wonders whether the language of Shakespeare is any longer capable of conveying thought, or is become indeed a cryptogram. The Christians feast the Jew not from respect for him, but to give Lorenzo a chance to run away with Jessica; just as Lorenzo runs away with Jessica and the ducats, not, as François Victor Hugo thinks,<sup>[12]</sup> to satisfy his own or the dramatist's enlightened convictions on the subject of intermarriage, but, so far as the purposes of the play are concerned, to give point to Shylock's revenge. Both are matters of story, of improbabilities not, in modern fashion, smoothed away, or, very likely, if Gosson's play were known, a matter of sources. . . .

Those who will have it that Shylock, though bad, was made so, do violence to Shakespeare in two different quarters. In the first place, they have recourse to an all-pervading irony. Antonio, gentlest and humblest of Shakespeare's heroes, kicking and spitting at Jews and thrusting salvation down their throats, — such, they say, is the spectacle of race-hatred to which Shakespeare points.<sup>13</sup> And those others who will have it that Shylock is a noble spirit brought to shame, carry the irony still farther, into the characterization of Antonio and his friends. He, not Shylock, is the caricature! His virtues are but affectations and shams: his friends are debauchees, parasites, and fribbles! That is, nothing is what it seems; a comedy ending in moonlight blandishments and badinage is a tragedy, and the play written for the customers of the Globe flies over their honest heads to the heights of nineteenth-century transcendentalism! Irony is surely unthinkable unless the author intends it, and here not the slightest trace of such an intention appears. Moreover, a play of Shakespeare's is self-contained; the irony is within it, so to speak, not underneath it. There is irony in the appearance of Banquo at the moment when Macbeth presumes hypocritically to wish for his presence at the feast, or, more obviously still, in the fulfillment of the Witches' riddling oracles, but here is no irony such as Mr. Yeats discovers in the success of Henry V and the failure of Richard II.<sup>14</sup> Shakespeare does not dream that to fail and be a Richard is better than to succeed and be a Henry — or an Antonio. He knows not the ways of modern idealism, which sets the judgment of the world aside, nor the ways of modern artistic expression, which withholds the purport of the higher judgment from the world. No abysmal irony undermines his hard sense and straightforward meaning. Shylock is indeed condemned: Sir Henry Irving took no counsel of the poet when he made his exit from the ducal palace in pathetic triumph.

In the second place, they do violence to Shakespeare in representing Shylock as the product of his environment. The thoughts of men had not begun to run in those channels; the ancient rigors of retribution held fast; men still believed in heaven and hell, in villains and heroes. Though in him there is little of George Eliot's moral rigor, as brought to bear on Tito Melema,<sup>[15]</sup> for instance, Mr. Yeats errs, I think, in his opinion that Shakespeare's plays are, like all great literature, 'written in the spirit of the Forgiveness of Sin'.<sup>[16]</sup> Macbeth is not forgiven, nor is Othello. Richard III and Iago were damned even in the making. And though the shortcomings of Falstaff, Bardolph, Pistol, and Nym serve a while as food for mirth, Shakespeare is in full accord with Henry V as he casts his fellows out of his company and out of his mind, to meet their end in the brothel or on the gallows. Except in comedy, he has not the spirit of forgiveness which, like Uncle Toby's for the Devil,<sup>[17]</sup> comes of mere kindness of heart; and neither in

comedy nor in tragedy has he the forgiveness of our psychological and social drama and novel, where villains and heroes are no more, which comes of fulness of knowledge. Thus he deals with poverty, the hard-handed, greasy, foul-smelling, ignorant and ungrateful multitude for which he so often utters his aversion; and thus he deals with the kindred subject of heredity. If a scoundrel is a bastard, or is of mean birth, the fact is not viewed as an extenuating circumstance, but is turned to a reproach. It may in a sense explain his depravity, but never explain it away. It sets the seal upon it. It confirms the prejudice that there is a difference between noble blood and that of low degree. So, though our hearts are softened by Shylock's recital of the indignities he has suffered, the hearts of the Elizabethans, by a simpler way of thinking, are hardened. It confirms the prejudice that there is a difference between Christian and Jew. . . . [Gives examples.]

Even at the end of the seventeenth century Robert South, as he considers the universal detestation in which, through the ages, Jews have been held, must conclude that there is 'some peculiar vileness essentially fixed in the genius of this people'. It does not occur to him that there is no one to blame, and that the cause of the detestation lies in race-hatred, the incompatibility of temperament and customs. 'What's his reason?' cries Shylock. It is the reason which Antonio – that is, Shakespeare – is not analytical enough to recognize or cynical enough to avow. Steadily the Jewishness of Shylock is kept before us; like Barabas, he loses his name in his nationality – 'the Jew', 'the dog Jew', 'the villain Jew', 'his Jewish heart'; – and it is not merely according to the measure of his villainy that at the end and throughout the play he suffers. Shakespeare himself would have said, with Robert South, that the reason was his 'essential Jewish *vileness*'; but we, who in the light of modern psychology and the history of society are aware that no man and no age can render adequately the reason why they themselves do anything, recognize that the famous reason given by Shylock himself, in the heat of his *ex parte* <sup>[18]</sup> pleading with which Shakespeare so little sympathizes, curiously enough hits the mark.

With this conventionality in mind we may approach the final question, whether villain and butt as Shylock is, he may not also be, as Professor Schelling thinks, a pathetic creation. Mr. Schelling speaks of Shylock as 'semi-humorous,' a character in whom there is a grotesqueness bordering on laughter and a pathos bordering on tears.<sup>19</sup> The union of butt and villain is, as we have seen, common in Shakespeare's day, and it is as old as the stupid devils of the miracle-plays; and the union of villain and droll goes back to the clever devils, those of Dante, too, and medieval painting, and underlies the characterization of most of the villains – Aaron and Iago, for instance – in Shakespearean and Elizabethan drama. But villain, butt, and pathetic figure, all in one, is a thing hard to conceive. Drollery or ludicrousness and pathos coalesce, then as now, in Ibsen's Ulric Brendel<sup>[20]</sup> or in Shakespeare's Mercutio and his clowns; but derision mingling with pathos would be like water poured into the fire. Round Shylock's words about Leah and the turquoise the question centers [Quotes 3.1.119–23]. This, most critics assert, the great historian of the drama<sup>21</sup> almost alone dissenting, is pathos: it is not the ducats behind the turquoise (a diamond gone, cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfort!) but the thought of Leah that wrings his heart. . . . We may not be used to laughing at a man as he mourns the flight of his daughter, the memory of his wife, or the theft of his ducats; but neither are we used, any more than Salanio or the boys of Venice, to the manner of his mourning.

*Shylock a comic villain, 1911*

I never heard a passion so confus'd  
So strange, outrageous, and so variable [2.8.13–14].

Shylock is a puppet, and Tubal pulls the string. Now he shrieks in grief for his ducats or his daughter, now in glee at Antonio's ruin. In his rage over the trading of a turquoise for a monkey, he blurts out, true to his instinct for a bargain, 'not for a wilderness of monkeys' [3.1.128], and the Elizabethan audience, as well as some few readers today, have the heart – or the want of it – to think the valuation funny. . . . The mistake of the critics . . . is in some measure that of viewing the text piece by piece, and not as a whole. Torn from the context, there are phrases, even sentences, that may, indeed, seem pathetic. But Shakespeare plays the familiar dramatic trick of taking the audience in for a moment – of clapping upon a seemingly pathetic sentiment a cynical, selfish, or simply incongruous one. Shylock cannot wish that his daughter were dead at his foot (if that be pathos) without, while he is at it, wishing that the jewels were in her ear, the ducats in her coffin; he cannot think of Launcelot's kindness, as he parts with him, without also thinking of his appetite; and when he hears of his turquoise traded off for a monkey, thoughts of Leah, his bachelorhood, and a wilderness of monkeys clatter through his brain. Here is pathos side by side with laughter, but not according to Mr. Schelling's thought. The nuances, the harmony is lacking – in true Elizabethan style, there is glaring contrast instead. The pathos is a pretense, the laughter alone is real. The laughter is not restrained, either, but would be nothing less than a roar: the grotesqueness goes over the border of laughter – perhaps of tears.

The trial scene is another place where Shylock has seemed pathetic. Almost all critics make him so, in spite of the scales and the knife-whetting and the jeers at the Jew's discomfiture. Professor Baker holds that Shakespeare evinces a sense of dramatic value in presenting Shylock's disappointment as tragic through his eyes, amusing through Gratiano's. How is the tragic value presented? By the miser and usurer's prostrate prayer to the Duke to take his life if he will take his wealth, or by his plea that he is not well? The biter bit, is the gibe cast at him at the end of *Il Pecorone*,<sup>22</sup> and that, exactly, is the spirit of the scene. Nor is Gratiano the only one to crow. 'Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desir'st – Soft! The Jew shall have all justice – Why doth the Jew pause? Take thy forfeiture – Tarry, Jew; the law hath yet another hold on you – Art thou contented, Jew? What dost thou say?' [4.1.312, 316–17, 343–4, 388] Aimed at Shylock as he pleads and squirms, these words fall from lips which a moment before extolled the heavenly qualities of mercy! But here, as in Antonio's notion of conversion, or the Duke's notion of clemency to Jews, is the irony of history, not of art. . . . [Provides illustrations.]

[Stoll then discusses the argument that Shakespeare omitted Shylock from the last act, because including him would have delighted 'the Jew-baiters'.] But that would have been to make a point of the matter, and to raise the Jewish question in a play where the Jew's story is, and is meant to be, but an episode. That question, or the slavery question, which Professor Jastrow – not Shylock – raises, or the sex question, or any other, had for Shakespeare, or his brother playwrights, no existence. To him things were solid and settled; he was a conservative in art, as well as in life; and in his plays he held no brief, followed no program. The Jews he made ridiculous not because he himself had a grudge against them, but, just as he made London citizens, Puritans, Frenchmen, and Welshmen

E. E. Stoll

ridiculous, because, as he might have said, they were so. He took the world as he found it, and in no respect more than in matters of mirth. (262-75)

## 57 William Winter, Shylock and his interpreters

1911

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From *Shakespeare on the Stage* (New York, 1911).

William Winter (1836–1917), Massachusetts-born writer, was the influential dramatic critic of the *New York Tribune* from 1865 until 1909. Winter graduated from Harvard Law School but never practised law. A prolific author, his books include *Henry Irving* (New York, 1885), *The Life and Art of Edwin Booth* (New York, 1893), and *Other Days: Being Chronicles and Memories of the Stage* (New York, 1908), which contains reminiscences on writers and theatrical figures he had known, ranging from Wilkie Collins to Henry Irving and Edwin Booth. Winter is an invaluable witness to two very different interpretations of the role of Shylock. Winter subsequently issued *Shakespeare on the Stage: Second Series* (New York, 1916).

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### THE CHARACTER OF SHYLOCK

The notion that Shylock is, or was intended to be, a majestic type of the religious and racial grandeur of Israel appears to have germinated, or at least to have acquired authority, about the beginning of the nineteenth century. The German publicist, Ludwig Boerne (1786–1837), writing about *The Merchant of Venice*, designated Shylock 'an exalted Jew and an avenging angel,' not persecuting Antonio as the foe of usury, but as the foe of the Hebrew faith. Douglas Jerrold (1803–1857) said of Edmund Kean, as Shylock, that he impressed his audience 'like a chapter of Genesis.' Thomas R. Gould, writing about the elder Booth as Shylock, declared that he made the part 'the representative Hebrew.' That view is alluring to imaginative, sympathetic, ingenious students of this complex subject, and they are prone to read subtle meanings into the text of Shakespeare; but it is not warranted by anything in the play. On the contrary, everything in the play confutes it. No word spoken by Shylock, and no word spoken about him, justifies the theory that he is 'an avenging angel.' No part of his conduct justifies it, and, as an old proverb says, 'Actions speak louder than words.' Shylock hates Antonio for several sufficient reasons, which are distinctly specified. He is a revengeful man, and he purposes to gratify his revengeful desire by committing murder under the sanction of legal form. Able and admirable representatives of Shylock, subsequent to the time of Macklin, have deemed it essential to commend the character to public sympathy by investing it to some extent with paternal feeling and domestic virtue. Even George

## William Winter

Frederick Cooke, the avowed disciple of Macklin, when delivering Shylock's passionate expostulation, 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' dwelt pathetically on the word 'affections.' [3.1.60] Henry Irving after saying of Jessica, 'I would my daughter were *dead* at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! would she were *hearsed* at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!' [3.1.87–90] interjected, in tones of poignant anguish, 'No, no, no, no, no!' Richard Mansfield, at the place where Shylock leaves his house, to feast with his Christian enemies (immediately subsequent to his emphatic refusal to do so!), caused the father to embrace his daughter Jessica and kiss her on the forehead, – that daughter who describes their house as 'hell,' [2.3.1] and testifies as to Shylock's feeling and purposes revealed in the privacy of his home:

When I was with him, I have heard him swear,  
To Tubal and to Chus, his countrymen,  
That he would *rather* have *Antonio's flesh*  
*Than twenty times* the value of the sum  
That he doth owe him. [3.2.284–8]

Shylock been has grossly ill-treated by Antonio, stigmatized as a 'cutthroat dog,' publicly spurned, insulted on the Exchange, – the Rialto, – kicked, spat upon, habitually reviled, treated as if he were no better than 'a stranger cur' [1.3.111, 118]; and Antonio, – 'the good Antonio,' 'the honest Antonio,' of whom it is said by one of his friends that 'a kinder gentleman treads not the earth,' [2.8.35] – has explicitly assured him of the likelihood of a continuance of the same ignominious treatment. Shylock accordingly hates Antonio with an implacable though natural hatred and wishes to kill him; and, opportunity presenting itself, Shylock speciously and treacherously induces Antonio to make a covenant the breaking of which will, on the exaction of the nominated forfeiture, cost him his life. Shylock hypocritically calls that covenant 'a *merry bond*,' [1.3.173] and signifies that even though Antonio should 'break his day,' the penalty would not be exacted; and this he does within a few moments after privately asseverating that, if he 'can catch him once upon the hip,' he 'will feed fat the *ancient grudge*' [1.3.46] he bears him. From the first moment when he perceives even a glimmering chance of revenge it is the intention of Shylock to murder the man whom he hates and loathes. It is obvious that his reasons for entertaining and pursuing that intention are sufficient to his own mind, but it is also obvious that he is a sanguinary, ruthless villain. Opinion on that point has always differed, and accordingly the numerous representations of Shylock which have been provided within the long period since Shakespeare's Jew was restored to the stage (1741), by Macklin, have chiefly varied in the particular of morality, some actors endeavoring to present Shylock as an austere image of Justice, others presenting him as a baleful image of Revenge, and still others . . . striving to make him a composite of both. (137–41)

### [THE THEATRICAL TRADITION BEFORE IRVING]

Junius Brutus Booth as Shylock took the imaginative, exalted view of the character, laying particular emphasis on those intimations of racial pomp and religious austerity which predilection for the ideal of the pious and majestic Hebrew discerns in such

*Shylock and his interpreters, 1911*

phrases as 'our holy Abraham,' 'at our synagogue,' and 'An oath, an oath! I have an oath in heaven'; at the same time, like EDMUND KEAN, he wrought his chief effect by means of the Jew's delirium, thrilling his hearers by the tempest of emotion, the frenzied ebullition of commingled impulses and contrasted passions, – avarice, fury, resentment, and snarling, murderous malignity, – in the Street Scene. [3.1] . . .

It was of Kean's Shylock that Douglas Jerrold said it was 'like a chapter of Genesis,' – meaning that, in its stern, bleak simplicity, it was austere, hard, peremptory, decisive; incarnating the Mosaic idea of inexorable Law; and Hazlitt, Kean's ardent admirer and advocate, intimated that his performance of the Jew was essentially unlike that of Macklin (which he had never seen: Macklin, who finally retired from the stage in 1789, died when Hazlitt was only eleven years old), and superior to it. The elder Booth's Shylock is specifically described by his faithful and reverent chronicler, Thomas R. Gould, and obviously it did not resemble that of Macklin. 'He made it,' says Gould, 'the *representative Hebrew*: the *type* of a race as old as the world. He drew the character in lines of *simple grandeur*, and filled it with fiery energy. In his hands it was marked by pride of intellect; by intense pride of race; by a reserved force, as if there centred in him the might of a people whom neither time, nor scorn, nor political oppression could subdue; and which has, at successive periods, even down to our own day, drawn the attention of mankind towards its frequent examples of intellectual power.'

Macready's ideal of Shylock, which he presented in his customary admirable style of minute elaboration and complete symmetry, was not, as historic commentary has sometimes declared, the majestic Israelite, intent to avenge upon the Christian the accumulated wrongs of his 'sacred nation,' but a creature compact of austerity and murderous malice. He declared the opinion that the character is 'composed of harshness,' and that Shylock's anguish relative to the loss of the ring of Leah is only the suffering of wounded cupidity. His delivery of one sentence, '*Nearest his heart* – those are the very words,' which was horrible in its expression of hatred and exultant cruelty, signified the intrinsic spirit of his performance.

Charles Kean not only made Shylock a *quaint* character but also made him, at some moments, noble and winning, – a condition absolutely incongruous with Shakespeare's Jew. His ideal, accordingly, was measurably incorrect: his execution was deft and admirable. In aspect and demeanor Kean was austere and formidable, and he employed in his performance many of the striking devices of stage business which had been used by Edmund Kean, his father. . . .

EDWIN FORREST sometimes acted Shylock, but early in his career he discarded the part, as also he did that of Iago, – 'on account,' says his chief biographer, Alger, 'of his extreme distaste for the parts, and his unwillingness to bear the ideal hate and loathing they awakened in spectators.' (150–3)

EDWIN BOOTH, in his younger days, when acting Shylock, endeavoured to express the same ideal of that character which had been shown by his father, but later he discarded that ideal and presented Shylock as the relentless revenger of personal indignities, – an injured, insulted, bitterly resentful man, animated by a vindictive, implacable hatred, intensified by racial and religious antipathy. [Quotes Booth's letter to Furness: No.41 above.]



## William Winter

'I think Macready was *the first* to lift the uncanny Jew out of the darkness of his element of revengeful selfishness into the light of *the venerable Hebrew, the Martyr, the Avenger*. He has several followers, and I once tried to view him in that light, but he doesn't cast a shadow sufficiently strong to contrast with the sunshine of the comedy. . . . 'Twas the money value of Leah's ring that he grieved over, not its association with her, else he would have shown some affection for her daughter.'

It is notable, as a coincidence of thought, that Macready, many years before Booth thus expressed his judgment, had not only written of Shylock, that the part is 'composed of harshness,' but also had set forth the identical conclusion reached by Booth relative to Shylock's interest in Leah's ring.

Booth's first general revival of *The Merchant of Venice* was effected at the old Winter Garden Theatre, New York, on January 28, 1867, when he accomplished a production of that comedy not before equalled and not surpassed until Henry Irving revived the play, November 1, 1879. . . . In making an acting version of *The Merchant* he followed a custom which had long prevailed, cutting the play in such a manner as to make it serviceable chiefly to the prominence of Shylock and ending it with the Jew's exit, at the close of the Trial Scene, – the last words spoken being those of Gratiano, – 'to bring thee to the gallows, not the font.' [4.1.400] That version he used for many years, but after forming his professional alliance with Lawrence Barrett, in 1887, he rectified his stage copy, and, influenced by the example of Henry Irving, restored the end of the Fourth Act, and also the whole of the Fifth Act,<sup>1</sup> – excepting only those few lines in it of indelicate speech, which good taste does not tolerate and always must exclude.

It was my privilege, in association with Edwin Booth to edit, – 1877–78, – the sixteen plays that constituted his customary repertory, and those plays were subjects of our frequent discussion. At that time my views of the character of Shylock were colored by the ingenious and persuasive but fanciful expositions of it that had been set forth by such authoritative writers as Hermann Ulrici, Ludwig Boerne, and Victor Hugo, and I urged Booth to present a majestic Hebrew of the old Bible. I was mistaken. His ideal, on the contrary, had been then derived exclusively from Shakespeare, and it was correct.<sup>2</sup> There was pathos, at certain moments, in his personation of Shylock, but it was the spontaneous, involuntary ebullition of his innate sensibility, and in particular it evinced itself in the exquisite melody of his sympathetic voice: he touched the hearts of his hearers because he could not help doing so. At certain times, indeed, the delivery of Booth was perfunctory, languid, tame: he was an uneven actor and of many moods, not a machine: but no words can describe the glow of his spirit and the music of his tones when once his feelings had been fully aroused through that sympathy with which a powerful imagination can inspire the mind. His impersonation of Shylock blended subtle craft with grim humour, but also it blended burning passion with Oriental dignity; and his method was, in various particulars, original.

The custom had been for Shylock to make his first entrance following Bassanio. Booth began the scene with a picture: Shylock was 'discovered' standing, midway, on a short, broad flight of steps, where he had at that moment paused, at mention of the sum of money which Bassanio wished him to lend to Antonio, and Bassanio was visible, in the act of turning away, as if impatient at the Jew's hesitation. Thus poised, Shylock

### *Shylock and his interpreters, 1911*

spoke his first words, 'Three thousand ducats – *Well?*' [1.3.1] Then, as the colloquy proceeded, Shylock advanced, Antonio entered, and the climax of the scene was reached in Booth's fervid delivery of the apostrophe to the Merchant, in which suppressed passion burned and glowed beneath a glitter of sarcasm. The First Act was ended with another picture, – Antonio and Bassanio departing together, and Shylock, at first, moving in the contrary direction, then pausing to turn and gaze after them, with a look of horrible hate and gesture of menace, as he spoke the lines transposed from the Jailer's Scene:

Thou call'dst me a dog, before thou hadst a cause;  
But, since I *am* a dog, BEWARE my fangs! [6.3.7–8]

The humanity of the man he embodied was vitiated by evil, but it was humanity. The thrilling dramatic effects that he caused were provided in the tremendous speech which begins 'To bait fish withal' and ends with 'It shall go hard but I will better the instruction,' [3.1.53–73] and in the horrid ejaculation of wicked triumph, – exultant, jubilant, inexpressibly terrible, – of Shylock's joy on hearing of Antonio's losses: 'I thank God! I thank God!' [3.1.102] In the Trial Scene his movements were slow, precise, exact, predominant, massive, as of inexorable power; his face was rigid and pale; his eyes burned darkly; there was an occasional tinge of grisly humor in his delivery: the total effect was that of the vibrant, observant poise of a deadly reptile, aware of its lethal potency, and in no haste, although unalterably determined to make use of it.

The dress that Booth wore when acting Shylock was distinctly Hebraic and strikingly expressive of Oriental character. It comprised a long, close-fitting gown, dark green in color; a dark brown gaberdine, with flowing sleeves and a hood; a scarf, of variegated colors, twisted around the waist so as to form a girdle; a leather pouch, dependent from the scarf; pointed shoes, of red leather; a Phrygian cap, having a turned-up rim, about two inches wide; earrings; several finger rings, and a ring on the thumb of the left hand. The face was made up thin and haggard. The beard was grizzled. The head, – in the actor's earlier days, – was dressed with a 'black-bald' wig; later, with a gray wig, bald on the crown. In his right hand he carried a long, gnarled staff. His appearance, as fittingly described by himself, was 'grotesque,' but also it was tragic. The picture of Booth drawn by that conscientious, sympathetic, felicitous artist William J. Hennesy . . . exhibits the 'grotesque' aspect which, especially in early life, he imputed to the Jew, and which he intentionally emphasized in presentment: but that picture, useful and instructive though it is, does not convey any impression of Booth's final ideal of Shylock, or signify in the least the lurid passion and terrific power with which that ideal was embodied by him. (153–9)

#### CHARACTER OF SHYLOCK

Two considerable reasons for the enduring popularity of Shylock are the startling authenticity of the character as a complete exponent of human hatred, and the absolute excellence of the part as a medium for dramatic impersonation. That celestial humility which, when wrongfully stricken upon the face, can and does 'turn the other cheek'<sup>[3]</sup> involves a wondrous element of self-control and lovely patience, and, theoretically, it is

practicable. The iron doctrine of the Law, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,'<sup>[4]</sup> on the other hand, is eminently human, and unregenerated humanity cordially approves and generally acts upon it. The notion that Shylock's conduct can be justified is preposterous, notwithstanding the vindictory arguments that have been put into his mouth. There is abundant reason for his conduct. Persecuted the 'sacred nation' unquestionably had been, when Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice*, and persecuted it continues to be, in some places, – although, in America, it is rapidly coming into possession of its inheritance, the Earth, – and certainly it is no longer remarkable for sufferance or humility. Shylock, enduring with patient fortitude and without rancor the insults and injuries heaped upon him, would be one of the noblest and most sympathetic characters in literature. The wrongs to which he is subjected neither justify nor extenuate his proceedings, but his rehearsal of them does irresistibly appeal to the sense of 'fair play,' and that tremendous speech beginning 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' [3.1.59] is overwhelming in its cogent reasoning and lurid eloquence: it crystallizes the whole being of Shylock into a gem of light, and it remains, and will always remain, the final word on the subject of his character. It is a marvel of rhetoric. It scorches like devouring flame. It shrivels and annihilates all the sentimental sophistry with which mistaken theorists have tried to invest the character. It is superlative, whether for logic, passion, or the spontaneous, fiery ejaculation of inveterate malignity; and it prevails. It states Shylock's motive, – Hate, inspired by wrong; and it states his purpose, – Revenge, not Vengeance. The Jew is abhorrent and detestable, but he is 'within his rights'; and whenever he is greatly represented, notwithstanding his infernal wickedness, he possesses a horrible grandeur, as the emblem of terror and the example of that retributive ruin which inevitably overtakes those persons who seek revenge. 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord: 'I will repay.'<sup>[5]</sup>

Those strenuous efforts which were begun long ago, on the stage, to read into the character of Shylock various genial attributes which are alleged to be elemental in humanity, – affection, parental solicitude, pious devotion, and the like, – have been industriously continued in recent times. The Jew, it is asserted, has been an ardent lover and a good husband; is a good father; is devout; is fraternal with other Israelites; is exemplary as a citizen; keeps a 'sober house'; frequents the synagogue, and respects the laws. Those assertions are transparently irrelevant. Aside from the allusion to Leah's ring, – 'I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys,' [3.1.121–3] – there is nothing in the play to suggest affection on the part of Shylock for his dead wife: his daughter specifically describes their home as 'hell,' and there is no word spoken or action performed to warrant the ascription to Shylock of any qualities except such as appertain to a bigoted, perverted mind, an embittered heart, a nature saturated with guile and malice and corroded by resentful suffering through long years of oppression and by the consuming fires of evil passion. Shylock deceitfully cajoles Bassanio into consenting that Antonio shall sign the bond, by declaring that he would not, under any circumstances, exact the penalty. He expressly declares that the transaction is a jest, – 'a merry sport.' [1.3.145] When suggesting this 'merry bond' to Antonio, he carelessly specifies that,

If you repay me not on such a day,  
In such a place, such sum or sums as are

*Shylock and his interpreters, 1911*

Express'd in the condition, let the forfeit  
Be nominated for an equal pound  
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken  
In what part of your body pleaseth me; [1.3.146–51]

but when the bond has become forfeit and is produced in Court the fact appears that, in the actual execution of it, the Jew has been scrupulously careful to insert in it a deadly exactitude of specification: the pound of flesh is to be cut from the merchant's 'breast'; '*Nearest his heart: those are the very words!*' [4.1.254] He plainly declares his purpose in compassing the death of his enemy: that purpose is not only Revenge but the obtainance of a clear field for usury. '*Were he out of Venice, I could make what merchandise I would.*' [3.1.128] Whatever Shylock may originally have been (and in every form of evil that comes through human birth there is some admixture of good), he has become incarnate wickedness, and he is not the less a monstrous villain because he is an insulted man and a legal creditor.

HENRY IRVING

The most thoroughly consistent, absorbingly interesting, and decisively paramount impersonation of Shylock that has been seen within the last sixty years, – and, in its maturity, as I believe, after weighing the recorded evidence, the best ever given, – was that of Henry Irving. That great actor had studied the subject with microscopic scrutiny, and he knew every fibre of it. His opinion relative to the earlier performances of the part was expressed to me in the remark that, as far as his reading and observation had enabled him to judge, Henderson was the greatest of the actors of the Garrick period, and I believe he considered that Henderson gave the true ideal. 'Shylock,' he said, in my presence, 'is a bloody-minded monster, – but you mustn't play him so, if you wish to succeed; you must get some sympathy with him.' In old times *The Merchant of Venice* was invariably offered for the sake of Shylock alone, and with that purpose it was cut and condensed. In Henry Irving's version it was given for the sake of all that it contains, and given, substantially, as Shakespeare wrote it; and when it is thus given, – that is, not merely with single design to display the semi-tragical Jew, but also with intelligent purpose to exhibit and enforce its constituents of pure, high comedy, – the romantic story of Portia becomes the most engaging part of it, and the character of Portia becomes conspicuous. In Irving's presentment of it a fine equilibrium was preserved between the parts, and while the bloodthirsty Jew, intent on obtaining his pound of flesh, was kept at a proportional level, the serene presence of Portia dominated an enchanting picture of friendship vindicated and love fulfilled, – the massive weight and propulsive force of Shylock, nevertheless, remaining unimpaired: Portia was the fascination: Shylock was the power.

Irving's production of *The Merchant of Venice* was first effected at the London Lyceum Theatre, on November 1, 1879, and it was first shown in America, at the Star Theatre, New York, on November 6, 1883. The expenditure of money on this revival was small, – only \$60,000, – but the setting was made with exact knowledge, sound judgment, and superlative taste, and artistically it was the most elaborate and complete presentment of this play that has been seen. Special felicities of investiture and detail in it were the

## William Winter

pictures of the Place of St. Mark; the passing and repassing of traders on the Rialto; the almost spectral gondolas, gliding along a shadowy canal; the opulent variety of the scenes in Portia's House at Belmont; the use of clashing cymbals, making wild, Oriental music, to signalise the arrival and departure of the Prince of Morocco; Shylock's grim return to his desolated home, which, during his absence, had been despoiled by his treacherous daughter and her lover, – a return effected in gathering gloom, immediately after an episode of tumultuous revelry, the distant sounds of music being still faintly audible, – a poetically effective treatment, devised by Irving, which has since been copied in almost every representation of the comedy; the restoration of Shylock's scene with the Jailer and Antonio, time and opportunity being thus, by implication, duly allowed for the marriages of Bassanio and Portia, and Gratiano and Nerissa; the opulent pageantry of the Venetian Court; and the lovely, moon-lit summer-night picture of Portia's Garden.

When Irving first acted Shylock he manifested a poetically humanitarian ideal of the part, and . . . indicated the Jew as the venerable Hebrew patriarch, the lonely, grieved widower, and the affectionate, while austere, father. He failed not, indeed, to present Shylock as the *vengeful* representative antagonist of intolerant Christian persecution of the Jewish race and religion, but he personated a man, originally humane, who had become embittered by cruel injustice, without having entirely lost the essential attributes of average humanity. His garments were scrupulously arranged, his aspect was neat, his demeanor was formal, – even to the extent of suggesting the 'smug' decorum at which he sneers, when describing Antonio ('That used to come so *smug* upon the mart' [3.1.46]), his action was restrained, and in the fundamental, propulsive motive of his performance there was more of a racial oppugnancy than of personal hatred. As time passed, however, a radical change in the personation was, little by little effected, till at last, without entire abandonment of a purpose and power to awaken sympathy, it became the true Shylock of Shakespeare – hard, merciless, inexorable, terrible. Thus matured, Irving's Jew was a man upon whom, – while his every thought was colored and every purpose directed by racial antipathy and religious fanaticism, – social oppression had so wrought as to develop only the most radically evil propensities; a representative Hebrew, who, while revering 'our sacred nation,' [1.3.48] swearing by 'our holy Abraham,' [1.3.72] and 'our holy Sabbath,' [4.1.37] having 'an oath in heaven' [4.1.228] and urging the sanctity of it, is animated by the wicked purpose of a murderous personal *revenge*. The work of art which shows the possible depravity of human nature should justify its exhibition by an impartment of warning, by an inherent admonitory exposition of the bleak, miserable loneliness of the soul that has succumbed to Evil, the corrosive, withering effect, alike upon the physical system and the spiritual being, of that fatal surrender to sin which abandons the heart to wicked passions. Irving's mature, final embodiment of Shylock imparted that warning, and in such a way as to impress it on the memory forever: and it was by means of the moral influence thus exerted in association with the charm of his magnetic personality that the actor excited pity and gained a certain rueful sympathy with a character that is terrible, displayed in conduct that is monstrous. The consummate skill of Irving, informed by profound knowledge of human nature and guided by unerring judgment, wrought every essential detail, however minute, into every fabric of dramatic art that he presented, but perhaps his portrayal of Shylock, more distinctively than any other single work of his, excepting Becket,<sup>[6]</sup> exemplified his marvellous faculty

*Shylock and his interpreters, 1911*

of impersonation, – that faculty as to which, considering breadth of range, wisdom of choice, precision of touch, and uniformity and thoroughness of execution, he was unequalled in our time, and, probably, has not been equalled in any period or in any land. . . .

Irving's Shylock entered, for the first time, preceding Bassanio, who, obviously had found him in the mart and spoken to him about a loan of money. He was seen to be a man stricken in years – his shoulders a little bowed, his knees a little bent, his face lined and wrinkled, his hair gray, – '*old Shylock*' [2.5.2.] in every detail, – but hardy, resolute, formidable, possessing the steel-sinewy, nervous vitality of the Hebrew race, and animated by indomitable will. His aspect was distinctively Jewish, and it was Orientally pictorial. His demeanor revealed a mind intensely interested, veiling that interest by a crafty assumption of indifference. His detested enemy had applied to him, to borrow money: that fact was singular, was astonishing; there might be no consequence in it, or there might proceed from it the opportunity, for which he had long hungered and thirsted, to strike that enemy dead. Bassanio must be made to repeat his request, and the matter must be carefully considered. One skirt of the Jew's gaberdine, – a garment of rich material but of sober hue and well-worn, – was caught up at the side and held in the right hand, which also held a black crutch-stick, grasping it near the middle and more as though it were a weapon than a prop. Throughout the opening scene the mention by Shylock of the ducats desired by Antonio was made in a lingering, caressing tone, involuntarily expressive of his love of money, and the thumb and first two fingers of whichever hand happened to be free, – for he shifted his staff occasionally from one hand to the other, – were, from time to time, moved slowly, as though in the act of counting coins. The first speech, 'Three thousand ducats – Well?' [1.3.1] only noted the sum, with an accent of inquiry; the second speech, 'For three months: – Well?' [1.3.3] indicated watchful expectation of something to follow; but the third speech, 'Antonio shall become *bound*' [1.3.5], was uttered with a strong emphasis on the merchant's name and on the word 'bound,' accompanied by a momentary flash of lurid fire in the dark, piercing, baleful eyes, a quick contraction of the muscles of arms and hands, instantly succeeded by a perfect resumption of self-control, as the calm, cold voice, reiterated the recurring question, 'Well?' The utterance of the declaration 'I *will* be *assured* I may' [1.3.29] was sharp, incisive, almost fierce, but the tone quickly softened in delivery of the words that immediately follow. The rebuff beginning 'Yes, to smell pork' [1.3.33], was ejaculated in a bitter tone of contemptuous protest, till the close, when the words 'nor *pray* with you' [37–8] were spoken in accents of deep solemnity. Then Shylock saw and recognized the approaching figure of Antonio, – a fact signified in the expression of his face, before he asked, with an entire change of manner, in a nonchalant, indifferent way, 'What news on the Rialto?' [38] He then raised his left hand, as though to shade his eyes, and gazed intently into the distance, saying 'Who is he comes here?' [38–9] There was in the action of Irving's Shylock, at that and at some other points, a viperous impartment of the Jew's inherent treachery and deep-seated malice – the duplicity which is characteristically false in circumstances in which it would be much easier to be true. Bassanio left the scene, to meet his friend Antonio, while Shylock, alone, delivered the self-communing speech which follows, not as an 'aside,' but as a soliloquy, gazing malevolently at the Christian friends, and contemptuously mimicking their greeting of

## William Winter

one another. The line 'How like a *fawning publican* he looks!' [41] was spoken with a loathing sneer, a peculiar long, soft emphasis of contempt and scorn being laid on the word 'fawning,' but that sneer instantly gave place to a glare of reptile hate, as the avowal of bitterest animosity was harshly snarled forth, with significant and appropriate stress on the second word of the second line.

I *hate* him, for he is a Christian  
But MORE, for that, in low simplicity,  
He lends out money *gratis*. [1.3.42–4]

Shylock was shown to be aware of the Merchant's approach, but also he was shown to assume, because of sheer, innate duplicity, an air of preoccupation, as though ignorant of the contiguity of the man whom thus he hated and denounced. His greeting to Antonio was that of cringing humility, and when he mentioned the feasibility of borrowing money from Tubal, 'a *wealthy Hebrew*' [1.3.57] of his tribe, he lapsed into the condition of the sordid, specious, wily money-lender, incapable, from force of the habit of trickery, of anything like fair and open dealing. His manner became formal and his articulation sharply incisive, when saying 'I had forgot – three months,' – a pause, and then an intent look at Bassanio, – 'You told me so' [66–7]. The Jew's defence of usury was made with a slow, ruminative insistence on the details of the Biblical story of Jacob's thrift. The trenchant rebuke to Antonio was begun with an assumption of judicial restraint, a certain dignity, but, as the delivery of it proceeded, the feeling became intense, the utterance bitter, mordant, and fiery, such as might well incite the Merchant's angry retort; but at 'Why, look you, how you storm' [137], the manner of the Jew, – his rage repressed by a sudden exertion of will, – became meek and ingratiating. When he said, 'Your single bond' [145], Shylock, over-eager, touched the breast of Antonio, who thereupon drew back, wrapping his cloak around him, as though the touch of the Jew were a contamination, and in the brief pause which ensued Shylock was seen to curb his resentful exasperation at being treated as if he were a leper, the obvious effort being followed by a copious glow of cordiality, in the offer of 'kindness' [143] and in the insidious proposal of the 'merry bond' [173]. There was, in Irving's peculiar intonation and manner, when his Shylock said, 'An equal pound of *your fair flesh*' [149–50], a suggestion of latent, sinister meaning, as if his secret thought were, 'If my touch contaminates you, perhaps I shall soon give you reason, indeed, to dread it!' His delivery of 'O father Abraham, what these Christians are!' [160] was so convincingly honest and earnest, in its apparent candor, that it might have beguiled even the most distrustful of hearers. At the close of the scene, Antonio and Bassanio having parted from him, Shylock turned away, moved a few steps, paused, turned back, glared after his foes, raised his crutch-stick and shook it, in menace, with a look of frightful hatred, making such an illuminative picture of the character as only the brush of inspired genius could convey.

In Irving's arrangement of the comedy the Second Act contained three scenes, the second being devoted to Lorenzo's love affairs, and the third, exceptionally picturesque and illuminative, devoted to Shylock, in his relation to the incident of Jessica's elopement. In this latter scene the place represented was a street in front of Shylock's house.

*Shylock and his interpreters, 1911*

At the back a finely painted drop afforded a spacious view of romantic Venice, in the dim starlight. A high bridge, spanning a canal, extended across the stage, from the upper left-hand corner to a point forward on the right. The bridge was accessible by steps. At the right of and below it was a building, fashioned with a projecting hood above the door, – the ‘penthouse’ [2.6.1] mentioned by Lorenzo. At the left of the stage, in the foreground, bordering the canal, was placed the house of Shylock, on the front of which was a prominent balcony. Launcelot and Shylock entered from that dwelling, the former in haste and perturbation, as if retreating from his harsh employer. Shylock’s speech of dismissal to him, – ‘Well, thou shalt see’ [2.5.1], – was spoken by Irving in a strain of censorious sarcasm, and the Jew’s parting from his daughter, immediately before her flight, was effected in a mood of querulous anxiety, Shylock showing himself oppressed by presentiment of impending disaster: ‘There is some ill a-brewing towards my rest’ [2.5.17]. At mention of Bassanio, when Launcelot said, ‘My young master doth expect your reproach’ [2.5.20], there was a quick accession of severity in Shylock’s face and demeanor, and the tone in which, to the menial’s blundering speech, he replied ‘So do I – his’ [2.5.21] – was grim with expectancy of revenge. When he ended his authoritative delivery of the mandate, to Jessica, ‘Lock up my doors’ [2.5.29], he entered the house, was absent for a moment, and then returned, wearing a cloak and an orange-tawny, turban-like head dress, and carrying a lantern and a staff. Hearing the voice of Launcelot, who was speaking in a hurried undertone to Jessica, but not hearing the words, he swiftly advanced to his daughter, as Launcelot sped away, seized her by the wrist, looked suspiciously upon her face and harshly put the question to her, – pointing with his stick after the departed servant, – ‘*What says that fool of Hagar’s offspring – ha?*’ [2.5.43] Reassured by Jessica’s ready lie, he turned from her, murmuring, ‘The patch is kind enough’ [46], and then, with the old proverb about the wisdom of precaution on his lips, ascended to the bridge and passed across it, out of sight. The elopement of Jessica with Lorenzo was then effected, in a gondola, which moved smoothly away in the canal, and the scene became tumultuous with a revel of riotous maskers, who sang, danced, frolicked, and tumbled in front of Shylock’s house, as though obtaining mischievous pleasure in disturbing the neighborhood of the Jew’s decorous dwelling. Soon that clamorous rabble streamed away; there was a lull in the music, and the grim figure of Shylock, his staff in one hand, his lantern in the other, appeared on the bridge, where for an instant he paused, his seamed, cruel face, visible in a gleam of ruddy light, contorted by a sneer, as he listened to the sound of revelry dying away in the distance. Then he descended the steps, crossed to his dwelling, raised his right hand, struck twice upon the door, with the iron knocker, and stood like a statue, waiting – while a slow-descending curtain closed in one of the most expressive pictures that any stage has ever presented.

Irving did not follow the Macklin tradition as to the acting of Shylock in the tremendous Street Scene of the Third Act [3.1.22–130], – the stage tradition, that is, which prescribes as imperative in that scene almost incessant movement, explosive vociferation, and lamentable and furious delirium. His reason, probably, was that he did not consider himself physically equal to the effort required by that method of treating the situation, or he may have deemed, and probably did deem, another method more effective upon the feelings of an audience. The treatment which he devised and employed was wonderfully potent. The convulsive passion, liberating the man from every restraint of prudence and



every expedient of duplicity and bursting forth in torrid eloquence, the deracinating conflict between outraged parental authority and the animal instinct of paternity, the overwhelming access of religious fanaticism, the terrific wrath of despoiled avarice, and the savage determination to have a hellish revenge – all those shattering forces were implicated and displayed in Irving's acting of Shylock in this tempestuous scene, with a spasmodic energy of natural emotion, transcending, in its power to excite pity while diffusing a scene of terror, any possible manifestation of mere physical excitement. When he entered, the 'outrageous passion' immediately consequent on his daughter's thievery and flight had somewhat abated. His dress was disordered. His gown (the cloak or gaberdine had not been put on) was torn open at the throat, his hair was dishevelled, his hands were clenched, his movements were swift, – the mental tempest venting itself in physical agitation, – and as he approached, the jeers of his Christian persecutors being faintly audible in the distance, he was snarling and muttering to himself. When he perceived the Christians, Salanio and Salarino, the comrades of Lorenzo and Bassanio, his fury flamed forth again, and the glare of hatred which he bent upon them was shocking in its infernal intensity. The exclamation, 'My own flesh and blood *to rebel!*' [3.1.34] commingled relentless anger with astounded incredulity. There was comparatively little movement on the part of Shylock, throughout this scene, – there was no yelling, and there was no rushing to and fro. The utterance of "There I have another – *bad match!*" [44] expressed the infinite of loathing. The ominous words, 'Let him look to his bond,' [47, 48, 50] were spoken in a lower tone than was used in speaking the associated sentences, and in the final iteration every word was uttered separately. 'Let – him – look – to – his – *bond!*' [3.1.42] The furious response to Salarino's question about the flesh, 'What's that good for?' [52] came like a lightning flash, – "To bait fish withal!" [53] and then, after a pause of suspense, ensued the torrid invective, the greatest of all Shylock's speeches, uttered at first in an almost suffocated voice, – "If it will feed nothing else it will feed my revenge" [53–5], – but presently in the fluent tones of completely liberated passion. As the infuriated Jew proceeded the Christians involuntarily shrank from him and he slowly moved toward them, until he had fiercely enunciated the reply to his own question, 'Why, revenge!' [71] – at which point he whirled away and came down the stage in the opposite direction, twice ejaculating the word 'Revenge,' as if convulsed with delirium, and then he stopped and again turned on his enemies. Throughout that exacting scene Irving never lost control equally of the situation and the audience, but held both in complete thrall, not pausing to allow the destructive interjection of applause, after the word 'Revenge,' – an interruption frequently permitted by performers of Shylock, – but commanding his auditors till the superbly rounded close, 'It shall go hard but *I will better the instruction!*' [72–3] which always elicited a tremendous burst of enthusiastic fervor. The awful picture of wrath which he had thus created was held by him for a moment, and then Shylock seemed to become oblivious of the Christians, and, turning from them, encountered his associate and emissary, Tubal. That person came from the left of the stage, as Salanio and Salarino vanished at the right, and Shylock, meeting him, laid his left hand on Tubal's right arm, at the elbow, and his right hand on Tubal's left shoulder, and, so holding him and leaning on him, three times spoke his name: 'How now, Tubal, Tubal, Tubal, – *what news from Genoa?*' Then, holding him off at arm's length, he asked, 'Hast thou found *my daughter?*' [79–80] The

revelation of the indurated selfishness of Shylock's nature, in Irving's utterance of 'The *curse* never fell upon our nation *till now* – I NEVER *felt* it till now,' [85–6] was so complete as to be absolutely shocking. There could be no doubt relative to his perception of the character. When Shylock, in the overwhelming anguish of self-pity, dwelt on the magnitude of his losses, he plucked upon his robe, with the left hand, while with the right, firmly clenched, he convulsively smote himself, many times, delivering slow, heavy blows, on his naked breast. The momentary revulsion of feeling that Irving permitted the Jew to indicate, after his frenzied invective relative to Jessica's ignominious robbery of his treasure and flight from his home, seemed to be an involuntary impulse not so much of human nature as of the animal propension toward its young. A kindred emphasis was placed on 'No tears but of my shedding' [96]; but the tears of Shylock are those of rancorous rage and furious desperation, not of wounded affection or grief, and that was the meaning Irving conveyed. The ejaculation, 'What, what, what? *ill* luck, *ill* luck?' [99] was given with ferocious animation and joyous expectancy, and the wicked outcry, 'I thank God, I thank God,' with a horrible exuberance of delight, immediately succeeded by almost piteous doubt, at '*is* it true? *is* it –TRUE?' [102–3] An effect of contemptuous amusement followed his agonized groan, at Tubal's mention of Jessica's extravagance and the abject meanness of the accents in which he moaned, 'I shall never see my gold again.' The repetition, 'fourscore ducats' [111–12], was spoken in a semi-bewildered undertone, as though the Jew could not credit the possibility of such wanton waste by his child. The supreme climax of the situation was reached and shown by means of sudden contrast, – fury abruptly succeeding lamentation, in the thrilling celerity with which he cried, 'I am very glad of it: – I'll *plague* him: I'll *torture* him: I am *glad* of it' [116–17], and the subsequent, 'I will have the *heart* of him, if he forfeit' [127]. Persons who truly saw that frightful figure, – an authentic and terrific image of tragedy, – can never forget it, – the tall, attenuated form, the ghastly, pallid face, the deep-sunken, dark eyes, blazing with wrath, the jaws champing, the left hand turning the sleeve up on the right arm as far back as the elbow, and the fingers of the right hand stretched forth and quivering, as if already they were tearing out the heart of his hated enemy. The scene was rapidly rounded. Irving, although exceptional among actors for the perfect poise and massive authority which take fully and exactly the time required, be it ever so long, for the accomplishment of a purposed artistic result, never marred effect, whether great or small, by lingering unduly on an achievement once completed.

Some time had been supposed to elapse prior to the scene of the Jew's colloquy with the Merchant, when Antonio walks abroad, in the Jailer's custody. Shylock's excitement had given place to cold, concentrated determination of murder. In that scene Irving was incarnate cruelty. His attire was orderly, sober, correct; his demeanor obdurate. He evinced a calm, revolting pleasure in the rejection and suppression of the miserable Antonio's appeals, together with hectoring censure of the Jailer's clemency, in allowing his prisoner 'to come abroad' [3.3.8–10] for exercise. Throughout the Trial Scene his acting was perfect in symmetry, particularly of expressive detail, cumulative power, and tragic effect. All indication of passion had disappeared from his visage and person. He seemed the authentic personification of the Mosaic Law, the righteous minister of Justice; the ordained avenger. In the presence of that majestic Hebrew the observer became, for a moment, completely oblivious that Shylock is not only a villain but a

trickster; that his nature, like his quest, is abhorrent; that the 'bond' to which he appeals, and by virtue of which he so ostentatiously craves 'the law,' was obtained by the hypocritical pretence of friendship and magnanimity; and that he is now proceeding in his actual character, that of a dissembling scoundrel, to do a murder, under the compulsory sanction of a Court of Justice. The illusion, however, was only momentary. Every evil passion poisons the mind that harbors it, till, if the inevitable degradation be not stayed, the character is vitiated, the body is ravaged, the soul is polluted. That truth was legibly written in the countenance of Irving's Shylock, and as the Jew stood there, in the Courtroom, no thoughtful observer could fail to read it. There was a horrible yellow pallor of the skin. The lines in the face had been deepened. The cheeks were hollow. There was a faint glow of hectic color around the sunken, burning eyes. The body was emaciated. On entering the Court Shylock advanced a little way, paused, and slowly gazed around until his eyes found Antonio, upon whom his look then settled, with evident gloating satisfaction – a cruel, deadly look of sanguinary hatred – and then he stepped a little forward and gravely bowed toward the Duke's throne. The address of that magistrate was heard by him with patient but wholly unmoved attention, and his reply was spoken with dignity and decisive force. The words, 'What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?' [4.1.89] were so spoken that they seemed those of honesty, and almost carried conviction of right intent. The contempt with which Gratiano's appeal was answered was of *withering indifference*. That *voluble intercessor's* denunciation was totally disregarded, except that, after it had ended, Shylock, with the point of his naked knife, touched the bond, which had been thrust into his girdle in the form of a roll, and made his curt answer in a cold, level, sinister tone, expressive of a scorn so profound as to be devoid of all feeling. In the peculiar emphasis that he laid on the word 'law' [142, 206, 237, 238] there was a latent sarcastic mockery, as if, in his thought, he were deriding the folly of a law that could be made to serve such a purpose as the murder which he intended to commit. There was bland simplicity in his question, 'On *what* "compulsion" *must* I?' [183] and he listened with weariness and growing impatience to the speech about 'The quality of mercy,' [184–202] feeling it to be irrelevant, futile, and tedious: his answer to it was abrupt and decisive. When Portia, in pitiful entreaty, said, 'Bid me *tear* the bond,' [234] he laid his left hand heavily on both of her hands, to stay the action, and answered, without even a tremor, 'When it is *paid*, according to the tenor' [235]. At 'So says the bond – doth it not, noble judge?' [4.1.249] he laid the point of his knife on the words in that document, held upon by Portia, and when she inquired, 'Are there balance here, to weigh the flesh?' [253] he caused an hysterical laugh, by the grisly promptitude with which he brought forth the 'balance' from his bosom, – an action which seemed to imply that he had carried the implement there, to comfort him by its touch, with assurance of his certain revenge. The relentless statement 'Tis not *in* the bond' [262] was horrible in its icy implacable resolve, and he uttered with infernal exultation the summons to the Merchant, 'A sentence! – *Come!* PREPARE!' [4.1.300] In the subsequent resolute, persistent effort to extricate himself with at least financial profit from the ruins of his defeated scheme of murder the stalwart force of the Jew's character was splendidly maintained, and at the final catastrophe, the collapse, both physical and mental, was denoted with consummate skill. In making his exit from the Court Shylock moved slowly and with difficulty, as if he had been stricken by fatal weakness and were

*Shylock and his interpreters, 1911*

opposing it by inveterate will. At the door he nearly fell, but at once recovered himself, and with a long, heavy sigh he disappeared. The spectacle was intensely pathetic, awakening that pity which naturally attends upon despoiled greatness of character and broken, ruined power, whether that character and that power be malignant or benign. (171–96)

## 58 Sir Israel Gollancz, 'man is what man had made him'

1916

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From 'The "Shylock" of Shakespeare,' Lecture delivered before the Jewish Historical Society at University College, 22 May 1916. Reprinted in Gollancz, *Allegory and Mysticism in Shakespeare: a medievalist on The Merchant of Venice: reports of three lectures*, eds. Hope Travers and Mabel Day with a preface by A. W. Pollard (London, 1931), pp. 13–34. My text is from the reprint.

Sir Israel Gollancz (1864–1930), who came from a distinguished Rabbinical family, was educated at University College London and Christ's College Cambridge. A scholar of Middle English poetry as well as Shakespeare, Gollancz was one of the founding members of the British Academy after it received its royal charter in 1902. Three years later Gollancz became the Professor of English Language and Literature at King's College, London, a position he held until his death in 1930. Gollancz's contributions to Shakespeare studies were those of popularizer, editor, biographer, source hunter, and interpreter. His Shakespeare publications included *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1894) for *The Temple Shakespeare* series (40 vols., 1894–6); a volume commemorating the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death: *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare* (1916); *In Commemoration of the First Folio Tercentenary* (Oxford, 1923); and *The Sources of Hamlet* (1926). In addition to academic work, Gollancz was much involved with Anglo-Jewish communal affairs.

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If there is one subject that interested the early Churchmen in preaching their sermons it was, of course, the great story, the essential part of the Christian creed. Let us approach it as students, and see what would happen supposing a preacher of the eleventh or twelfth century were to put effectively and dramatically before a crude and rude audience such a text as the following: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friend' [John, 15:13], or such a text as this: 'Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it' [Ephesians, 5:25]. No text was more often used by the preachers, and if you attempt to put before an unlettered audience either of these texts or both of them, you will have a Moral drama enforcing the lesson that the preacher wished to enforce. How else is it to be done save by showing in contrast the tenderness and self-sacrifice of Christ on the one hand and the alleged heartlessness, the alleged brutality, according to the popular traditional hatred and bias, of the Jew on the other hand? And if, when you have put these two characters in juxtaposition for the purpose of enforcing

the text, you wish to graft on to that one text the second text that I have quoted, 'Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it,' how else is your Church to be personified save as the spouse desired and longed for?

So that your second text must needs provide not only the lady typifying salvation, tenderness, the fairest attribute of the Almighty – not only that, but also a sequence of suitors who, in order to win her, make their various efforts, and for whom, as regards the one particular suitor who is to succeed, the self-sacrificing character is ready to give his very life-blood, his very heart to the cruel adversary, typifying the attribute of cruelty associated in the popular mind with our own people. Now, you will say that I cannot point to chapter or verse for such an explanation at the back of the Shylock story; but read your medieval literature, such a book for example as *The Nuns' Rule*, which belongs to about the early thirteenth century, one of the most beautiful books in English literature, written by a man who understood human nature, and especially the nature of the nuns he wrote for. In that book we have these texts, both these texts, chosen and allegorised in a very fine way so that the lady, the spouse, the Church, becomes a noble lady who is besieged in her castle by many an adversary until at last the right wooer, the son of a neighbouring king, is victorious; and in that book, which belongs to the thirteenth century, we come across the following reference: 'Do not men account him a good friend who layeth his pledge in Jewry to release his companion.' 'God Almighty laid Himself in Jewry for us.'

I therefore say that the starting-point of the legend of Shylock – I would insist on emphasising it as the legend, the legend going back to the time of prejudice and hatred which can still be understood – that legend had been created, I feel sure, by some early monkish divine in a dramatic homily, and from that dramatic homily all the permutations and combinations have developed. And I will say this, that when, in the text-books and studies which we constantly have of *The Merchant of Venice*, we are told that the story of Shylock comes from one particular source and the story of the Fair Lady of Belmont from another source – all that is, to my mind, quite fictitious. There may be different variants with reference to the two component parts of the story, but they represent the component parts of one and the same story arising out of the blending of the two texts I have quoted to you.

By about the middle of the sixteenth century the Moral drama in England was becoming obsolete, but was still co-existing side by side with other forms of drama. Shakespeare knew this form of drama – the Moral drama – and when he was a boy (I am talking of 1574–1579, when he was quite a lad), in the year 1579 already in London a play was performed in which the two component parts (the play is lost now, we only know it from reference) were the bloody minds of usurers and the greed of worldly choosers, that is, both the story of Shylock and the story of the Caskets. That has disappeared, but I am inclined to think that that play was very near indeed to the Moral drama. A corresponding play that does exist called *The Three Ladies of London* gives us elements so near to the allegorical Moral drama that I have mentioned as to give us almost a conviction that even if the characters in the play mentioned in 1579 were all real, the names were rather nicknames than real personages and characters.

That brings us to about 1579, that is, when Shakespeare was fifteen, when the subject, as we have it referred to in *The Merchant of Venice*, had already been dramatised. We

cannot point to the positive source that the author of the play had used. This is of minor consequence. The point is that it represents a play dealing with a problem the Elizabethans were very much interested in, namely, the problem of usury. And it is with that problem in view that right through the Elizabethan Age we have a series of pamphlets at a time when there were practically no Jews in England. The Jewish question had nothing to do with that problem which was the great problem of the Church, a social and ecclesiastical problem – the problem of usury. This man, in 1579, took the whole legend and dealt with it in so expressive and dramatic a way that it received praise from Stephen Gosson (who disapproved plays generally), a Puritan preacher.

Then we come to the period when Shakespeare was being heralded by a whole group of great men, a group of great poets, and the greatest of them Christopher Marlowe. . . .

Now about 1590 or 1591 Christopher Marlowe looked about for a theme, and found one well suited to his genius. His genius sought subjects that represented the idealisation of gigantic passion on a gigantic scale. He was a Titanic poet, and something of his neo-Titanic being he poured into the poor, lifeless vessel of the drama *Tamburlaine*. He, through sheer might and power, climbed to the very top of Fortune's Wheel, and when there thrust his fist in the face of Fortune. The steady Wheel went round, and the poor Emperor, where was he? In the pit below.

Then he chose the great theme of Dr. Faustus to idealise the passion of the lust for knowledge as opposed to wisdom. . . . [Discusses *Dr. Faustus*.]

Then he looks round and takes the theme of the *Jew of Malta*, a theme for the lust of wealth with no idea of usury save as a passing incident associated in the popular mind with the Jewish character. The background of that play is rather the politics of the time, the problem of Turkey, the relation of the Jewish people from the Elizabethan point of view to the enemies of England – it is about 1590–91 that we have that play.

In the early part of 1593 Marlowe died, and Shakespeare, who up to that date had been, as if in awe of him, doing nothing in rivalry with Marlowe, choosing rather comedy than tragedy, for the first time comes forward as the rival of the Master, a Master born in the same year as Shakespeare himself, but yet just getting in advance of Shakespeare by a year or two, and during that year or two doing all the work necessary for the coming of the Master. He writes the play of *Richard III* on the model of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, he writes the play of *Richard II* on the model of Marlowe's *Edward II*, and he writes the play *The Merchant of Venice* in rivalry, to a large extent, with Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. He looks round for his theme. What theme was he to take? The Jew of Malta? No.

Shakespeare's interest was in Italy, there was the poet's quest – there alone were those elements in strong contrast that interested Shakespeare so much in his early work. In his early life he depicted violent love and violent hate, love as rapid as the lightning – gone before one can say 'it lightens' – and hatred too. . . . [Discusses *Romeo and Juliet*.]

Was it when he was thinking of Italy that he thought of the Venetian Jew? And the story which had already been localised in Venice in the same way as the story of Romeo and Juliet had been localised in Verona goes back to the time before Italy was dreamt of as a land of civilisation. He turned to Italy and no doubt he found that this Venetian Comedy would just satisfy that point of development of his genius. For a number of years, Shakespeare chose comedy pure and simple, but somewhere about 1595 to 1596

the two elements of Shakespeare's being, Comedy and Tragedy, blending in the creation of what was almost a new form in England, what might be called Tragi-Comedy sprang into life – which is not all tears, not all laughter, but a strange commingling of both. And in this play of *The Merchant of Venice* he saw his possibilities. He chose a theme which had been well known in London from its popularity in the courtyards of taverns. We come as early as 1579 on the 'Bloody minds of Usurers and the greediness of worldly choosers.' Now I am sure that if we were to rediscover by any chance that old play, we should be astonished to see how much of the timber of Shakespeare's play was there.

Shakespeare did not mind about conveying timber. As all men of genius know, the name is graven on the workmanship. It does not matter much about the timber, and Shakespeare, as a great artist, took timber where he saw much might be made of it, the name being graven on the workmanship, and that name being Shakespeare's. He took the old play. He worked it. It is Shakespeare.

But the first problem Shakespeare had was to find a name for his hero or his heroic villain. For to begin with, the villain of his play was to be no ideal character save ideal in villainy; he was to be the counterpart of Marlowe's Barabas, Marlowe simply giving the name which easily occurred to him to the chief character of his play. Shakespeare was careful in the choice of his names. One of the most fascinating studies in Shakespearean literature is, perhaps, this investigation into the choice of names by Shakespeare. He looked round. Who was to be and what was to be the name of the hero? Now, there was one book that Elizabethans turned to when they wanted to know anything about the Jews. You say the Bible? Yes, but somehow or other the Bible did not suggest the only place where they might find them. Look at the later history of the Jews. And the most favourite book of the Elizabethan period is a book which you have often heard about in this Society, namely, Peter Morwyng's translation of the pseudo-Josephus.<sup>[1]</sup> This was very popular. It went through edition after edition. People read it and they got all sorts of influences from it, as seen by its influence on Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. And now Shakespeare, reading this book, in the early part – quite in the beginning – came across a very interesting statement that when the Jews were besieged they resolved to send three of their number to go and interview a Roman General, Antonio, who was then at Ascalon, and one of the chosen three within the city was Schiloch.

Schiloch is a very fascinating word about which, in a Philological Society, a great deal might be said. Shakespeare was interested in it, and seems to have appropriated it as a very good name for a Jew. But his play was to be a play on usury and one cannot emphasize enough the fact that it is, to begin with, a problem play. Now Shakespeare had an enquiring mind. He wished to give to his play a certain Biblical character, and if you read *The Merchant of Venice* you will find he gives almost a special Biblical idiom to Shylock in that he makes him speak with a twang. Not that he breathes of jargon. He speaks a very beautiful English. (Shakespeare gives this quality also to Caliban.) But there is a special idiom torn almost from the Bible that he tries to put into the lips of Shylock. As in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* this hero-villain was to have a daughter. In Marlowe's *Jew*, the daughter's name is Abigail. Shakespeare turns to the Bible – those Bibles that in Elizabethan times and in modern times have lists of proper names with their explanations, and he finds, in this Bible, Ischah, the daughter of Haran, which means 'She that looketh out.' 'Oh,' he says, 'there is what will be the name of the daughter of my hero.'



She, that is the daughter of the ghetto, shall pry out from the window.' He sees almost visibly the elements of his plot from that, and takes the name in question. There is no doubt that Jessica was taken directly from the study of the glossary.

But what about his hero, the hero personifying the usurer? There is no question about that whatever. Other ideas there may be. I do not think anyone can doubt that in Elizabethan times the popular name for the usurer was the 'Cormorant.' I could quote you half a dozen passages where several or many authors used this term for usury. Indeed one man, a little later than the Elizabethan period, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a very popular minor poet, wrote a book – a book concerning 'Land Cormorants,' or 'Those people who feed on other people' – because the cormorant was the creature that swooped down and caught up the fishes. Now, most of you in this room know better than I do that the Hebrew for Cormorant, one of the forbidden beasts, is Shaloch, and I have not the least doubt that Shakespeare combined the Schiloch from the book already referred to with Shaloch the cormorant, and created, in the manner in which he was fond of creating names, the name of his hero. Not only that. I doubt whether the name was Shylock in Elizabethan times. If you turn to an ordinary edition of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* you will find the statement that Shakespeare took the name Shylock or Schiloch from a little book which appeared many years afterwards, in the seventeenth century, 'Schiloch the Jew.' Of course the name had been taken from Shakespeare, but it shows that the name was written Schiloch, not short, but long, as in Shylock.

Shakespeare then had his hero: the cormorant – the usurer; and, following the legend (in the same way as Chaucer in *The Prioress's Tale*, though there were no Jews in England in the fourteenth century, chose the legend of little Hugh of Lincoln and gave us the pathetic tale which jars on us but satisfies his audience – the tale of little Hugh murdered by the Jews in their Jewry), so Shakespeare took the popular legend already known, and emphasised the character of the usurer. But it was Shakespeare and not Marlowe doing the work. We see that when we compare *Richard II* with Marlowe's *Edward II*, or *Richard III* with *Tamburlaine*.

But those who read the two plays feel the difference, and so it is when one turns to Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. To begin with, the theme is the theme of the usurer created with all the monstrosity and horror likely to satisfy his audience fed on the legends of the monstrosities of the Jews. But that legend had become crystallized by Shakespeare's time. Hence his rationalizing of the allegory ... from the New Testament ... his real point is that one so loves his neighbour that he is willing to give his life for him. You must, therefore, have someone who is claiming that love, claiming that heart, on the one hand, and also the friend for whom this self-sacrificing being is ready to give it. And what more natural when you know the whole development of the allegory than that the friend for whom the great sacrificer is willing to make the sacrifice wishes to woo a fair and noble lady, so noble that she can only be gained by one who, careless of the ordinary methods of the world choosing gold and silver, chooses real wealth. And the fair lady of Belmont, we can understand her ancestry; she really belongs (and Shakespeare unconsciously divines it – he does not know this but he divines it) – her pedigree links her back – to that old Midrash which passed into medieval literature, so that we have fifty or sixty variants of that old medieval Midrash, namely, Justice and

Peace and Truth on the one hand and Mercy on the other. They are the four daughters. They represent your Portia, Mercy: the others are only by chance referred to. And Portia's great speech, for which so much of the great play, is a preparation, represents the embodiments, as the Liturgical drama all the attributes, of the daughter of the Deity. It is as though one were listening to an old Midrash of the old allegorical form which we get in Shakespeare's own time.

I said years ago, when I did not see the force of my words (and that is the interesting part), that Portia's great speech of Mercy addressed to Shylock represents almost the epitome of a whole moral play. I am sure that in thus attempting to discover what Shakespeare himself did not understand, but what a great artist divines without understanding, I was groping towards the fact that Portia is actually Mercy personified, one of the four daughters of God, one of the four attributes of the Almighty as the old Hebrew Midrash put it.

Now people might argue and say: Yes, Shakespeare took it, but his object was to temper the prejudices of his age against the Jews; and we quote with pride, and we have quoted a great deal within the last week or two, Shakespeare's famous plea. He puts into the lips of Shylock a noble plea for tolerance, which, from that point of view, represents that power that belongs to Shakespeare of divining humanity where under ordinary conditions there might be mere monstrosity. That belongs to Shakespeare's genius, and true genius is, of course, human; but I do not go with those who would like to cut out part of the play, and say that when Shylock said that he wished the bond to be drawn up as 'a merry sport' [1.3.145], he meant it to be a merry sport, but never intended to go further – that it was only later on that he changed his mind. I do not for a moment hold with that belief. It belongs to the play, to the character, to represent Shylock as repellent, as the man willing to claim his due. But where Shakespeare cried 'halt' was at this: that though this monster might, from the moment that we see him, have been willing to claim his right, yet under ordinary conditions he would have yielded to the plea for mercy. He would not have executed his diabolical revenge.

Yes, Shakespeare felt that, and yet he cannot make him change under ordinary conditions. He cannot divert him from his purpose. On the contrary the purpose has to become strengthened in Shylock. And now, in order to understand Shylock as he appeared before Elizabethan audiences, I want to introduce you to another type of drama now brought into combination. In dealing with *The Merchant of Venice*, I have spoken of the allegorical drama, I have spoken of Marlowe and his drama of passion. There was, however, a kind of drama, very popular in London about 1590, a drama in which a character may become maddened by wrong, so maddened as absolutely to be willing to risk everything for the carrying out of vengeance. The best type of this drama is a play called *The Spanish Tragedy*, where a father, having lost a beloved son, Horatio (the father is called Hieronymo), seeks vengeance, and is determined to get it; becomes distraught with longing for vengeance, and ultimately becomes so keen to get it that he asks the instrument of the original wickedness to join him in the performance of a play. And that play, which is to be acted before an audience, becomes a real tragedy in which the hero in his desire for vengeance sacrifices himself, so maddened is he. 'Hieronymo gone mad' became the popular theme for an Elizabethan audience.

Thus, as a great element of this play and in Shakespeare's treatment of Shylock, one

must bear in mind the utmost importance of the theme of *The Spanish Tragedy*. There was an element of the comic, if one may use comedy in the deeper sense, for an Elizabethan audience to see Shylock sharpen on his shoe the knife for exacting the pound of flesh. But for the audience it was also a figure like 'Hieronymo gone mad' – distraught by grief; and it was Shakespeare's great power to see by what means the distraction of Shylock, the mad determination not to give up the idea that he originally held fairly tenaciously, but would have abandoned when the plea for mercy was put before him, could be brought about.

In order to make the monstrosity of Shylock understood, Shakespeare uses the character of Jessica – 'she that looketh out from the window' [2.5.40–1].

Horatio, the beloved son, murdered in *The Spanish Tragedy*, was the cause of Hieronymo's madness. It was Jessica who more cruelly struck the heart of Shylock with anguish. Jessica becomes the instrument for distraction, for determining this side of Shylock's character – that is, the distraught man, keen for vengeance at all costs and not willing to yield, almost maddened, grotesquely maddened, as Hieronymo became grotesquely maddened in the play of *The Spanish Tragedy*.

And notice – in some way or other both Marlowe and Shakespeare knew much about the Jews. How they knew it is difficult to tell, but they did know this: that your Jew may be in the public mind the vilest usurer. He may be as vile as may be. But there is one tender point, the sanctity of the home life. And it is marvellous, not so much with Shakespeare, because Shakespeare knew everything, but that Marlowe also knew this – that is the extraordinary part of it. As I said before, even as in *Romeo and Juliet*, seeing that the rivalry between the two houses demanded for their hatred the sacrifice of what is best and most lovable, namely, Romeo and Juliet – these two beautiful characters – so in this play of the other Italian city, Venice, Shakespeare sees the antagonism between the two castes, the caste of Shylock on the one hand and of the Christians on the other. He gives us a sort of minor counterpart, a minor play, a minor Romeo and Juliet – Jessica and Lorenzo.

It was not to be a tragedy, this play, but a tragi-comedy. How near to tears, how near to disaster! For Shylock there was tragedy, though for the Elizabethan audience it made a comedy; so it is tragi-comedy. The tragi-comedy is cleverly brought about by Shakespeare through the desertion of Jessica and through nothing else. Up to that point Shylock did have the intention, according to Shakespeare, according to the Elizabethan audience hearing the play, of claiming this monstrous thing. But he would not have done so. The plea of mercy would have been too strong, the inherent human nature in the man was too strong, till he became maddened, till he became distracted; and for that purpose Shakespeare gives this counterplot of Jessica and Lorenzo. But Shakespeare – this is another lesson that one is always learning as one tries to understand Shakespeare – the old idea that Shakespeare was an inspired rustic who wrote plays belongs to the past, at least I hope so – the idea that he was a clever dramatist even, that I hope belongs to the past – what people will understand more and more is this, that Shakespeare was *par excellence* a speaker, a thinker, a philosopher. That is what one has to bear in mind wherever one turns – from the early works to the crowning glory, *The Tempest* with its marvellous demand for music, where Shakespeare throws aside his magic garment, and drowns his book 'deeper than did ever plummet sound' [5.1.56]. From the very

beginning it is Shakespeare the thinker. He does nothing without thought, the great poet, the mighty poet, and he has chosen this medium for his poetry – people forget the Elizabethan stage and see the great platform stage. Shakespeare is the thinker; in *Romeo and Juliet* he speaks his own thoughts through such a humble character as the Friar, and the Friar comes in with a little flower – some flowers he had been collecting in an osier basket – and sees wonder in this little flower. There is medicine and poison. So in the human heart [Quotes *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.3.27–30].

And in this play, this play which has almost indirectly become the counterpart of *Romeo and Juliet* from many points of view, in this play where does the lesson come to us? Where? If I had to say what is the burden of this play, this play that started as a mere drama of usury, so clearly was it this and so clearly connected with that idea I emphasized of Antonio standing really for the Christian *par excellence*, himself – and Shylock, the hated Jew, for Evil, and Portia, the Lady of Belmont, for Salvation. [Discusses the identification of Antonio with Christ.]

I say that incidentally all these things come in, yet all along Shakespeare's mind is at work. He has used his character of Shylock, the Cormorant, the Monster Cormorant. He uses him not only as the Jew of Marlowe, the Hieronymo of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Well, what of it? He argues the lesson we know, the great plea, 'Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands?' [3.1.59]. But after all, yet in spite of all, from the popular standpoint – and the Elizabethan only saw it from the popular Elizabethan standpoint, and it did not require a tragedy of Roderigo Lopez to embitter the popular mind against the Jew in Elizabethan times – what Shakespeare does is to think out the problem, and this is Shakespeare's own view of the whole subject. It is strange – the lesson of the play as Shakespeare sees it, namely, that man is what man had made him. The monster Shylock, this Cormorant, is what man had made of man. Only how true it is. We know that although the whole thing is a futile and monstrous legend, and that no Jew ever existed of the type of Shylock, we know that even if popular legend clung to that belief, popular legend made man to be such a monster as Shylock is – so Shakespeare did all this, even as he demanded the sacrifice of both Romeo and Juliet to the hatred of the rival houses, for to the prejudice of Shakespeare's time sacrifice means atonement for what is past.

The tragedy of the inner sacrifice of religion is often very clearly set forth. There must be the sacrifice before the atonement can be made; that is the attitude of tragedy in ancient Greece. It comes out in some of the teachings used by the Church at the very beginning and permeates the drama, when you have the Christian idea meeting with the old Greek demand for vengeance. But Shakespeare broods on the problem, and it is from the lips of Lorenzo, this minor Romeo, that the lesson of the play is enunciated. And notice this. It is spoken to the base and heartless Jessica, that almost light-of-love, who yet understands as truly as Lorenzo the mystery and the wonder of it all. Beneath the starry night they sit and there the [Quotes 5.1.56–65].

Yes, Lorenzo strikes the note. Shylock, too, has an immortal soul: the muddy vesture of decay is made more muddy by the scorn and the contempt of the Antonio of the time. There, too, is the music – if it could only be heard aright. And Shakespeare seems to emphasise that lesson to the Jessica who, after all, explains so much of the mystery, of the horror, of the monstrosity, of the character of Shylock. And Shakespeare perhaps

### Sir Israel Gollancz

seems to say 'Yes: if, in popular prejudice, in the hatred of the mass of the people, this Shylock stands forth in harmony, in music as the jarring note of discord, yet he, too, is of the chosen.' And to him, as Marlowe put it in the lips of his character, 'came the promise.'

And in Shakespeare's wisdom, perchance, Antonio's harmony and the music which he sounds might very well have been heard from Shylock himself, had not the world turned him into the pseudo-Cormorant we know him now to have been. (21-34)

## 59 Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Shakespeare's 'stage-cleverness' and the story's 'monstrous absurdity'

1916

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From 'The Workmanship of *The Merchant of Venice*', *The North American Review*, 203 (March 1916), pp. 435–48.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863–1944), novelist, poet, journalist, and anthologist, became King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge in 1912. A powerful lecturer, he was influential in the creation of the Cambridge English Tripos, and an English School separate from Medieval and Modern Languages. A Cornish man and author of four fictional chronicles of Cornish life, a committed Liberal, he was knighted by Asquith for his political, literary, and educational work. Following the death of his son Bevil in 1919 while on Army service in Germany, 'Q.' – as he called himself – plunged into lecturing and writing. From 1921 until his death, he was joint editor of the 'New Cambridge Shakespeare' with John Dover Wilson, and wrote introductions to all the comedies. Part of this lecture was reused in his book, *Shakespeare's Workmanship* (1918), and in his edition of *The Merchant of Venice* (Cambridge, 1926), p. xxi–xxxii.

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Since in the end it taught me a good deal, and since the reader too may find it serviceable, let me start by shortly rehearsing my own experience with *The Merchant of Venice*.

I came first to it as a schoolboy, and though I got it by heart I could not love the play. I came to it (as I remember) straight from the woodland enchantments of *As You Like It*, and somehow this was not at all as I liked it. No fairly imaginative youngster could miss seeing that it was picturesque or, on the face of it, romantic enough for anyone, as on the face of it no adventure should have been more delightful than to come out of the green Forest of Arden into sudden view of Venice, spread in the wide sunshine, with all Vanity Fair, all the *Carnival de Venise* in full swing on her quays; severe merchants trafficking, porters sweating with bales, pitcher-bearers, flower-girls, gallants; vessels lading, discharging, repairing; and up the narrower waterways black gondolas shooting under high guarded windows, any gondola you please holding a secret – of love, or assassination, or both – as any shutter in the line may open demurely, discreetly, giving just room enough, just time enough, for a hand to drop a rose; Venice again at night – lanterns on

## Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

the water, masqued revellers taking charge of the quays with drums, hautboys, wry-necked fifes, general tipsiness; withdrawn from this riot into deep intricacies of shadow, the undertone of lutes complaining their love; and out beyond all this fever, far to southward, the stars swinging, keeping their circle – as Queen Elizabeth once danced – ‘high and disposedly’ over Belmont, where on a turfed bank ‘the Moon sleeps with Endymion’ [5.1.109] though the birds have already started to twitter in Portia’s garden. Have we not here the very atmosphere of romance?

Well, no. . . . We have a perfect *setting* for romance; but setting and atmosphere are two very different things. I fear we all suffer *temptation* in later life to sophisticate the thoughts we had as children, often to make thoughts of them when they were scarcely thoughts at all. But fetching back as honestly as I can to the child’s mind, I seem to see that he found the whole thing heartless, or (to be more accurate) that he failed to find any heart in it and was chilled: not understanding quite what he missed, but chilled, disappointed none the less.

Barring the Merchant himself, a merely static figure, and Shylock, who is meant to be cruel, every one of the Venetian *dramatis personae* is either a ‘waster’ or a ‘rotter’ or both, and cold-hearted at that. There is no need to expend ink upon such parasites as surround Antonio – upon Salarino and Salanio. Be it granted that in the hour of his extremity they have no means to save him. Yet they see it coming; they discuss it sympathetically, but always on the assumption that it is *his* affair:

Let good Antonio look he keep his day,  
Or he shall pay for this [2.8.25–6]

and they take not so much trouble as to send Bassanio word of his friend’s plight, though they know that for Bassanio’s sake his deadly peril has been incurred! It is left to Antonio himself to tell the news in that very noble letter of farewell and release [Quotes 3.2.315–22] – a letter which, in good truth, Bassanio does not too extravagantly describe as ‘a few of the unpleasant’st words that ever blotted paper.’ Let us compare it with Salarino’s account of how the friends had parted [Quotes 2.8.36–49].

But let us consider this conquering hero, Bassanio. When we first meet him he is in debt, a condition on which – having to confess it because he wants to borrow more money – he expends some very choice diction. [Quotes 1.1.122–5.] That may be a mighty fine way of saying that you have chosen to live beyond your income; but, Shakespeare or no Shakespeare, if Shakespeare means us to hold Bassanio for an honest fellow, it is mighty poor poetry. For poetry, like honest men, looks things in the face, and does not ransack its wardrobe to clothe what is naturally unpoetical. Bassanio, to do him justice, is not trying to wheedle Antonio by this sort of talk; he knows his friend too deeply for that. But he is deceiving *himself*, or rather is reproducing some of the trash with which he has already deceived himself.

He goes on to say that he is not repining; his chief anxiety is to pay everybody, and ‘To you, Antonio, / I owe the most in money and in love’ [1.1.130–1], thereupon counts on more love to extract more money, starting (and upon an experienced man of business, be it observed) with some windy nonsense about shooting a second arrow after a lost one.

Shakespeare's 'stage-cleverness' and the story's 'monstrous absurdity', 1916

You know me well, and herein spend but time  
To wind about my love with circumstance [1.1.153–4],

says Antonio; and, indeed, his gentle impatience throughout this scene is well worth noting. He is friend enough already to give all; but to be preached at, and on a subject – money – of which he has forgotten, or chooses to forget, ten times more than Bassanio will ever learn, is a little beyond bearing. And what is Bassanio's project? To borrow three thousand ducats to equip himself to go off and hunt an heiress in Belmont. He has seen her; she is fair; and [Quotes 1.1.163–76].

Now this is bad workmanship and dishonouring to Bassanio. It suggests the obvious question, Why should he build anything on Portia's encouraging glances, as why should he 'questionless be fortunate,' seeing that, as he knows perfectly well, but does not choose to confide to the friend whose money he is borrowing, Portia's glances, encouraging or not, are nothing to the purpose, since all depends on his choosing the right one of three caskets – a two to one chance against him?

But he gets the money, of course, equips himself lavishly, arrives at Belmont; and here comes in worse workmanship. For I suppose that, while character weighs in drama, if one thing be more certain than another it is that a predatory young gentleman such as Bassanio would *not* have chosen the leaden casket. I do not know how his soliloquy while choosing affects the reader

So may the outward shows be least themselves –  
The world is still deceived with ornament [3.2.73–4]

– but *I* feel moved to interrupt: 'Yes, yes – and what *about* yourself, my little fellow? What has altered you that you, of all men, start talking as though you addressed a Young Men's Christian Association?'

And this flaw in characterization goes right down through the workmanship of the play. For the evil opposed against these curious Christians is specific; it is Cruelty; and, yet again specifically, the peculiar cruelty of a Jew. Then, as I see it, an artist at the top of his art would have opposed to this cruelty mansuetude, clemency, charity, and, specifically, Christian charity. Shakespeare misses more than half the point when he makes the intended victims, as a class and by habit, just as heartless as Shylock without any of Shylock's passionate excuse. It is all very well for Portia to strike an attitude and tell the court and the world that

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath [4.1.184–6].

But these high-professing words are words and no more to us, who find that, when it comes to her turn and the court's turn, Shylock gets the money by being allowed (1) to pay half his estate in fine, (2) to settle the other half on 'the gentleman / That lately stole his daughter,' and (3) that 'He presently become a Christian' [4.1.384–5, 387]. (Being such Christians as the whole gang were, they might have spared him *that* ignominy!)



## Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

Moreover, with such an issue set out squarely in open court, I do not think that any of us can be *satisfied* with Portia's victory, won by legal quibbles as fantastic as anything in *Alice in Wonderland*; since, after all, prosecution and defence have both been presented to us as in deadly earnest. And I have before now let fancy play on the learned Bellario's emotions when report reached him of what his impulsive niece had done with the law, and the garments, he had lent to her. Indeed, a learned Doctor of another University than Padua scornfully summed up this famous scene to me, the other day, as a set-between a Jew and a Suffragette.

Why are these Venetians so empty-hearted? I should like to believe – and the reader may believe it if he will – that Shakespeare was purposely making his Venice a picture of the hard, shallow side of the Renaissance, even as in *Richard III*. he gives us a finished portrait of a Renaissance scoundrel ('I am determined to [prove] a villain'[1.1.30]); of the Italianate Englishman who was proverbially a devil incarnate. He certainly knew all about it; and in that other Venetian play, *Othello*, he gives us a real tragedy of two passionate, honest hearts entrapped in that same *milieu* of cold, practised, subtle malignity. I should like to believe, further, that against this Venice he consciously and deliberately opposed Belmont (the Hill Beautiful) as the residence of that better part of the Renaissance, its 'humanities,' its adoration of beauty, its wistful dream of a golden age. It is, at any rate, observable in the play that – whether under spell of Portia or from some other cause – nobody arrives at Belmont who is not instantly and marvellously the better for it; and this is no less true of Bassanio than of Lorenzo and Jessica and Gratiano. All the suitors, be it remarked – Morocco and Aragon no less than Bassanio – address themselves nobly to the trial and take their fate nobly. If this be what Shakespeare meant by Belmont, we can read a great deal into Portia's first words to Nerissa in Act V. as, reaching home again, she emerges on the edge of the dark shrubbery

That light we see is burning in my hall.  
How far that little candle throws his beams!  
So shines a good deed in a naughty world. [5.1.89–91]

– a *naughty* world: a world that is naught, having no heart.

It were pleasant (I say) to suppose this naughtiness, this moral emptiness of Venice, deliberately intended. But another consideration comes in.

Any school manual will recite for us the 'sources' of *The Merchant of Venice*. Briefly, we all know that it intertwists three plots of intrigues; and we need not vex ourselves here with their origins, because they are nothing to our purpose. We have:

Plot I. The story of the Jew and the pound of flesh.

Plot II. The story of the caskets.

Plot III. The intrigue of the exchanged rings.

To this summary I but append two remarks: The one, obvious to anybody, that Plots I. and II., the pound of flesh and the caskets, are monstrous and incredible; the pound of flesh business starkly inhuman, the casket business scarcely more plausible when we examine it. Be it granted that, as Nerissa says, 'holy men at their death have good

Shakespeare's 'stage-cleverness' and the story's 'monstrous absurdity', 1916

inspirations' [1.2.27–8] (sometimes!). Yet this profound reason scarcely covers Portia's father, since in point of fact his device gave his daughter to a lucky fortune-hunter. . . . The third intrigue – that of the exchanged rings – is mere light comedy.

For my other remark: in Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*, an invective against stage plays by a playwright turned Puritan, published in 1579 – when Shakespeare was a boy of fifteen and before he had 'written a line' – there occurs an allusion to a play called *The Jew*, and described as 'representing the greediness of worldly chosers and bloody mind of usurers.' These coincident phrases – 'The Jew,' 'The greediness of worldly chosers,' 'the bloody mind of usurers,' – indicate a play on the very lines of *The Merchant of Venice*, and tell us, as well as such casual evidence can, (1) that Shakespeare was refurbishing an old play, (2) that the two themes of the pound of flesh and the caskets had already been combined in that play before Shakespeare ever took it in hand to improve it.

Reading this into Gosson's allusion, we see Shakespeare tackling, as a workman, an old piece of work which already included two monstrous, incredible stories. Even if we rule out Gosson, we see Shakespeare about to combine in one play these two monstrous, incredible stories, *plus* a third which is an intrigue of light comedy separate from both.

It does not matter to which alternative we incline. With either of them Shakespeare's first task as an artist (as any artist will tell us) was *to distract attention from the monstrosities and absurdities in the plot*. I shall return to this.

For the moment I postpone it, to consider another necessity. Every artist knows, and every critic from Aristotle down, that the more you complicate your plot – the more threads you tie together in your *nexus* – the less room you leave yourself for invention and play of character. That is A.B.C.; and it is almost A.B.C. that with three entanglements in hand – one inhuman, two incredible, one fantastic – and three hours to do your trick in – you almost exclude your chance of working seriously upon character.

Shakespeare had two outlets only, and he took full advantage of both. I rule out Antonio, who, as I said, is merely static. He is made, and rightly, the pivot of the action (and drama is by its very name dynamic). But the pivot is inert; he himself scarcely lifts a hand.

There remain Shylock and Portia, who do the work.

I am going to say very little upon Shylock, who, to my thinking, has been over-philosophised and yet more drearily over-sentimentalised. Charles Kean or Macklin began it. Irving completed (I hope) what they began. Heine, himself a Jew, tells how in a box at Drury Lane he sat next to 'a pale, fair Briton who at the end of the Fourth Act fell a-weeping passionately, several times exclaiming, "the poor man is wronged"; and Heine goes on to return the compliment in better coin, with talk about 'a ripple of tears that were never wept by eyes . . . a sob that could come only from a breast that held in it the martyrdom endured for eighteen centuries by a whole tortured people.'<sup>[1]</sup>

That is all very well.

Few of us doubt that Shakespeare often wrote greater than he knew; that he is what we can read into him. But the point is that he started out to make Shylock such a cruel, crafty, villainous Hebrew as would appeal to an audience of Elizabethan Christians. The very structure of the plot shows *that*.

But every author knows how a character of his invention will sometimes take charge of him; as every reader must recognize and own in Shakespeare an imagination so warm,

## Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

so large, so human, so catholic, that it could not, creating even a Caliban, help sympathising with Caliban's point of view. So it is with Falstaff; and so with Shylock. As I see him, he takes charge of his creator, fenced in by intricacies of plot and finding outlets for his genius where he can. Shakespeare so far sympathises that, even in detail, the language of Shylock is perfect. [Quotes 3.1.120–4.]

It is curious to reflect that Shakespeare most likely had never seen a Jew in his life.

Let us turn to Portia, the only other character on which the bleached fence of the plot permits Shakespeare to display his strength in characterising. Hazlitt says, 'Portia is not a very great favourite with us . . . Portia has a certain degree of affectation and pedantry about her, which is very unusual in Shakespeare's women.'<sup>[2]</sup> Pedantry, or a touch of it, she *must* have in the trial scene. It is a part of the plot. But – 'affectation'? Let us for a moment dismiss that importunate trial scene from our minds and listen to these lovely lines, in which she gives herself, utterly, without low bargaining, as Shakespeare's adorable women always do, out of confessed weakness springing to invincibility [Quotes 3.2.149–71]. This, by the way, is the first we hear of the ring; and we may observe how cunningly Shakespeare foists on us this new card, a moment after he has finished with the caskets. For though he runs three plots in *The Merchant of Venice*, he runs but two at a time. Indeed, he does not actually get to work on this plot of the ring (or, rather, of the rings) until Act 4, Scene 1, line 426, at the very moment again when the pound of flesh plot is played out and done with. But *here* we are prepared for it

This house, these servants, and this same myself  
Are yours – my lord's – I give them with this ring  
Which when you part from, lose or give away,  
Let it presage the ruin of your love,  
And be my vantage to exclaim on you. [3.2.170–4].

'A girl's fancy? – a caprice?' we ask ourselves, noting a thought too much of emphasis laid on this trifle. Yet, after all, if Portia choose to make it a token of the much she is giving, why should she not? So we let it pass, to remember it later on.

But when we consider the body of this speech of Portia's (far more beautiful, with the reader's leave, than her more famous one on the quality of mercy, line by line flowing straight from a clean heart) and compare it with Bassanio's trash about his debts, surely our instinct discriminates between things that poetic language can, and things it cannot, dignify. . . . Portia, indeed, is the earliest portrait in Shakespeare's long gallery of incomparable women. We can feel her charm at the full only if we get the Trial Scene back to its right focus. We then see what was amiss with Hazlitt, for instance, when he grumbled over 'a certain degree of affectation and pedantry about her . . . which perhaps was a proper qualification for the office of a civil doctor.'<sup>[3]</sup> He had the Trial Scene in his eye. Now all star actors and actresses tend to exaggerate the significance of this scene, because it gives them an unrivalled occasion to exploit, as Portia or as Shylock, their personalities, their picturesqueness, their declamatory powers – Shylock, whetting his knife on his boot, Portia publicly outmaning man, yet in garments decorously ample. Worse, far worse! – it has become the happiest hunting-ground of the amateur.

There ought to be a close time<sup>[4]</sup> for this scene. I grant it to be the crisis of the action.

Shakespeare's 'stage-cleverness' and the story's 'monstrous absurdity', 1916

But it has been sentimentalised and sophisticated until we can scarcely see the rest of the play; and I, for one, long hated the rest of the play for its sake.

Here I take up and continue the personal confession. Some four or five years ago I had to stage-manage *The Merchant of Venice*. This meant that for two good months I lived in it and thought about little else. Having once achieved the difficult but necessary feat of getting the Trial Scene back into focus, I found a sense of the workmanship growing in me, and increasing to something like amazement: in the midst of which certain things new to me emerged and became clear.

Of these I beg to offer my report.

(1) To begin with, for purpose of the report – though in fact and in time it came about last of my little discoveries – Shakespeare was working upon that old play alluded to by Gosson, which combined the two incredible stories of the pound of flesh and the caskets. He started with his hands tied.

(2) He started, as in such hap every artist must, with one paramount object – *to distract our attention from the monstrous absurdity of the story*. Now let us mark with what ingenuity he does it. All artists know it for an axiom that *if you are setting out to tell the incredible, nothing will serve you so well as to open with absolute realism*. Then, with this axiom in mind, let us consider the first scene of this play. There is nothing about any pound of flesh in it! Still more astonishing, while the adventure to win Portia is propounded and discussed, there is not a word about caskets! By the end of the scene Shakespeare has impressed on our minds: –

- (a) that we are dealing with people as real as our selves;
- (b) that Antonio, a rich merchant, has so deep an affection for young Bassanio that he will forget all business caution to help him; and
- (c) – first and cunningest of all, *when later we look back*, that this man of affairs, rather deeply involved, gets very anxious without knowing quite why. The reader goes on to note how it increases Antonio's hold on us when he shakes off all his own melancholy at the first hint of helping his friend.

As for the pound of flesh, we next observe how Shylock in Scene 3 slides it in under cover of a jest. By this time Shakespeare has us at his mercy; all the characters are so real to us that we have no choice but to accept all the incredibilities to come. And meanwhile and moreover all the stage for those incredibilities has been set, though we can hardly believe that the trick has been done in four lines – the first and the three last of the Act; in Antonio's opening confession 'In sooth, I know not why I am so sad' [1.1.1], and in Bassanio's other premonition, as with a start of fear, 'I like not fair terms and a villain's mind' [1.3.179]. 'Come on,' Antonio reassures him heartily – *he* is the cheerful one now, forgetful of self and his own premonitions [Quotes 1.3.175].

(3) Launcelot Gobbo is patently own brother and twin to Launce of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and I think him no improvement on Launce. But if we follow back that hint and turn the pages of the earlier play, we soon begin to rub our eyes. Inured as we are to Shakespeare's habit of economising his material, of turning old plots, tricks, situations to new uses, his 'rifacciammenting' (if I may coin the word) of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in *The Merchant of Venice* is audacious. For a sample, compare the

## Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

two early scenes in which the two heroines discuss their lovers; while, as for the main device of *The Two Gentleman of Verona* – the heroine in mannish disguise – in *The Merchant of Venice* there are but three female characters, and they *all* don man's clothes!

(4) 'This is a play,' wrote Hazlitt, 'that in spite of the change of manners still holds undisputed possession of the stage.'<sup>[5]</sup> It does yet; and yet on the stage, sophisticated by actors, it had always vexed me, until, coming to live with an acting version, I came to track the marvellous stage-cleverness of it all, when, in revulsion, I grew impatient with all judgments of Shakespeare passed on the mere reading of him. This had happened to me before with *The Taming of the Shrew* – a play noisier in the study than on the stage; strident, setting the teeth on edge; odious, until acted; when it straightway becomes not only tolerable, but pleasant, and not only pleasant, but straightforwardly effective. In particular, I had to own of *The Merchant of Venice* that the lines which really told on the stage were lines the reader passes by casually, not pausing to take their impression. It fairly surprised me, for an example, that Lorenzo's famous speech in the last Act – about the music and the moonlight and the stars – though well delivered, carried less weight than four little words of Portia's.

(5) And this brings me to the last Act, so often discussed. . . .

The Fifth Act, as Shakespeare finally gives it to us, is lovely past compare, even after professionals have done their worst on the Trial Scene. Nay, whatever they did or omitted, the atmosphere of the Doge's court was thunderous, heavily charged; after all, a good man's life was at stake, and we have hung on the lips of the pleaders. We have to be won back to a saner, happier acceptance of life; and so we are, by gracious, most playful comedy. It is all absurd, if we please. The unsealing of a letter telling Antonio, to make joy complete, that 'Three of your argosies / Are richly come to harbour suddenly,' is unbelievable. 'You shall not know,' Portia adds – 'You shall not know by what strange accident / I chanced on this letter' [5.1.276–8].

No; nor anyone else! It is absurd as the conclusion of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Yet it is not more absurd than the ending of most fairy-tales.

And while all this has been passing, the moon has sunk and every thicket around Belmont has begun to thrill and sing of dawn. Portia lifts a hand. 'It is almost morning . . . / Let us go in –' [5.1.295–7]. (436–48)

## 60 Isador Henry Coriat, Shylock's anal-erotic tendencies

1921

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From 'Anal-Erotic Character Traits in Shylock', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 2 (1921), pp. 354-60.

Isador Henry Coriat (1875-1943) was descended on his paternal side from a distinguished family that included merchants, Rabbis, and Kabbalist scholars from Marrakesh in Morocco. Coriat's father immigrated to Philadelphia, and Coriat studied at Tufts Medical College, subsequently opening a private practice in Boston, and specializing in neurology and psychoanalysis. Coriat served as President of the American Psychoanalytic Association from 1924 to 1925 and from 1936 to 1937. According to Barbara Sicherman in the *Dictionary of American Biography Supplement Three 1941-1945* (New York, 1973), Coriat 'believed psychoanalysis could help individuals sublimate infantile tendencies into useful intellectual and artistic pursuits, and especially praised the healing properties of religion' (p. 191). His books range from *Abnormal Psychology* (1910), *The Hysteria of Lady Macbeth* (1912), and *Repressed Emotions* (1920), to *Stammering: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (1928).

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Shakespeare's character of Shylock, the central figure of *The Merchant of Venice*, has been one of the male characters in the marvellous gamut of the Shakespearean drama whose essential traits have evoked varying interpretations, thus placing it in the same category with *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*. Whether or not he was a blood-thirsty villain or a man more sinned against than sinning, or whether he showed character traits which were to be expected in one of his race and tradition, are subjects over which the controversy of Shakespearean criticism has raged. It has been the fashion to compare the character of Shylock with that of Barrabas in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. This parallel, however, is incorrect in its general essentials, for Barrabas carried his long suppressed hate to the point of sadistic lust murders, a trait which is entirely absent in Shylock; for Shylock's wishes at no time during their development had any of the horrors of the revenge of Barrabas.

The sources of the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* and of the character of Shylock have been traced to old ballads, such as the song of Gernutus, Italian romances (*Il Pecorone*), Persian and Indian legends, the *Jew of Malta* and finally an old German comedy. Thus there were many analogies in European and Oriental literature to the two intertwined stories which may be termed the pound of flesh theme and three caskets theme, which

## Isador Henry Coriat

constitute the main plot of the *Merchant of Venice*. It appears that Shylock was made a Jew to appeal to the popular prejudice of the time. As Elze states<sup>1</sup> 'His (Shakespeare's) public wished above all things to see Shylock crushed', and it may be added that Shakespeare completely fulfilled the wishes of that public.

Most of the critical interpretations of Shylock's character have insisted on the essential Jewish traits. For instance Hudson states that Shylock is 'thoroughly and intensely Jewish, with strong national traits interwoven with personal traits'. Brandes in his fine criticism regards Shylock from the same standpoint: 'Shakespeare has seized upon and reproduced racial characteristics and emphasized what is peculiarly Jewish in Shylock's culture.'<sup>[2]</sup>

It is impossible to agree with these interpretations, for when Shylock's character traits are examined according to psychoanalytic conceptions, it will be found that they are not specifically Jewish, but universal, and that the same traits may exist in all men and women. Analysis of Shylock's character is able to show, first, that it is not particularly Jewish and secondly, that his love for money and his hate and revenge spring from the same unconscious sources, in other words they are merely the outward projections of strong anal-erotic tendencies. These anal-erotic impulses are the same in all men and as a result of racial repression any individual may show an outburst of the same strong characteristics as Shylock and react as he has done. These character traits have been precipitated into the unconscious of all mankind from the experience of previous generations and it is only the moral code of culture and civilization which keeps them suppressed. Under proper conditions these egoistic and anal-erotic components emerge and dominate the personality and thus become manifest either as an instinct for the possession of money or a stubborn wish for revenge.

A few of the Shakespearean critics have possessed sufficient insight into Shylock's character to refer to the anal-erotic components in a vague manner, but without, however, clearly understanding them. Giles<sup>3</sup> for instance cites the feeling of power and omnipotence in Shylock and states: 'His energy is restricted to one mode of power, the power of money. To have potency he must have money'. Heine, with his remarkable insight, clearly saw the ambivalent<sup>[4]</sup> tendencies of Shylock's character, the love of money and revenge and the love for his daughter. He states: 'Shylock does indeed love money, but there are things which he loves still more, among them his daughter ("Jessica, my girl"). Although he curses her in his rage and would see her dead at his feet with the jewels in her ears and the ducats in her coffin, he loves her more than ducats or jewels'.

In referring to Judaism, Weininger<sup>5</sup> specifies that it is 'neither a race nor a people nor a recognized creed. I think of it as a tendency of mind, as a psychological constitution which is a possibility for all mankind'. This statement is of interest in any psychoanalysis of Shylock, for it furnishes an insight into those traits which have constantly been referred to as being peculiar to the Jew in general and to Shylock in particular. As all men are capable of homosexual object selection and often accomplish this in their unconscious mental life, so all have the same anal-erotic components which to a certain degree are so conspicuous in Shylock.

The unconscious mind is so remote from the conscious mind, that Freud's astonishing demonstration in 1908 of what he termed the anal-erotic character traits has provoked

the most intense opposition and incredulity. These traits of adult life and their dependence on infantile sexual excitations in the anal canal have been criticized as absurd and grotesque, yet anyone who carefully worked in psychoanalysis is soon absolutely convinced of the soundness and validity of Freud's ideas.

Without going into the mechanism and genesis of these traits, it seems sufficient merely to enumerate them for the purpose in view, namely the analysis of the various aspects of Shylock's character. These features when they occur in a highly developed anal-erotic individual are orderliness, parsimony, miserliness and obstinacy, to which may be added love of money, hate, revenge, love of children, defiant disobedience and procrastination. Nearly all these will be found well defined in the character of Shylock if the development of the play and the text are carefully studied.

Shylock is portrayed as a wealthy Jew of Venice in whom the love of money, as shown by his often reiterated reference to his 'ducats', is a distinguishing trait. With the love of his money, Shakespeare with a remarkable insight emphasizes the tenderness for his daughter Jessica, as a sort of unconscious identity of the two most valuable possessions of his life – his daughter and his ducats. As Jones points out: 'One of the most impressive traits in the whole gamut of the anal character is the extraordinary and quite exquisite tenderness that some members of the type are capable of, especially with children; this is no doubt strengthened both by the association with innocence and purity . . . and by the reaction-formation against the repressed sadism that so commonly goes with marked anal erotism'.<sup>6</sup> This is well shown in the speech of Salanio where the elopement of Shylock's daughter Jessica is described:

My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! [2.8.15]

That Shylock is a miser, that he collects, gathers and hoards money and gives none or very little out, even in the management of his own household, is demonstrated in the speech of Launcelot Gobbo, the servant of Shylock, where he states: 'I am famished in his service, you may tell every finger I have with my ribs' [2.2.106–7]. Shylock is a miser because money means power to him and, as Ferenczi states,<sup>7</sup> 'The adult's symbolic interest in money gets extended not only to objects with similar physical attributes, but to all sorts of things that in any way signify value or possession. . . . The enjoyment at possessing it has its deepest and amplest source in coprophilia'.

Studies in anal erotism have demonstrated that whenever archaic methods of thought prevail, such as the neuroses, dreams, superstition and unconscious thinking, money has been brought into the closest connection with filth and scatological rites. This superstition is shown in the fairy tale of the goose which laid the golden eggs and in many legends, poems and linguistic expressions. Ferenczi has also emphasized the transition from the infantile idea of excrement to the apparently remote symbol of money.<sup>8</sup>

For instance, in the analysis of a compulsion neurotic with strong anal-erotic traits and superstitions the following dream occurred: He was paying the roan in coin for commission on some goods and the man gave the money to a horse to eat and then the dreamer recovered the money from the manure of the horse and stuffed it into a big sausage for safe keeping. Here we have a dream which coincides with the superstition of bringing the discovery of treasure into association with the act of defaecation. Now the profound significance of Shylock's words to Jessica becomes clear:



Isador Henry Coriat

I am bid forth to supper, Jessica . . .  
I am right loath to go;  
There is some ill a brewing towards my rest,  
For I did dream of money-bags to-night. [2.5.11, 16–18]

Here we have an exquisite combination of the precipitation of strongly repressed anal-erotic traits into the unconscious, producing the dream of ‘money bags’ the superstitious interpretation of the dream, the hate of Shylock and the love and tenderness for his daughter. In addition, the scatological symbolism of ‘money-bags’ in the dream is very apparent to workers in psychoanalysis. This relationship with the usual Elizabethan freedom of coprophilic expression is also seen in the last words of Shylock’s warning to Jessica.

Fast bind, fast find,  
A proverb never stale in thrifty mind. [2.5.54–5]

Shylock’s sadism as shown in his literal demand for the pound of flesh is already found foreshadowed in his ‘aside’, when he first meets Antonio, the ‘aside’ I take it, as in all dramas, being a sort of a day-dream.

If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him. [1.3.46–7]

and the later words: ‘Cursed be my tribe, / If I forgive him!’ [1.3.51–2] This sadistic hate is further emphasized in the following dialogue:

*Salarino.* Why, I am sure, if he forfeit, thou wilt not take his flesh; what’s that good for?  
*Shylock.* To bait fish withal, if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge.  
[3.1.51–5]

This is what Brandes probably meant when he said, in speaking of the character of Shylock ‘Money is nothing to him in comparison with revenge. His hatred for Antonio is far more intense than his love for his jewels and it is the passionate hatred, not avarice, that makes him the monster he becomes’.

As Ernest Jones<sup>9</sup> has pointed out, an observation which was subsequently confirmed by Freud, there is a strong unconscious psychological connection between hate and anal erotism. This connection is seen to an extreme degree in Shylock. From this hate there arises the sadism of Shylock with its pleasure in the anticipation of inflicting pain on the hated person as a form of defiance. This character trait of sadistic hate is developed to its fullest extent in the trial scene, where Shylock is preparing to have the due and forfeit of his bond:

*Bassanio.* Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?  
*Shylock.* To cut the forfeiture from that bankrout there. [4.1.121–2]

*Shylock's anal-erotic tendencies, 1921*

Here in this wonderful scene, the hate of Shylock, the pleasure in the anticipation of inflicting pain and seeing others suffer, is strongly over-emphasized and becomes stronger than the love for money [Quotes 4.1.85–7].

Thus is portrayed with astonishing accuracy another anal-erotic trait, the idea or feeling of power, showing the deep connection between power and anal erotism or between force and possession, the sadistic and the anal-erotic impulses. For until the legal quibble of the distinguished Portia, Shylock's feeling of power over an unfortunate fellowman and the pleasure which this power brings is reinforced by the admission of the Duke that Shylock's demand, cruel and blood-thirsty as it may seem, is a just one and within the law.

The conclusion to be drawn from this short analysis of Shylock's character is that all men in whom there are highly developed anal-erotic character traits, particularly those referring to money, power, hate, would have reacted, under the same circumstances of social repression, in much the same way that Shylock reacted. We may assume, therefore, from the data as revealed by the distinguishing traits of anal erotism, that Shylock's character was not of a particular racial type, but that such character traits can be found in all individuals where these traits are so little repressed and so highly developed as profoundly to modify their relations to their fellow men. The same unconscious impulses and motivations under the same conditions which reacted on Shylock would be able to produce identical tendencies to power and revenge. (354–60)

## 61 Gerald Friedlander, Shylock not an authentic Jew

1921

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From *Shakespeare and the Jew*, with an Introduction by Maurice Moscovitch (New York, 1921).

Gerald Friedlander (1871–1923), Anglo-Jewish Rabbi and man of letters, was born in London and educated at a Rabbinical seminary in Hanover, at Jew's College in London, and at University College, London. From 1897 until his death he was the Minister at the Western Synagogue in London, and also taught Hebrew at University College School and elsewhere. An opponent of 'Liberal' and 'Reform' Judaism, Friedlander was embroiled in many ongoing controversies in the correspondence columns of newspapers such as the *Jewish Chronicle*. He wrote and edited various works on Anglo-Jewish history and literature and Judaica. *Shakespeare and the Jew* (1921, reprinted 1974) was introduced by the great Yiddish actor Maurice Moscovitch (1871–1940) who performed Shylock many times in Yiddish and in 1919 at the Court Theatre, Sloane Square, London.

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The subject to be discussed is 'Shylock, Shakespeare's greatest error.' By way of introduction let us ask a question which runs: 'What did report say and think of the Jew in Shakespeare's day? Was he a saint? No. Was he a gentleman? Impossible. Was he a man? Not even that. What was he then? Shakespeare's words in *The Merchant of Venice*, reply: 'The very devil incarnal' [2.2.24].

In glancing at the world's relation to the Jew, the reader of history will find throughout the story of mediæval Christendom that all orders of Christian society are 'arrayed in fierce and implacable animosity against the race of Israel.' The words quoted are not from Graetz, the Jewish historian, but from Milman, at one time Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, in the third volume (p. 159) of his well-known and interesting *History of the Jews*. Let us listen to this historian's tale of the Jewish people: 'Every passion was in arms against them. The monarchs were instigated by avarice; the nobility by the warlike spirit generated by chivalry; the clergy by bigotry; the people by all these concurrent motives. Each of the great changes which were gradually taking place in the state of the world seemed to darken the condition of this unhappy people' (*ibid.*). . . . [Gives an account of Jewish history and persecution in medieval Europe.]

We all recognise the supreme genius of Shakespeare. His humorous outlook on life, his wealth of thought, and his superb command of language still stir us as they did the millions of men and women who have loved and admired this master of the pen. We

*Shylock not an authentic Jew, 1921*

also love to listen to the deep harmonies of his tragedies. We also are enchanted by the wondrous powers of his speech. Well do we know and reverence the magic of his genius. Nevertheless if we take exception to his portrait of a Jew, we do not do so in order to blame him for giving expression to the general opinion of his day with regard to the supposed evil nature of the Jew. Shylock is a monstrosity, not a real human being created in the Image divine.

[Summarizes the plot, discusses Shakespeare's sources, the Lopez case, and Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*.]

What does the Jew as portrayed by Shakespeare's incomparable genius, think of life? Very little, for he longs for the flesh and blood of the Christian. He does not value his own life when he says: 'You take my life / When you do take the means whereby I live' [4.1.376-7]. But what Shakespeare did not know – and how in spite of his wonderful gifts could he know – is the fact that the genuine Jew of flesh and blood, not the wooden, lifeless caricature good enough for the stage, has throughout the ages known his true nobility as the chosen witness to things divine. When the Church was mad with the blood of Israel, slain to glorify a son of Judea exalted to the rank of a God, the Jew in the hour of peril and pain, despised and forsaken on earth, rejected and accursed, would betake himself to the synagogue and commune with the Only God of Humanity, whispering:

Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire before thee.

My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

[Ps. 73: 25-6].

You ask: 'Has Shylock the Jew no religion?' O yes, a religion of a strange kind. He refers very definitely to the New Testament, and Portia also lays the Gospels under contribution in her attempt to teach the Jew the lesson of mercy. Shylock's mouth is full of strange oaths. He swears by 'Jacob's staff' [2.5.36]. An oath perfectly suitable in the mouth of a Christian, but not in that of a Jew. 'The staff of Jacob' was familiarly used in the sense of a pilgrim's staff, because Saint James or Jacob, the patron of pilgrims, was represented with one in his hand: Spenser in his *Faerie Queene*, says:

And in his hand a Jacob's staffe, to stay  
His weary limbs upon (1.6.35).

Then Shylock swears by 'his tribe' and by 'the Sabbath.' Such oaths are unknown to a Jew. To call the Founder of the Christian Religion 'a Nazarite' (1.3.34), might be an error on the part of a Christian, but no Jew would use this term. He might say 'Nazarene.' There is not one word spoken by Shylock, which one would expect to hear from a real Jew. God, the Torah, the Messiah, holiness, love, kindness, prayer, are all unknown to Shylock. He becomes like Jessica, his daughter, a Christian on the spot, without a sign of the slightest inward struggle, without a word of hesitation or resistance.

## Gerald Friedlander

Christianity knows quite well that the conversion of a Jew is the most difficult of all her problems.

Thus we see how Shakespeare goes astray. Yet he makes Shylock go to the Synagogue. The Jew who frequents the Synagogue knows its teaching. The Synagogue forbids a Jew to cut off a piece, even the smallest portion, of a living animal. How much more does this humane law, known only in Israel, apply to a human being? Portia is right in reminding Shylock that the attempt to cut off a Pound of Flesh would put Antonio in danger of losing his life. The Jew of the Synagogue knows the Decalogue. The Sixth Commandment runs: 'Thou shalt not murder.' Would a Jew in the sixteenth or any other century risk the very lives of all the Jews in his town by daring to give vent to his hatred of a Christian by cutting his flesh and thereby killing him in the public court of law before the chief magistrate of the city, where he and his brethren were suffered to live as Pariahs, without the rights and privileges of the Christian citizens? Moreover, we are seeing a trial in Venice. The man in jeopardy is a nobleman and a Christian. His opponent is merely a 'Jewish usurer.' In Venice of that day there was a very powerful secret Court of Ten. This infamous tribunal never hesitated for a second to poison or drown its victims.

There are two stories in *The Merchant of Venice*; the 'Casket Tale' and the 'Pound of Flesh' incident. Then the play has two sides, a comic side which raises laughter, and a serious side which fixes the attention and expectation of the spectator or reader. Whether the dramatist intended his audience to believe the plot is hardly probable. In any case the genius of Shakespeare lessens the improbability of his plots. The superstructure is so magnificent and beautiful that the audience and readers are apt to forget the foundation. We survey the construction with such wonder and pleasure that we forget to think of the enchanted basis on which the whole structure rests. The conduct of Portia has not escaped the criticism of legal experts. Is it likely that this very sweet lady, in the guise of a lawyer, could impose upon the high court of justice in Venice? She saves the life of the Christian merchant by a quibble. She does not hesitate, in spite of her reverence for mercy, to rob the unfortunate Jew not only of his faith and soul but also of his wealth. Does history afford any parallel to Portia's ruse? There are, however, historic parallels to the incident of the mutilation of the flesh of a fellow-being as a forfeit. [Instances cases regarding the mutilation of the flesh.] Jewish history and literature afford no parallels to the cases just mentioned.

I have tried to show how Shakespeare has gone astray in his attempt to understand the psychology of the Jew. . . . We know that Shakespeare had before him in the flesh a Jew, who was accused of having attempted the diabolical crime of poisoning the Virgin Queen, his ideal monarch. The Jew was believed to have tried to spill the blood of the greatest ruler on earth. Surely it was not too much to suppose that a Jew could be capable of insisting on the harsh terms of the bond, whereby he might cut off a pound of flesh, especially when his victim was a Christian.

Shakespeare's greatest error lies in his complete failure to understand the true nature of a Jew's heart and soul. He assumes simply that he has neither. . . .

Shakespeare in his *Merchant of Venice* has done the Jew for all time an injustice. The physical persecutions endured by the Jew throughout the ages are forgiven if not forgotten, but the persecution by the libels and falsehoods written by the pen are more

*Shylock not an authentic Jew, 1921*

lasting in their venomous effect than the most violent outrage offered to the body. Why? Because the pen can poison the soul and mind of humanity. Shakespeare's error was duly recognised by Lessing, one of the greatest critics of literature. He made amends by writing the true story of the Jew, *Nathan the Wise*. His glory is shared by Richard Cumberland.<sup>[1]</sup> All honour to these vindicators of the Jew. (1, 12–13, 24–8)

## 62 Levin L. Schücking, Shylock's self-revelation in soliloquy

1922

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From *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays* (London, 1922), transl. W. H. Peters from *Die Charakterprobleme bei Shakespeare* (Leipzig, 1919).

Levin L. Schücking (1878–1964), Professor of English at the University of Leipzig, and a leading German Shakespeare critic of the inter-war period, was a pioneer in rediscovering Elizabethan dramatic conventions. For a bibliography of his publications see Walter Ebisch, *Bibliographie der wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten von Levin L. Schücking* (Leipzig, 1938). He was the co-author, with Walter Ebisch, of *A Shakespeare Bibliography* (Oxford, 1931), with a *Supplement for the years 1930–1935* (Oxford, 1936).

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In no department of Shakespeare's art do we find such irregularity as in his dealing with the motives for action. It has therefore become the happy hunting-ground of the most daring and extravagant critics, the starting-point of the most fundamentally diverse interpretations of his characters. But as has been shown in the preceding chapters, it will not be impossible to base our conclusions on the firm ground of facts if we try to form a picture of his method of working that is not contradictory to the results we have so far obtained.

The first peculiarity that strikes us is one that cannot surprise us, knowing, as we do, how he strove after a plain and popular form of expression. Information that in a modern drama must be deduced from the action itself, or gathered indirectly from the dialogue of the principal or secondary personages – the monologues of the heroes serving at most to supplement it – is here imparted, in all essentials, by just these monologues, which especially in the great tragedies give us, ready made, all the knowledge necessary for our judgment of the speaker's character. Brutus, for instance, unreservedly opens his soul to the penetrating gaze of the spectator, and exposes the motives of his actions in his monologue, and Macbeth, with that self-knowledge of which, against all probability, even the villains of Shakespeare are capable, carefully enlightens the audience:

I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
And falls on the other. [*Macbeth*, 1.7.25–8]

*Shylock's self-revelation in soliloquy, 1922*

What clearly distinguished reasons, too, does Shylock give when he discloses the threefold root of his hatred against Antonio in the following speech:

I hate him for he is a Christian,  
But more for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.  
He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,  
Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
On me, my bargains and my well-won thrift,  
Which he calls interest. [1.3.42–51]

This absolutely plain and unmistakable exposition of the Jew's point of view has been seized upon and subjectively interpreted, according to their own personal point of view, by critics who are accustomed to read more *between* the lines than *in* them. They have endeavoured to upset the ethical balance which Shakespeare intended to establish between the parties, being induced to take this line by the fact that the standards of morality have changed in many respects since his time. We now regard Shylock's enemies, the gay cavaliers and dowry-hunters, the royal merchant suffering from an aristocratic weariness of the world, largely as drones for whom we have but little sympathy. On the other hand, we sympathize with the Jew, who voices the bitter feeling of his race, due to incessant insults, in such powerful and touching language. The contention of these critics would be acceptable only if the Jew's behaviour were not in agreement with the reasons expressed in his words. Now the fact is that there is a perfect agreement. As most characteristic, we need point out only the cunning manner in which he utilizes the chance of laying a snare for the merchant by getting him to sign the bond. When Antonio's friend, grown suspicious, warns him against signing the gruesome document Shylock pretends, with masterly hypocrisy, that the whole affair is nothing more than a joke; he even goes to the length of simulating offence because the arrangement is taken seriously at all:

O father Abram, what these Christians are,  
Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect  
The thoughts of others! Pray you, tell me this;  
If he should break his day, what should I gain  
By the exaction of the forfeiture? [1.3.160–4]

We see clearly that a conception which regards Shylock as the avenger who by chance obtains an opportunity of exacting retribution for his downtrodden race, and who cannot be expected to show mercy to his enemies who, on their part, treat him without pity, strays far from the poet's intention. This passage alone suffices to show how, on the contrary, he tries to entrap his unsuspecting enemy by cunning and perfidy. Nor can we overlook the fact that the fury of the Jew, due to sordid avarice against the merchant



Levin L. Schücking

who lends money without interest, and the hatred against the Christian, which springs from racial pride, are meant to be important motives, in conjunction with the vindictiveness of one who has been oppressed and ill-treated.

Scientific Shakespearian criticism, however, has never taken the so-called Shylock question very seriously; the text of the drama was too clear an argument against it. Still, the case is useful as affording instruction of the degree of arbitrariness and neglect of the text to which Shakespearian exegesis can sink in a comparatively simple instance. Similar mistakes, of almost the same gravity, are committed on other occasions by many of the most exact interpreters who in the case of Shylock rightly admit the poet's own words to be the only canon of judgment. (203–5)

## 63 E. E. Stoll, Shakespeare's intentions and the dynamics of comedy

1927

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From E. E. Stoll, *Shakespeare Studies, Historical and Comparative in Method* (New York, 1927; corr. edn, 1942), Ch. 6: 255–336.

On Stoll, see No. 56 above. In 1927 he issued *Shakespeare Studies*, including six previously published essays which were 'entirely recast – much altered and even more enlarged' (p. v). He prefixed the following note to his essay on Shylock:

In the general outlines of the conception of this character, and in some of the arguments, I discovered, when on the point of printing my article in 1911, that I had been anticipated by Mr. W. H. Hudson, and, after the printing, by Mr. George Woodberry.<sup>[1]</sup> I refer to both eminent scholars below. Similar views have been expressed independently by Mr. William Poel, and by Professor Creizenach in the fourth and fifth volumes of his *Geschichte des Dramas*. . . . Swinburne, too, in his *Three Plays of Shakespeare* (first published in 1909), with which I have just become acquainted, thinks Shylock 'less sinned against than sinning, not less grotesque than piteous'; and the opinion nowadays seems to be turning in that direction. An external sign in America is the fact that the Jewish Anti-Defamation Society is more and more successful in its endeavours to keep the play out of the schools. (p. 255 n. 1)

Throughout his essay Stoll draws frequent comparisons between Shakespeare's treatment of his comic characters and what Molière did with *George Dandin, ou le Mari confondu*; *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*; *Le Tartuffe ou l'imposteur*; Argan and Béline in *Le Malade imaginaire*; Arnolphe in *L'École des Femmes*; M. Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*; the misanthropical Alceste in *Le Misanthrope*; the miser Harpagon in *L'Avare* together with Cléante, Valère, and Maître Jacques in that play; Sganarelle in *L'École des maris*; and Géronte and Valère in *Le Médecin malgré lui*.

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[Stoll returns to his earlier argument (p. 269) above) that 'The dramatist's intention . . . together with his success or failure in fulfilling it, is the only matter of importance'.]

Professedly, to be sure, the intention of the author has for long been the 'guiding star of criticism'. What has the writer proposed to himself to do? Goethe asked; and how far has he succeeded in carrying out his own plan? 'From Coleridge to Pater, from Sainte-Beuve to Lemaitre', says Professor Spingarn, 'the answer to this question is what critics have been striving for even when they have not succeeded';<sup>2</sup> and I could add the names of other critics so different as Professor Lipps, Mrs. Edith Wharton, Mr. Clutton Brock, and Alexander Pope, who for themselves have avowed it. Only now and then have critics frankly denied it, and declared that the purpose of the author has only an historical interest. That way, they seem to see, if not madness, chaos lies. For thus a work of art means anything, everything – that is, nothing, – and what is the use of discussing it? It ceases to be a means of expression or communication, – it is a relic, a token, a fetish which conjures up more or less irrelevant spiritual or ecstatic states, and starts one off upon a reverie or tangential rapture, and it is these states, then – this reverie or rapture – that must pass for criticism. Yet actually and practically criticism of the great idols, Shakespeare or Cervantes, has oftenest been of just that nature, and the sound principles so frankly recognized are as freely disregarded. There has been little patient endeavour to discover the author's intention, and less fidelity to it when found. Heaven and earth have been moved to establish the true text, to interpret a now forgotten phrase or track down an obscure allusion; but of the larger meaning, the conception of a character, and the scope and significance of the whole, each man feels (or writes as if he felt) pretty free to think what he pleases. His impression, not the author's discoverable intention, is his standard; his feelings, not the author's fairly discernible feelings, are his guide. Throughout Professor Bradley's fine book on *Shakespearean Tragedy* [1904] the supreme authority recognized seems to be the experience of the reader. 'The reader should examine himself closely on this matter', he repeats in various forms as he discusses 'tragic fate' and the 'substance of tragedy'; and so he frequently arrives at conclusions that on the one hand neglect the practical and conventional aspects of Shakespeare's dramaturgy, and on the other hand overwhelm Shakespeare's concrete, dualist way of thinking with our prevailingly abstract, monistic one . . . (pp. 258–9).

Not that we are to think of the artist's intention, however clear it may seem to us, as necessarily clear and conscious in him; or that he keeps to it without changing. It is well known that the lineaments of Don Quixote, Sancho, and Parson Adams alter somewhat in the course of the long stories, and that the Falstaff of *Henry IV*, Part I, is not quite the same man in Part II and in the *Merry Wives*; and the like may have happened to Shylock. But then (if indeed it happened) it was altogether of the dramatist's own doing; it was a change in his purpose but a change that he (however unconsciously) made himself, and not one that took place in the character independently. Critics . . . darkly intimate the contrary, and speak of a character taking the bit between his teeth and running away with his author, that is, saying and doing things – getting drunk, even<sup>3</sup> – without the author's permission or knowledge. Thus, seizing upon a common illusion of the artistic temperament, they make a pretext of it for running away from the author themselves and setting up an interpretation of their own. Always the character 'runs away', very properly, into the fold of our modern sentiments and prejudices, alien from his maker's. He knows where he shall be welcome, where he is really at home. But this autonomy

and independence of a character is all a mere illusion and nothing more, thanks to the externalizing power of the creator's imagination. . . .

A character is as much the author's means of communication to the public as a phrase or sentiment. . . . And a convention or dramatic device, though now outworn, is as important a means of such communication as the wording of the text. With this we nowadays acknowledge that we have no right to tamper, but neither have we the right to ignore the others. If we follow the wording only and ignore the old undramatic convention of comment and description, then Mr. Firkins'<sup>[4]</sup> interpretation of Macbeth, at the moment of his anxiety lest that moment should lose its present horror, as an epicure in crime, is quite legitimate, though so far from Shakespeare's. And then Shakespeare's is a 'scientific curiosity'. And then however he meant them all, the Ghosts are hallucinations, Shylock is a tragic character, Falstaff a courageous and pathetic one, and Cervantes, Molière, and Rabelais himself, if we will, have tears in their eyes . . . (260–2).

[Stoll reverts to his discussion (p. 270–1 above) of Shakespeare's 'ordering of the scenes' to control the audience's perception of characters and issues.]

Launcelot and Jessica, in separate scenes [2.2; 2.3], are introduced before Shylock reaches home, that, hearing their story, we may side with them, and, when the old curmudgeon appears, may be moved to laughter as he complains of Launcelot's gormandizing, sleeping, and rending apparel out, and as he is made game of by the young conspirators to his face [2.5]. Here, as Mr. Poel<sup>[5]</sup> has noticed, when there might be some danger of our sympathy becoming enlisted on Shylock's side because he is about to lose his daughter and some of his property, Shakespeare forestalls it. He lets Shylock, in his hesitation whether to go to the feast, take warning from a dream, but nevertheless, though he knows that they bid him not for love, decide to go in hate, in order to feed upon the prodigal Christian [2.5.13–15]. And he lets him give up Launcelot, whom he has half a liking for, save that he is a huge feeder, to Bassanio – 'to one that I would have him help to waste / His borrowed purse' [2.5.50–1]. Small credit these sentiments do him; little do they add to his pathos or dignity. Still more conspicuous is this care when Shylock laments over his daughter and his ducats. Lest then by any chance a stupid or tender-hearted audience should not laugh but grieve, Salanio reports his outcries – in part word for word – two scenes in advance, as matter of mirth to himself and all the boys in Venice [2.8.4–24].

It is exactly the same method as that employed in *Twelfth Night*, Act III, scene ii, where Maria comes and tells not only Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian, but, above all, the audience, how ridiculously Malvolio is acting, before they see it for themselves. The art of the theatre, but particularly the art of the comic theatre, is the art of preparations, else it is not securely comic. But the impression first of all imparted to us is of Shylock's villainy – an impression which, however comical he may become, we are not again allowed to lose. In the first scene in which he appears, the third in the play, there is one of the most remarkable instances in dramatic literature of a man saying one thing but thinking another and the audience made to see this. He prolongs the situation, keeps the Christians on tenterhooks, turns the terms of the contract over and over in his mind, as if he were considering the soundness of it and of the borrower, while all the time he is hoping, for once in his life, that his debtor may turn out not sound but bankrupt. He casts up Antonio's hard usage of him in the past, defends the practice of interest-taking,

is at the point of stipulating what the rate this time shall be, and then – decides to be friends and take no interest at all. He seems, and is, loath to part for a time with three thousand ducats – “’tis a good round sum!” [1.3.103] – but at the bottom of his heart he is eager . . . (264–5).

[Stoll takes up his arguments (p. 275 above) that irony is ‘unthinkable unless the author intends it’, and that ‘a play of Shakespeare’s is self-contained; the irony is within it, so to speak, not underneath it.’]

Nor is Jessica treated with malice,<sup>6</sup> in mockery or irony, as, having forsaken him and robbed him and never since given him a regretful or pitying thought, she now revels in jest and sentiment, in moonlight and melody, at Belmont. What right has Signor Croce to call her ecstasy sensual? Since her father had made home a hell to her and Launcelot, and in robbing him she has acted with the approval of everybody, as did the son who robbed Harpagon, has she not a right, in the world where she now lives, to be really happy? Signor Croce may be horrified at Jessica as was Rousseau at the unfilial Cléante; but just as sympathy at the theatre traditionally is for the debtor and against the money-lender, so it is for the amorous son or eloping daughter and against the hard-hearted, stingy father. Thus it had been on the stage since the days of Plautus; cheating the old man was both sport for the slave and relief for the son’s necessities. Either consideration gave pleasure in the comic theatre. It is not ideal justice – that is not the business of comedy, but as Monsieur Donnay says of Harpagon’s gold, ‘nous sommes enchantés que cet or, mal acquis, rentre dans la circulation. De tous les vices qui peuvent s’emparer d’un homme, l’avarice est certainement le plus detestable, et qui excite le moins notre pitié’.

And as for the Jew – ‘’tis charity to undo a Jew’ [*Jew of Malta*, 4.4.80], both thought and said the age. Indeed, is not Jessica what might have been taken for a true daughter of her tribe, like Rachel, who ‘stole the images that were her father’s’ before she fled; and like the daughters of Israel, who before they went up out of the land of Egypt, ‘borrowed’ of their neighbours jewels of silver and jewels of gold?<sup>[7]</sup> ‘And they spoiled the Egyptians’, adds naively and complacently the ancient chronicler; and, having turned Christian, why should not Jessica spoil the Jew? the Christians will be likely to ask. But here, as in Antonio’s notion of conversion, or the Duke’s notion of clemency to Jews, is the irony of history, not of art. . . . (298–9)

[Stoll reverts to his earlier discussion (p. 276 above), of ‘whether villain and butt as Shylock is, he may not also be . . . a pathetic creation’.]

Before, then, we take up this question whether Shylock is also pathetic, we must consider some fundamental principles, too much ignored: 1. That the interpretation of literature – and of drama even more – is, as we have seen, mainly a study in emphasis. 2. That much comedy skirts the confines of tragedy, and what keeps it comedy is emphasis, or a conventional ‘isolation’, as Monsieur Bergson<sup>[8]</sup> has called it. 3. That comedy follows without question the manners and prejudices of the time. 4. That in the Shylock scenes there is so large an element of formal external comic technique that it is impossible to consider Shylock only ‘semi-humorous’, in part pathetic.

The first principle, that the interpretation of literature is mainly a study in emphasis, should be self-evident, and be disputable only in its applications. By manipulation and arrangement, unification and subordination, repetition or contrast, not by explicit and

prosaic comment or statement, the purpose and fairly the whole purport of a piece of literature are revealed. What is important and what is unimportant, what is merely of the story and what is central thought and animating mood or emotion, – these are the main questions we should ask in criticism, and they are answered by a study of emphasis almost alone. It is the matter of light and shade, of balance and perspective, of focussing, as in a picture. Some years ago the isochromatic photographic process was introduced as a great improvement, which made it possible to reproduce paintings exactly, what is lighter in the picture being now lighter in the photograph, and what is darker in the picture being darker in the photograph. Now some, recognizing that Shylock was by Shakespeare meant to be a comic villain, say that he was meant to be pathetic too; and others, that he was meant to be a 'supremely pathetic figure' for us at least to-day, the dramatist having knowingly or unknowingly put in little touches that warrant this different, later conception of ours. That is, the emphasis, chief means of expression at the command of the artist, is considered adjustable; what was dark turns light; what was less important becomes more important; the comedy becomes a tragedy; and Shylock forcibly, though legitimately, becomes what Mr. Schelling indeed says he is and always was, the hero instead of the comic villain. How irrelevant then become both author and work! Thus the title of the quarto, 'The Comical Historie of the Merchant of Venice, with the extreme crueltie of Shylocke the Jewe towards the sayd Merchant in cutting a just pound of his flesh, and the obtaining of Portia by the choise of three chests' becomes, in the mocking words of Mr. Poel: 'The tragicall Historie of the Jewe of Venice, with the extreme injustice of Portia towards the sayd Jewe in denying him the right to cut a just pound of the Merchant's flesh, together with the obtaining of the rich heiress by the prodigal Bassanio'. With the same text, with the same characters, we have a different play, the important becoming unimportant, the unimportant, important, comedy and tragedy, the wrong a right, and the right a wrong.

As for the second principle – comedy skirts tragedy – it is surely obvious. Behind many a comedy there is, more or less apparent, a tragedy, just as something tragic or pathetic is behind almost every joke. And that somewhat (though not altogether) explains why it is that the transformation of comedy into tragedy is in criticism so frequent. For the *Merchant of Venice* is not the only comedy, and Shakespeare not the only comic poet – *L'Avare*, *Le Misanthrope*, and *Le Tartuffe* were changed in much the same way, at almost the same time. '*L'Avare*', says Goethe, 'where vice destroys all natural piety between father and son, is especially great and in a high sense "tragic".'<sup>9</sup> Romantic seriousness and sympathy, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, made them so; and only in recent years have criticism and the actor's art forsaken their strange imaginations and returned to Molière. In England and America we are slower in recovering from our Romantic excesses and aberrations; and the sympathetic and altruistic Mr. Masfield sadly and wonderingly shakes his head as he owns that 'some people find humour in the Simcox and Cade scenes' in *Henry VI*, where he finds only 'sadness and horror of heart'; and Professor Matthews avers that *All's Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, certainly meant for comedies, 'are far from being comic in their intent or in their effect' and 'move us to sadness rather than to mirth'. Sir Walter Raleigh, with his learning and imagination, does not think so;<sup>10</sup> the

humble audience to-day, with none of the one and little of the other, but in spirit not far removed from the Elizabethan, does not either. . . . (303-5)

The point is, that while, on the one hand, comedy skirts the confines of tragedy, on the other hand, it respects the boundary line and does not go philandering over the border. Behind a comedy is a tragedy, but that is not the comedy; behind a joke there is something tragic, but that is not the joke. Such tragedy is of our making, or our discovering, not the dramatist's. Comedy becomes tragedy when we stop and consider; but, kept under the comic spell, we do not stop – we judge, react, are swept and whirled away, not in grief but in laughter, not by our sympathetic passions but by our social prejudices or antipathies. 'A line higher', as Sainte-Beuve says, 'and the comic effect ceases, and we then have a character purely generous, almost heroic and tragic',<sup>11</sup> – or pathetic, one may add. This is true of the chief characters of Molière, unquestionably comic in effect when rightly played, whether in our time or in their own; but when read and thought about to-day, easily changed. Then George Dandin, Arnolphe, the Sganarelle of the *École des maris*, all of them cuckolds or deceived lovers, become pathetic; Alceste, the Misanthrope, becomes heroic; Tartuffe, the hypocrite, on the other hand and Harpagon, the miser, become villainous. But once this change comes about, we have quite passed from under the spell of the author, out of the little magic circle of his comic art, into the vast world of fact and reality, of cause and effect.

There the joke dies within us, and laughter fails. It rings out only within doors, not when we look beyond or afar. The comic dramatist, as Monsieur Bergson says – the jester – *isolates* his material, insulates it, indeed. The comic current runs through the scene, charges its every fibre and filament, close to earth but never suffered to touch it and escape. From Eden down, no doubt, a man whose wife deceives him has, to those in the comic mood, been an object of derision, – so he is in Aristophanes as in the medieval farces, and under the sway and tyranny of that sentiment George Dandin, Arnolphe, and Sganarelle are made sport of, and all their griefs and torments, their confidence surmounting their suspicions, their devotion drowning their resentment, and their cries of love thwarted and affection hopelessly thrown away, are at no point permitted to touch us too nearly but serve only to heighten the comic effect. They are oil (with a little water) to that lambent flame. Many of these speeches taken by themselves may touch us as do some of Shylock's, – that is, when disconnected like his, short-circuited, the electric current stopped. . . . (306-7)

Rustics, cuckolds, though not rarities, then were, and in some circles still are, openly recognized as social eccentricities; and in comedy, which is the image, not of life but of society, society records its instant verdict and claps on it the penalty of laughter. George Dandin and his fellows are cuckolds; Alceste, a bear, Monsieur de Pourceaugnac, a provincial come to town; Harpagon, a harsh father and miser; Shylock a harsh father, miser, usurer, and Jew: – nothing is considered further or indeed with equanimity may be. Save Harpagon, indeed, all of Molière's personages mentioned are more or less in the right, as Shylock, save in his character of Jew, is not in the right at all; but that is neither here nor there; where ideal justice is to be done comedy fades away, laughter collapses. Justice in comedy is swift, simple, and matter-of-fact as that of Judge Lynch, though bloodless.

On the third principle we have been touching already – comedy bows to the customs

and prejudices of the time. This Rousseau pointed out long ago,<sup>12</sup> and Monsieur Bergson has made it still clearer. The comic character is 'insocial', out of harmony with his social environment, and the spectator is kept 'insensible', unsympathetic – there, as Monsieur Bergson says, are two prerequisites. A critic of late has complained of that hard-hearted king and his hard-hearted court who laughed gaily at unhappy George Dandin; but comparative hardness of heart for the time being – that is, for three solid hours – is indispensable to comedy, at least the comedy of manners; and without it – in defiance of the sympathy which is both the pet emotion and the pet virtue of our age – we cannot enter into the comic spirit. In such comedy, as in most of Molière's and much of Shakespeare's, social prejudice, the social, or (perhaps more accurately) the society sense of what is comic prevails. Ideal equity plays no part, for though the hero did marry above his rank – 'tu l'as voulu, George Dandin', – he did not deserve to be beaten and bamboozled while his clever but wicked wife and her lover went free. Here and in other comedies it is the popular spirit of ridicule for one who is jilted or is a cuckold – an old man who has sought the love of a girl, a bourgeois who has won the hand of a lady, or a jealous and suspicious soul given something to be jealous for. In seventeenth-century France, Italy, or England, their tears touched no one. 'His tears will make you laugh', says Cecchi of the old man in love with a girl in the prologue to the *Incantesimi* (1550): – 'pensomi che vi darà benissimo materia da ridere, benchè a lui sarà da piangere'. And such are the tears of Dandin, Arnolphe, and Sganarelle – social offenders all. In some of the comedies it is the social prejudice merely; – against the climber like Monsieur Jourdain; the honest provincial come to Paris on a visit, like Monsieur de Pourceaugnac; or the gentleman who, like Alceste, will not do as others do – flatter as on occasion a gentleman should.

Now, in London there was no such refined society, or highly unified, organized, and sensitive social consciousness, as in Paris at the time of Molière, or in Athens at the time of Aristophanes; and Shakespeare, by temperament, was not a satirist; but nevertheless the comic spirit and method of all three dramatists had something in common, and the less refined the social consciousness, the more vindictive it is if aroused. Shakespeare's comedies are of course romantic, sentimental, and fanciful; but this contrast of low life with high life is one of his sources of comic effect as well; and honest but humble folk in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado*, *As You Like It*, and *The Winter's Tale* are made almost unbelievably stupid and ridiculous, while those who in vanity aspire to rise above their appointed place and station, like Justice Shallow and Malvolio, are cheated or made the victims of a ruthless practical joke. Sir Toby, Maria, and the Clown sport with Malvolio while he howls in torment; and Autolycus, to the delight of himself and the audience, fleeces simple, trusting souls who have no fault save their rusticity. Malvolio, in a measure deserves it; but these last, who do not, are no more expected to evoke our sympathy than are the honest souls whom Don Juan takes in, or Maître Jacques, in *L'Avare*, devoted to his master and his horses, when he stands in the way of young Valère, a gentleman and a lover. By our standards Shakespeare, in comic vein, is, for all his sweetness and gentleness, hard-hearted like Molière (or a 'malin', as the latter is called by Lemaître), but also like Chapman, Jonson, Dekker, Marston, Fletcher, Fielding and Smollett, Rabelais, Ariosto, Cecchi, and Aretino, and of course their audiences or reading public as well. How harsh and personal the jokes and pranks were that cultivated



people then not only read but in real life permitted themselves or applauded, appears clearly from courtesy books like *Il Cortegiano*.<sup>13</sup> But the most remarkable prejudice brought to bear for a comic effect in Shakespeare, is (as, from what has been said, might have been expected) not one which arises out of the *beau monde* at all but out of the people, society in the largest sense. It is the prejudice against Jew, miser, usurer. In each of these roles singly Shylock could not but be a purely repellent or comic figure on the stage because he was an object of derision in the street, indeed by tradition was on the stage as a comic figure already established; and in these roles combined and united, not in a tragedy, but in a comedy, how could he possibly be thought pathetic at all? To the comic effect of Jonson's *Silent Woman*, not only in Shakespeare's day but long after, there is abundant and authoritative testimony – to the comic effect of the 'heartless ragging of harmless old Morose', whose only shortcomings were a 'tight purse and extreme tranquillity'. These may have offended the *beau monde* as smacking of the bourgeois, the Puritan.<sup>14</sup> But to laugh and jeer at Shylock would have been less cruel, more human, in its inhumanity.

However that be, lest our own laughter should fail – we here approach the last principle – the situation has been hedged about with the most explicitly comic technique and apparatus. There is in Shakespeare's comedy comparatively little . . . which squares with the rationale of it in Monsieur Bergson's book, little of that highly developed, formal comic technique, which somewhat reminds you of the structure of music, abounding in Molière; but an exception is to be found in the scenes where Shylock appears. Here, quite apart from the social and racial prejudices brought so directly to bear upon him, are the comic devices of repetition and inversion, as well as others less easily designated.

By repetition I mean . . . not the repetition of words or phrases at happy junctures (often comically used by Elizabethans like Dekker, as well as by dramatists so different and remote from one another as Plautus, Molière, and Ibsen) but the repetition of a *motif*, as in the daughter-ducats dialogue with Tubal, and in this case it takes the form of alternation:

*Tubal.* One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey.

*Shylock.* Out upon her. Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my turquoise, I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wildness of monkeys. [3.1.118–23]

. . . Shylock is a puppet, and Tubal pulls the strings. Now he shrieks in grief for his ducats or his daughter, now in glee at Antonio's ruin. . . . Shakespeare, as soon as Tubal enters, lets Shylock strike up the tune of 'my daughter – my ducats', and, adhering to the method of comic alternation throughout the scene, plays the familiar dramatic trick of taking the audience in for a moment and of then clapping upon the seemingly pathetic sentiment a cynical, selfish, or simply incongruous one: –

Two thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter were dead at my foot – and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hears'd at my foot – and the ducats in her coffin. [3.1.86–90]

The dashes are my own, replacing commas in the quartos and folios; they are necessary, according to modern usage, to carry out what seems the manifest intention of the author. Such quick afterthoughts and comical anticlimaxes as we have here are to be found elsewhere in Shakespeare and in comic dialogue to this day. In *Le Malade imaginaire* Béline, his designing second wife, is bid by the dying Argan to take the money out of the cupboard –

Non, non, je ne veux point de tout cela. Ah! – combien dites-vous qu'il y a dans votre alcôve?

Falstaff, taking account of his slender stock of virtues, recalls that he had paid back money that he borrowed – 'three or four times';<sup>15</sup> Sir Peter Teazle, speaking of Charles, declares to Joseph that never in life had he denied him – 'my advice'; Bob Acres, replying to Jack Absolute as he reassures Sir Lucius ('He generally kills a man a week – don't you, Bob?') cries, 'Aye – at home'; and old Eccles, in the presence of the young folk, vows that 'there is nothing like work – for the young'.<sup>16</sup> So Shylock cannot wish that his daughter were dead at his foot (if that really be pathos) without, at the same time, wishing that the jewels were in her ear, the ducats in her coffin;<sup>17</sup> he cannot hear that there is no news of them without bewailing what has been 'spent in the search'; he cannot think of Launcelot's kindness, as he parts with him, without also thinking – 'a huge feeder!' – of his appetite; and when he hears of his turquoise exchanged for a monkey, thoughts of Leah, his bachelorhood, and a wilderness of monkeys come clattering through his brain. Here is pathos side by side with laughter, but not – according to Mr. Schelling's thought – the grotesqueness bordering on laughter, the pathos bordering on tears. The nuance, the harmony is lacking – in true Elizabethan style, there is glaring contrast instead. The pathos is a pretense, a moment's illusion; the laughter alone is real. Nor is it restrained – it is nothing less than a roar, the grotesqueness passes over the border of laughter – perhaps of tears.

I have used above the figure of the puppet and the string;<sup>18</sup> and surely nowhere else in Shakespeare do we get so distinctly as here that effect of the human being turned mechanical – automaton, or jack-in-the-box – which is frequent in comedy, as Monsieur Bergson has shown. We are familiar, as I have said, with such comically mechanical effects in ordinary life, when, for instance (to employ the vernacular) we 'take a rise out of' a person. We speak the provocative word – pull the string or press the spring, – and, behold, the effect expected! Shakespeare does that through the comfortable Tubal's alternate method of imparting his news, though he only continues the alternation set at work when first Shylock learned of his double loss: – Tubal pulls the strings of a puppet already in motion. The situation is thus instinct with comedy, pathos could not possibly live in its midst. The same situation indeed was already established on the stage as comic, as 'pathétique plaisant', for the outcries of robbed misers had entertained 'hard-hearted' audiences since the days of Euclio.<sup>19</sup> Marlowe's Barabas had displayed even the same jumble of emotions, as he gloated over his girl and his gold, and probably there had been others too.<sup>20</sup> A little later Cyrano de Bergerac, in the scene of *Le Pédant joué*, presents comically, like Molière and Shakespeare, the pangs of paternal affection contending with avarice, but attains a climax not to be found in either. Unlike Géronte, Granger does not

yet know the amount of the ransom demanded to save his son from hanging; but when he hears that it is a hundred pistoles, the scale then and there ceases to balance and kicks the beam. 'Go, Corbineli, tell him to be hanged and have done with it.' Here is the same grotesque, and (for the hard-hearted) comical, preference of the loss of a child to a worse thing that might befall him, that we find afterwards in *L'Avare*, when Harpagon declares that the fact that Valère (charged with having stolen his casket of treasure) had saved his daughter's life, is nothing, and tells her 'it were much better to have let you drown than have done what he has done'. 'Would she were hears'd at my foot – and the ducats in her coffin!' Harpagon, we remember, used to be misinterpreted, as Shylock still is; but Coquelin *cadet* changed that, and now again, as when Molière played him – and as when to Robinet he wrote of the playing – 'd'un bout à l'autre il fait rire'.

Then there is inversion, the tables turned. 'L'histoire du persécuté victime de sa persécution, du dupeur dupé, du voleur volé, fait le fond de bien des comédies.' The trial scene is an example. To most critics Shylock has here seemed to be more or less pathetic, despite the fact that, as I take it, Shakespeare has employed almost every possible means to produce a contrary, quite incompatible effect. . . . The biter bitten, is the gibe cast at him at the end of *Il Pecorone*,<sup>[21]</sup> and that, exactly, is the spirit of the scene. It is the same spirit and almost the same situation as at the close of Sheridan's *Duenna*, where another Jew, not nearly so culpable as Shylock, having now been fast married to the dragon herself, not, as he thinks, to the maiden that she guards, is jeered at for it, while one of the characters gives the reason, – that 'there is not a fairer subject for contempt and ridicule than a knave become the dupe of his own art'.<sup>[22]</sup> Shylock's disappointment is tragic to him, but good care is taken that it shall not be to us. Shakespeare is less intent on values than on the conduct and direction of our sympathies through the scene. This he manages both by the action and the comment. The scene is a rise and a fall, a triumph turned into a defeat, an apparent tragedy into a comedy; and the defeat is made to repeat the stages of the triumph so as to bring home to us the fact – the comic fact – of retribution. When fortune turns, almost all the steps of the ladder whereby Shylock with scales and knife had climbed to clutch the fruit of revenge he must now descend empty-handed and in bitterness; and what had been offered to him and refused by him, he is now, when he demands it again, refused. With the course of the action the comment is in perfect accord and unison, marking and signaling the stages of Shylock's fall. The outcries against the Jew and his stony heart, of the Duke, Bassanio, and Gratiano – protested against by Antonio as futile – give place to the jeers of Gratiano and the irony of the fair judge. Gratiano is not the only one to crow. [*Portia*:] 'Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desir'st – Soft! The Jew shall have all justice – Why doth the Jew pause? Take thy forfeiture – Tarry, Jew; the law hath yet another hold on you – Art thou contented, Jew? What dost thou say?' [4.1.314–16, 320–1, 335, 393]. Aimed at Shylock as he pleads and squirms, these words fall from lips which had a moment before extolled the heavenly qualities of mercy! But for more than the meagre mercy which Shylock is shown there is neither time nor place, the crowing fits the latter part of the action as perfectly as the indignant comment had fitted the earlier, and we must equally accept it or divest the scene of meaning and sense. The Jew's very words are echoed by Portia and Gratiano as they jeer, and at every turn that the course of justice takes (welcomed by Shylock, while it was in his favour, with hoarse cries of

gloating and triumph) there are now peals and shouts of laughter, such laughter as arises when Tartuffe the hypocrite is caught by Orgon, – ‘un rire se lève de tous les coins de la salle, un rire de vengeance si vous voulez, un rire amer, un rire violent’.<sup>23</sup> The running fire assails him to the very moment – and beyond it – that Shylock says he is not well, and staggers out, amid Gratiano’s jeers touching his baptism, to provoke in the audience the laughter of triumph and vengeance in his own day and bring tears to their eyes in ours. How can we here for a moment sympathize with Shylock unless at the same time we indignantly turn, not only against Gratiano, but against Portia, the Duke, and all Venice as well? but Shakespeare’s scene it is – Shakespeare’s comedy, – not ours or Hazlitt’s.<sup>24</sup>

One reason why the critics have, despite all, even in this scene, found pathos in Shylock, is that they well know that comic effects may keep company with the pathetic, in Shakespeare as in Dostoevsky and Chekhov. They remember Mercutio’s last words, Mrs. Quickly’s report of Falstaff’s death, or the Fool’s babblings in *King Lear*. Laughter may indeed blend with tears when the character is treated tenderly; but here and in the daughter–ducats scene it is, as I have said, only the laughter of derision. In the judgment scene, moreover, there is – very clearly marked – the spirit of retaliation; it is a harsh and vindictive laughter; and if Shakespeare had here intended any minor and momentary pathetic effects such as critics nowadays discover, he simply overwhelms them. Professor Matthews says that Shakespeare meant the spectators to hate Shylock and also to laugh at him, and yet made him pathetic – supremely pathetic too.<sup>25</sup> The combination seems to me impossible, at least in a comedy, and Professor Matthews seems to me to be talking metaphysics and forgetting the stage which he knows so well. If hateful, Shylock would provoke in the audience the *rire de vengeance*, an echo of Gratiano’s jeer; if pathetic also, he would – and should – provide no laughter (at least of such kind as is known to me) at all. In comedy, at any rate, things must be simple and clear-cut; a character which is to provoke laughter cannot be kept, like Buridan’s ass, in equilibrium, exciting, at the same time, both sympathy and hatred. For then the audience will keep its equilibrium too.

The crowing is not indispensable to the process of comic inversion, or the turning of the tables. Even without it, Shylock could quite well have been made to swallow the medicine, drop by drop, and be now refused what he had earlier been offered. Portia’s words about justice, the forfeiture, and the bond, whereby she reverses the machinery that had been set in motion, might have been enough. Gratiano’s crowing is, then, a bit of formal comic technique, added to make the effect unmistakable and secure. What pains comic dramatists take, and yet, in a century, they may be futile! Gratiano – and Portia also when she turns against Shylock – makes the audience in the court laugh, that in the theatre they may be certain to laugh too. The twitting and crowing when the tables are turned is to be found serving this same purpose elsewhere in Shakespeare, as in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *Much Ado*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Henry IV*; indeed (where there is no inversion) the merry report by Salanio and Salarino of Shylock’s ‘strange’ and ‘variable’ lamentations, and of the outcries of all the boys in Venice, is introduced for a similar end. Sarcey, as he discusses *Les Femmes savantes* and *Le Monde où l’on s’ennuie*, observes that in these alike there is one method because there is no other:

Le public n'y sent le ridicule des moeurs qui sont traduites sur la scène, que par l'étonnement que provoquent ces moeurs chez un personnage en scène. Il s'en amuse en les entendant railler; il rit par contre-coup, — *Quarante ans*, vi, p. 312.

The comic effect in the theatre is the echo and reduplication of that on the stage — somewhat as the shudder of wonder at the supernatural spreads and is caught up by the spectators from Horatio, Brutus, or Macbeth. Laughter, we all know, is contagious — in an instant the electric spark circles the house, explodes the magazine.

There are still other comic devices, such as the anticlimaxes and prompt miserly afterthoughts of Shylock, comical on the face of them, and the whetting of his knife. All together, there is in the Shylock scenes such an array of these as is nowhere else to be found in Shakespeare save in the *Comedy of Errors* or in the *Taming of the Shrew*. As Mr. Woodberry says, and Booth had recognized, Shakespeare 'did not hesitate to let the exhibition of these low qualities [avarice, cunning, and revenge] approach the farcical'. In general the comedy in Shakespeare is more a comedy of character than of situation, and the situations, as I have said, are seldom worked out and developed to the full; but here we have repetition and inversion, crowing and anticlimaxes, as in Molière; and in a comic tune wrought out so elaborately and emphatically that one wonders how any pathetic note could possibly find a place in it, save for the moment, and then only to contribute to the prevailing effect.

Some supposedly pathetic passages remain to be considered. Unlike Sir Sidney Lee (if he still holds to the view), I cannot find pathos in the remark, 'the patch is kind enough' [2.5.46], which Shylock makes as he looks after Launcelot dancing out of the door, any more than I can in that about the turquoise. Our sympathies — even our softer ones to-day — are engrossed and forestalled by Launcelot and Jessica, and we are not likely to concern ourselves, as Sir Sidney would have us do, about Launcelot's present deceitfulness and scant deservings. Any pathetic sentiment, moreover, that the remark might have evoked would immediately have been swallowed up — even as is the thought of Launcelot's kindness in the miser's breast — by the words 'but a huge feeder' which follow; by his remembering that Launcelot is 'snail-slow in profit' and 'sleeps by day more than the wild-cat'; and by his eagerness, after all, to forego the lad's company that he may help waste Bassanio's borrowed purse [2.5.46–51]. A reader — a philosopher — who lingers over and ponders the line, might well end by thinking it pathetic, but an audience that watches the swiftly moving scene could not. It is almost exactly parallel (though more obviously comical) with the situation of Sganarelle in the *École des maris*, pitying his young rival Valère as, after receiving the ambiguous message from Isabelle, he goes off, apparently rejected and heart-broken:

Il me fait grande pitié,  
Ce pauvre malheureux trop rempli d'amitié.

In both cases the momentarily kindly one has already been recognized as the chief comic figure; in both cases he is at that moment tricked and deceived; in both cases he is wasting his pity, not only on the young man but on the audience. The whole context and situation, therefore, makes it impossible that the audience should because of his pity

*Shakespeare's intentions and the dynamics of comedy, 1927*

or tenderness warm up to the old fellow – they are kept insensible by the tyranny and isolating power of the comic sentiment, though, in the case of Sganarelle, without such grotesque mercenary afterthoughts as to bring that sentiment home. And in both cases the pity is swallowed up in a deluded personal satisfaction. Sganarelle will now have the young girl all to himself; Shylock will now save 'board and keep'.

Another supposedly pathetic moment comes with Shylock's last speech:

I pray you, give me leave to go from hence.  
I am not well. Send the deed after me,  
And I will sign it. [4.1.395–7]

'Get thee gone', says the Duke, 'but do it'; Gratiano is permitted to jeer at him upon his christening; and Shylock's being unwell is received as would be a similar plea from a bully at school, just worsted in a fight. 'It's getting too hot for him', the other boys say with a grin, or, more safely, think it. Twice before he had said the like, – 'Give me my principal and let me go – I'll stay no longer question' [4.1.336, 346]. It is as if he were wriggling and squirming while they held him, and now that the Duke says 'Get thee gone', Gratiano gave him a parting kick or buffet. It is the *rire amer*, as we have seen, still familiar to us to-day, but which rang and resounded through the theatre of the Tudors and the Stuarts, and is awakened again and again by the pages of Fielding and Smollet, Dickens and Thackeray, as in that chapter where Major Pendennis 'neither yields his money nor his life'.<sup>[26]</sup>

In the passages which we have examined the apparent pathos has been thwarted and stifled by comedy; in others, it is by villainy instead. In the first scene in which he appears Shylock complains:

Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,  
For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe. [1.3.109–10]

It is poetical, no doubt, and throughout the century it has touched our humanitarian sympathies – because we have managed to forget the situation! At this moment Shylock is plotting to have the heart of him if he forfeit; already he has confessed to us that he hates Antonio because he is a Christian, but more for lending money gratis and bringing down the rate in Venice; and already he has vowed, if he can catch him on the hip, to feed fat the ancient grudge he bears him. His repetitions as he pulls at his beard – three thousand ducats . . . for three months . . . and Antonio bound – bode no good. Shylock is not only murderously plotting but at the same time playing the hypocrite. He pretends not to see Antonio when he appears; mutters, meanwhile, villainy to himself; and, once he speaks up, declares he was but debating of his present store, and though he has not the three thousand ducats in ready money, will borrow it – then suddenly sees Antonio and greets him effusively as a friend [1.3.59–60]. Just before the above 'pathetic' speech, has not Antonio himself remarked upon his hypocrisy to Bassanio aside?

The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.  
An evil soul producing holy witness

E. E. Stoll

Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,  
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.  
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath! [1.3.98–102]

That much even Antonio, his victim, discerns (though he knows much less than we) after Shylock has put up his specious defence of usury, shamelessly avowed his abominable practice of it, and taken refuge behind the shrewdness of a patriarch of his sacred tribe. And presently the Jew's hypocrisy turns, in his anxiety lest his plot should fail, to downright fawning:

Why, look how you storm!  
I would be friends with you and have your love. [1.3.137–8]

Who in his mind's eye does not see the Oriental gesture? Then, when Bassanio will not hear of so barbarous a contract, he takes to the cover of an injured innocence.

O father Abram, what these Christians are,  
Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect  
The thoughts of others! [1.3.160–2]

Surely no audience, if dramatic method or context counts with them for anything, can be touched by pathos here. Often Shylock's phrases are poetical – as are Iago's.

But the speech that to-day moves us most is 'Hath not a Jew eyes?' etc. [3.1.59–73]. This, again, is the speech not so much of a comic character as of a villain; and like other villains in Shakespeare, as we have seen, he is given his due – a full chance to speak up and to make a fair showing for himself – while he holds the floor. But it seems quite impossible to take it as pathetic, so hedged about is it with prejudice, beginning on a note of thwarted avarice and of revengefulness, and ending on one of rivalry in revenge, of beating the Christians at what, however justly, he chooses to think their own game. Certainly it is not the plea for toleration that it has generally been taken to be, – here in the third act, after all this cloud of prejudice has been raised up against him, and after his avowals of ignoble hatred, on which he is harping still:

He was wont to lend money for a Christian courtesy; let him look to his bond. . . .  
He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses,  
mocked at my gains, etc. [3.1.48–50, 53–8]

As Dr. Furness and others have observed, Shakespeare managed in this play very strangely if he meant to stand up for the Jews; but even the human appeal is deliberately thwarted.

We are alienated, not by Shylock's avarice and revengefulness alone – he seems just before his defence fairly to be hungering for the pound of flesh that shall 'feed' his revenge,<sup>27</sup> to him more profitable (for all that he says that it is not) than the flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats, – but also by the comic circumstances. Here is a remarkable case of comic preparations and precautions, of 'isolation'. This is the 'daughter-ducats'

scene, in which Shylock first appears after the ludicrous report given, in Act II, scene viii, by Salanio to Salarino, of his strange and variable lamentations; and to whom is he talking but to these two merry gentlemen at this moment? If in the theatre it is to be pathos, he should be speaking to some one more responsive on the stage; at every word he is expected to burst out in his 'daughter-ducats' vein once more; and presently so he does. Though we do not laugh at Shylock when he asks, 'Hath not a Jew senses, affections, passions?' good care has been taken that we shall not weep.

Indeed, I cannot but think that even this speech has for generations been misread, simply taken, like the other supposedly pathetic passages, out of its context, and a meaning superimposed. Not only does every one forget how it begins and how it ends, but every one fails to see the thread running through it, the idea, not that Jews have been inhumanly treated but that from a Jew mistreated you may expect the same as from a Christian – revenge, though in a richer measure. 'And what's his reason?' he begins, 'I am a Jew' [3.1.58]. And then and there, we, with our humanitarian impulses, jump the track – at once we are, one and all, over on Shylock's side. But Shylock's answer is not meant to have such a disconcerting effect; we must remember the cry of the London mob when Lopez paid the penalty, and Antonio's words, 'I am like to call thee so again' [1.3.130]; we must remember Luther, Coke, Bishop Hall, James Howell, Jeremy Taylor, Robert Smith, William Prynne, the Elizabethan dramatists, Shakespeare himself throughout his play.

A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit  
With the same spirit that its author writ.

For *Jew*, read *German*, time, 1914–18, place, Belgium or France, England or America, and we have, with greater provocation, that spirit approximately. Shakespeare does not jump the track himself. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands? and he proceeds to show that a Jew, having the wit to perceive an injury, the hand to avenge it, quite the same organs, senses, and passions, in fact, as a Christian has, he will when hurt do all that a Christian will do, and a good bit besides. 'Let him look to his bond' [3.1.47, 48, 50]. There is no suggestion that Christians should no longer do any hurt to the Jews, and we make Shylock overstate his case. He is only defending himself in what he intends to do; we make him defend his race against all that has been done to it. He is putting in a plea for the right of revenge; we turn it into a plea for equal treatment at the outset.

Of itself, to be sure, provided we can forget both beginning and end and the far from mitigating circumstances, this celebrated defence might touch us. In this regard it is, as we have seen, like other speeches of Shylock's, that about Leah and the turquoise, that about Launcelot's 'kindness', and the last speech of all, at the trial – they too would touch us were it not for the context and situation. That is, Shakespeare's method is not the ordinary method of caricature. He does not distort or grossly exaggerate the Jew's features, but flings a villainous or comic light upon them, – does not turn him into a gargoyle or hobgoblin like Barabas, but gives him, to an extraordinary degree, the proportions and lineaments of humanity and of his race, scoundrel though he be. Shylock's Hebrew pride supports him, even when he crouches and cringes. Living in humiliation, he has within him a great bitter well of scorn and sarcasm – for bankrupts



and prodigals, for the lazy and frivolous, for the light and weak of wit, and the frailties and inconsistencies of Christians. He takes a Puritanic, or Pharisaic, pride in his sober house. He has a regard for law and the letter of it, is stiff-necked and tenacious in insisting on his rights, and keen and dexterous, though specious and cynical, in his defence of them. And like all Jews, he fights, in argument or lawsuit at least, to the last ditch. By force of circumstances it is he, not Launcelot, that is of Hagar's offspring, and his hand is against every man save his daughter and those of his tribe; but for them and for the memory of Leah he has traces of a racial, a patriarchal affection, – they are his flesh, his blood. He remembers the past – having no particular reason to remember the present – the great but remote names of Scripture; and there is something of the dignity of such memories clinging to him, both in his bearing and his speech. And there is to his speech that indefinable individuality and identity of tone – in general, Shakespeare's greatest achievement in characterization – perceptible in the cast of phrase, the sound and rhythm of it, his repetitions, exclamations, and rhetorical questions – a tone hard and grating, sly and dogged, and yet not without stateliness. Heine has best described it, contrasting Shylock with Portia:

Wie trübe, kneifend, und hässlich sind dagegen die Gedanken und Reden des Shylock. Sein Wiz is kramphaft and ätzend, sine Mataphern sucht er unter den widerwärtigsten Gegenständen, und sogar seine Worte sind zusammengequetschte Misslaute, schrill, zischend, und quirrend.<sup>[28]</sup>

Harsh and repellent, he is real and individual; and there is poetry in him, as there is in almost all the characters of Shakespeare, even the villains and the grotesques, and more than there is in many of these.

Now, though, as I conceive it, there is nothing in the figure rightly to be taken as pathetic, one can see how easily, in forgetfulness of the context, it may be so taken by the modern sympathetic mind. The very dignity and isolation – the picturesque aspect – of the figure makes it pathetic for us, such sentimentalists are we! But in so doing we ignore the rest of Shylock, the traits not noble or appealing at all. Though not an ogre or scarecrow like Barabas, he is villainous enough and comic enough, as it were, in his own right. He is, as we have seen, a trickster, a whining and fawning hypocrite, and he sweareth to another's hurt and changeth to avoid his own. His oath and his horror of perjury are belied, not only by his clutching afterwards at thrice the principal although he had refused it – or if not that, at least the principal alone – but also by his prompt abandonment of his suit the moment he hears that a drop of blood means the confiscation of his goods. To keep them in his grasp is to him of more moment than to lay perjury on his soul; though that he had said he would not do, no, not for Venice. He could have commanded our respect if he had revered his oath, or if without swearing at all he had followed his losing suit (of which he is so proud) to the bitter end; but he is not a hero, even in racial revenge and hatred. His sacred nation he has forgotten long since; the curse upon it he had never felt until he lost his ducats; and in his suit, once fortune has turned against him, Shylock, in all his pretences, shrivels up. He stands on his oath no longer, of law he has for once had enough; and if nothing else showed that his last words were meant to be comic – 'I pray you give me leave to go from hence, I am

not well' [4.1.395–6] – it is his whimpering before that – 'Give me my principal and let me go', 'Shall I not have barely my principal?' [4.1.336–41] – his tearing the bond with a curse rather than take the forfeiture and declaring he will stay no longer question,<sup>29</sup> and his abject miserly cry to the Christians to take his life if they will take the means whereby he lives. A losing bargain or suit, after all, is not in his line; his dignity is external, and vanished once his fraud is revealed. And for this upshot there has been ample preparation. His hypocrisy and trickery glitter through his ruminations and repetitions when first he appears before us, and are fully revealed in his brief soliloquy. But drolly it has been idealized. Jacob and Rebecca he remembers reverently, – Jacob because of his crafty dealing with Laban, and Rebecca because, in palming him off upon Isaac, as a 'wise mother she wrought in his behalf'. Sharp practise he respects, and he dwells fondly upon it in Scripture.

There is much besides that is comical in him, details of his miserliness and his 'Jewishness' which should tickle the risible senses of any ordinary audience, Elizabethan or modern: a touch more rare is in the strait and rigid way that his mind and heart are cooped up within the confines of the law and the letter of it. 'Then must the Jew be merciful', says Balthazar. 'On what compulsion must I?' [4.1.182–3]. It is Greek to him, not Hebrew, these words and the following ones: – 'Have by some surgeon, Shylock.' – (Is it so nominated in the bond?) – 'It is not so express'd, but what of that?' 'Twere good you do so much for charity' [4.1.257–61]. – But only half does he hear what she is saying; and he pores over the writing – 'I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond' [4.1.262]. Surely he is not feigning; and though some may rather think it tragic, this spiritual blindness – and indeed the tragic crisis is not yet past; – the contrast contrived and the repetition employed seem calculated deliberately to bring home to us that rigidity, or '*raideur*', of the human spirit which Monsieur Bergson finds essential to comedy. The mercy must be down in black and white, signed and sealed. He is after all pretty much of a piece, a thorough grotesque; and in his quaint antique fashion business is business to him, a contract is a contract, a bargain a bargain. Everything is a bargain to him, good or bad, and it is often with a subtle and unobtrusive hand that Shakespeare makes this apparent. We have noticed his rage over the exchange of a turquoise for a monkey; but it is droller still to see how the contract for the pound of flesh is to him a good bargain even while with gruesome jesting he makes it out a bad one.

what should I gain  
By the exaction of the forfeiture?  
A pound of man's flesh taken from a man  
Is not so estimable, profitable neither,  
As flesh of muttuns, beefs, or goats. [1.3.163–7]

Literal-minded still! He might have said to Bassanio, 'Only a formality; a contract is not a contract without interest or forfeit?' But he cannot shake off his inveterate materialism, or the language of the market; and must needs look upon the forfeit as a precious commodity, flesh like other flesh (though in his chaffering, higgling way he vows that it is not), of which the price is high. "'Tis a good round sum'. [1.3.103] . . .

I have been at pains to ascertain and define the attitude of the author and his public,

and so interpret the play. I have found in Shylock the comic villain, and though finely and delicately done, nothing really and sincerely pathetic in him at all. Pains wasted, some present-day writers of the eminence of Professor Matthews will say; though the number of them is relatively fewer than it used to be. What Shakespeare intended does not much matter – what matters is what he did – and we have as good a right as Shakespeare to our opinion of Shylock, though ‘the comic aspects of Shylock have disappeared from our modern vision and the pathetic interest of the desolate figure is now most obvious’.<sup>30</sup> Art then ceases to be a means of communication from soul to soul, the author and his meaning are a matter of indifference, and there is really no work of interpretation, but only of expatiation, to do. Apart from Shakespeare’s opinion, what Shylock is there? one wonders, bewildered. There is, we are assured, an Elizabethan Shylock and – ‘even though Shakespeare might himself protest’ – a modern one, equally legitimate, though for us the modern is the real. And Shylock then is ambiguous, Janus-faced. Professor Matthews well knows what it is for an actor to misinterpret his part, to play it *à contresens*; but it is permissible in actor and critic too, it seems, when the play is three hundred years old. It is impossible, rather, for in that space of time a new meaning – mysteriously, but legitimately – develops, somewhat as a beard can grow in the grave, or as razors sharpen in the drawer.

Such a prodigious ambiguity – ranging between the satiric and the pathetic – would, I think, be a serious defect in a character; but I do not believe it is there. The mistake, as I conceive it, of Professor Matthews and other modernizing critics is that they either ignore the intention of the author or establish such an antinomy between what the author intended and what he did. There are cases, no doubt, where an author fails in his intention, but there is no opposition or discrepancy between intention and achievement here, for his intention we gather from what he did, and by that we mean the emphasis, the arrangement, the preparations and fulfillment, the comment, the villain’s attempt and the turning of the tables upon him, – all that larger meaning which is to be found not so much in the letter of the text as in the spirit of it and in the structure of the whole. To this the modernizing critics do not rightly attend; they read the text but they read it to suit themselves, – they read the lines or pages, not the play. Yet the intention – all this pervading spirit and purpose – is as important as the wording itself; – the intonation and accent and gesture of a spoken sentence convey as much of the meaning as the mere words do; – and to attend to these last alone is to do violence to the author and his work. What this means Professor Matthews also knows – for Macready and Barrett to cut the piece down to a Shylock play in three acts, ending with the trial, he says, is ‘plainly a betrayal of Shakespeare’s intent’.<sup>31</sup> Is it less a betrayal to keep the text intact, indeed, but read into half of it what to his intent is directly opposed?

In insisting on the historical aspect of the question – that is, to the effect of asserting our right to be modern, to be what we are – Professor Matthews and the others are really confusing the issue. The considerations of historical character which we have been urging are secondary: the primary consideration is the technical – that of the emphasis, the arrangement, the comment, and the like, just mentioned above, which convey the author’s meaning – and the historical considerations serve but to make that meaning more clear. That done, the figure stands before us, not a ‘scientific curiosity’, or a bit of hopelessly old-fashioned Elizabethan stage-furniture, but (though handled roughly) a

human being; and it has the considerable advantage of being real, whereas the modern is a chimaera, a myth. It is not resident in the faraway Elizabethan age any more than in ours, but in the mind of Shakespeare. The history, if it troubles us, can be quite forgotten. Treat Shakespeare as if a modern, and yet our reasoning applies. Read 'Ibsen' for 'Shakespeare' in the opinion rendered: 'What *Ibsen* intended does not much matter – and we have as good a right as *Ibsen* to our opinion of Rebecca West'. To that, I know, Professor Matthews and some of the others would demur. But by this same method of ignoring the author's intention or misreading his text, [*Ibsen's* plays have been seriously misinterpreted].

It is only a question of clear thinking, of knowing what we are doing (or not doing) and freely and honestly admitting it. On the popular stage, to be sure, Shylock must be played pretty much as Irving played him (though, like Irving himself, we should at the same time remember that this is not Shakespeare's Shylock at all); but criticism, unlike acting, has to do with the truth alone. If in reading the play we find a tear in Shakespeare's eye shall we not like Sainte-Beuve catch ourselves, and if we cannot find it in our hearts to dry the tear, at least candidly acknowledge that it is we ourselves who put it there? It is the French who see straight. As I have had occasion repeatedly to notice they have brushed away the romantic cobwebs and moonshine from Molière, and on the stage and in criticism he is himself again . . . [Quotes Lemaître's critique of Molière's *George Dandin*].

There we have what may be called the critical spirit, that spirit so rare and precious, – the earnest effort to read the words by the light in which the poet wrote them, the search for a meaning, not the imparting of one, the suspicion of error, the unreserved surrender to the truth. On its altar all the critic's sentimental finery and vagaries are laid unflinchingly, gaily! And by coincidence the very words Lemaître applies to Molière in dealing with *George Dandin* are not out of place for Shakespeare in dealing with Shylock. 'Mâle gaieté', and (not quoted above) 'une férocité toute joviale et sans nul fiel' – that is, in this case, with no bitterness or indignant irony directed against either Jews or the haters of Jews.

Not only is the modern meaning foreign to Shakespeare but it is, as we have suggested, superfluous. Critics speak as if it were impossible for Shylock to mean anything to us unless thus sentimentalized and tragicalized. Indeed, as we moderns have done with many another rough customer in history, literature, or holy writ, we have tamed and domesticated the 'dog Jew', and drawn his 'fangs'. 'He will speak soft words unto us', he no longer grins and he cannot bite. But Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, as we have seen, shuddered at him and laughed at him; and except at popular performances, where racial antipathy is rather to be allayed than fomented, so should we, as much as in us lies, do to-day. Thus we shall come into sympathy with the manifest intention of the poet, with the acting of the part on the Elizabethan stage, with the conception of the money-lending Jew in the contemporary drama, character-writing, and ballad, and with the lively prejudice of the time. A villain and a butt, 'une simple figure à gifles', as Francisque Sarcey shrewdly observes, 'un monstrueux grotesque, sur le nez de qui tombent à l'envi d'effroyables nasardes',<sup>32</sup> (only, as we have seen, he is not a monster, not a caricature); – such, save for the happily human elements and lineaments of his make-up, and for the splendour of poetry, shed, like the rain and the light of heaven, on the just

E. E. Stoll

and the unjust, is the impression which Shylock makes after he has been duly restored to the sixteenth century, an impression in which pathos has no place, and with which our notions of justice and social responsibility, on the one hand, or of ironical art, on the other, have, so far as they are merely modern, nothing to do. So he is not lost to us. That Hebraic and picturesque figure will be remembered long after he has retreated from the warm circle of our sentiments, and be visited again and again, by an exhilarating sally of the imagination, in the midst of the harsh and sturdy life to which he belongs.<sup>33</sup> (331–6)

## 64 Andrew Tretiak, the 'alien' question

1929

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From 'The Merchant of Venice and the "Alien" Question', *Review of English Studies*, 5 (October 1929), pp. 402–9.

In 1909 Andrzej (Andrew) Tretiak (1886–1944) became the first Polish PhD student in the field of English Studies under Professor Wilhelm Anton Creizenach (1851–1919) at the University of Cracow, and in 1922 he became the first Professor of English at Warsaw University. During the Second World War Tretiak joined other Polish academics in the Polish resistance movement. He was captured during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, and executed in front of his own house. Tretiak had produced Polish editions of *Hamlet* (1922), *Othello* (1927), *King Lear* (1929), and *Macbeth*, published posthumously in 1949.

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The 'alien' question seems to have been for Elizabethan London a social problem of an acute and burning nature. Anti-alien riots happened there three times at short intervals, in 1588, 1593 and 1595. The last time (1595) they came to a disastrous end: five of the riotous apprentices were hanged on July 24 on Tower Hill. From the historical point of view this execution was the final episode of the anti-alien riots in the last decade of the sixteenth century, but it did not seem so to its witnesses. The wave of public indignation rose certainly very high in the fateful summer of 1595. The theatre, always very eager to express public opinion, was not permitted, it seems, to speak out publicly on this question. The tragedy of *Sir Thomas More* was probably never acted on the popular stage, even after the change of the . . . May Day scene, for the sake of which, I think, the whole chronicle-play was expressly and exclusively written. The tragedy of *Sir Thomas More* was written at the latest in 1594, perhaps even earlier, in 1593, immediately after the riots of that year, which unfortunately brought in their wake the arrest of Thomas Kyd and the violent death of Marlowe. After the executions of 1595 it was quite impossible for the theatre to be silent any longer. And so, I think, *The Merchant of Venice* came to be written.

The play is an appeal both to Queen Elizabeth for mercy<sup>1</sup> and to the Protestant refugees from France and Holland, residing in London, to seek a sort of *modus vivendi* with the original citizens. Four passages in *The Merchant of Venice* indicate that it was with premeditation that Shakespeare undertook to treat the alien question in this dramatic piece, and that he sought to suggest a solution of this difficult and dangerous problem of his time. The passages are: 3.2.27–28; 3.2.26–31; 3.5.17–35; 4.1.35–39. All these

passages deal with Shylock's and his daughter's relation to the political and social conditions of Venice.

Shylock is a 'stranger' in Venice, but he enjoys 'the freedom of the state'; *i.e.* he is treated in all matters of justice, commerce and so on in the same way as the original citizens. This is 'the commodity that strangers have / With us' [3.3.26–8], and this is the coping-stone of the external policy of a sea-kingdom that wishes to make its capital the commercial capital of the world. Shakespeare approves of that policy: 'the trade and profit of the city / Consisteth of all nations' [3.3.30–1]. Speaking of Venice Shakespeare means London. In Shylock he sees the representative of all the foreign immigrants, who, having lost by expulsion, or by choice, their own country, become fully privileged denizens of another country, enjoying all the rights due to the native inhabitants of the place. I do not see any discord between the lines 3.3.26–31 and 4.1.35–39, as does Prof. J. Dover Wilson.<sup>2</sup> In Act 3 Shakespeare thinks of London as the capital of England where the whole foreign commerce of the country began to be concentrated. He looks here on London-Venice from the economic point of view, and from that of the external policy of the state. The words cited above cannot be interpreted as an allusion to the constitution of the state or the city. It is only the question of free trade between 'all nations,' of the feeling of security for those foreign merchants who might venture upon the exchange of commodities with England, and eventually might settle down in London, bringing their money and commercial energy to their new home. In the lines inserted in the play of *Sir Thomas More* (which I, for my part, take for an original manuscript of Shakespeare) the political ideas are the same. More reminds the revolted citizens that they may be banished from England, and asks them what welcome they can expect in other countries after having violated the law of hospitality in their own. Only the most scrupulous regard for justice in international (commercial) intercourse can give a solid basis of external policy capable of conferring real benefits on the state. In Act 4 Shakespeare looks on London from the point of view of internal policy. He thinks of it as an organised city with charters and 'freedom,' the which 'freedom' is enjoyed also by all strangers. The danger lies in the possibility of creating a precedent. If justice should be denied to a stranger who has occasion to bring legal proceedings against a citizen, this would afterwards permit the government to make inroads upon the privileges of native citizens. The different trends of Shylock's appeals are also conditioned dramatically. Before the judgment Shylock importunes the Duke and strives to seduce him with the important argument of commercial policy; in the judgment-scene he tends to awaken sympathy with his standpoint in the breasts of the citizens present by threatening them with the risk of creating a dangerous precedent.

Shylock is symbolically the French, Walloon or Flemish refugee. It is easy to understand why Shakespeare chose a Jew as a representative of the foreign residents in London. The choice was nearly compulsory; it was, indeed, the only one possible if Shakespeare wished to treat the matter publicly. Officially Jews were not permitted to come and settle down in England, although they lived there and even exercised some influence in the last decade of the sixteenth century. But the anti-alien riots were not directed against them, and the Master of the Revels could take no exception to a play that represented a strife between a Jew and a Christian although it must have been evident to the contemporary theatre-goers that the play pivoted on the alien question.

Shylock is to be taken in a more comprehensive sense than merely as a representative of the Jewish race. His racial characteristics seem to me no more outstanding than the French elements in the French heroes of Shakespeare's comedies or the Oriental blood in Othello. They have two sources, both literary: one of them is the mediaeval traditional portrait of a rich Jew who is always a sort of buffoon (as in the Croxton Play on Sacrament and in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*); the other is the Holy Scripture, which is the source of Shylock's picturesque language. His repeated mentioning of 'my tribe' betrays its provenance very distinctly.

At the same time the Old Testament is an internal link, connecting Shylock, the dramatic representative of the foreign element in a city, with the real historical aliens in London, the French and Dutch refugees, who, strong Huguenots, lived under the influence of the Old Testament. When Shakespeare lets Shylock say: 'I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following. But I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you,' [1.3.35-8] he gives a true picture of the distant relations of the refugees with the Londoners, limited exclusively to commercial intercourse. The mention of 'not praying together' is significant. Shakespeare does not here refer to the possibility of Shylock's voluntary conversion to Christianity. On the one hand, these words are a slip of memory on the part of Shakespeare, who did not think of Shylock merely as a Jew, but, particularly when beginning the delineation of the character of a Jewish usurer, thought rather of a foreign Christian merchant in London.<sup>3</sup> Such merchants belonged to another Christian creed which did not differ fundamentally from the Anglican creed, and it was possible for Shakespeare to consider the eventual 'praying together' of an English and a foreign merchant, both Christians, while it would have been quite impossible to imagine such a thing happening if Shylock was to be taken exclusively as a Jew. But on the other hand, it is a premeditated hint at the refugees. They did not pray together with the Londoners, having founded separate churches for themselves in London. The proclamations on the first day of the riots in 1593 were fixed to the door of the French and Dutch churches. Moreover, the foundation of the ethics of these 'churches' seemed, in the eyes of the Anglican Londoners, to be taken over from the Old Testament with its well-known notion of 'revenge.' I think I find an allusion to the ethical views of the refugees in the words of Gratiano in the judgment-scene, especially in the words on the wolf, which are now understood as an allusion to the unfortunate Jewish doctor, Lopez, executed in 1594. Shylock's cruelty is here identified with the cruelty of the wolf, 'hanged for human slaughter' [4.1.134]. We must take these words as implying something like the following: 'Your spirit (Shylock's) is bad like the spirit of the Jew.' *Tertium comparationis* lies, for me, in the Jewish racial element as represented in the Old Testament notion of revenge, and would be of no meaning if applied to the representative of Jews without some hidden thought of treating Shylock as the representative of foreign residents in general. We must not forget that Shakespeare and his contemporaries did not know, as we do now, that the executions of July 24, 1595, formed the closing incident of the anti-alien outbreaks of the period. Afraid that similar tragic events might be repeated, Shakespeare felt obliged to give a fair warning to the refugees that in the eyes of the Elizabethan public their bearing had nothing in common with Christian ethics and smacked rather of the Old Testament morals. And the latter were explained by the Christian official teaching as connected with the Jewish



racial elements. As it seems that none of the Flemish or French residents were killed in the riots of 1595, the severity of the punishment (the death of five apprentices) looked, to contemporary witnesses, like *revenge*. We know that it was 'at the complaint of the Elders of the Dutch and French Churches that Sir John Spenser committed some young rioters to the Counter.' The intervention of the Elders may have ceased with this act recorded by Stowe, but it is easy to understand that the Londoners may have ascribed the severity of the punishment to their importuning the City authorities and the royal ministers, although in historical reality the verdict of death was the result of some further riots connected only loosely with the foregoing troubles, and directed against the City authorities. Shakespeare puts the words on the wolf in the mouth of the unsympathetic Gratiano, who is the representative of the lower strata of the citizens; he is the mouthpiece of the less cultivated public opinion. We therefore need not assume that Shakespeare himself held Gratiano's opinion as to the desire of the foreign residents for revenge; his purpose was to point out to the refugees how dangerous it is to awaken the feeling of popular indignation; how easily public opinion may misconstrue the motives of behaviour.

Having brought the alien question upon the stage, and having in the judgment-scene drawn a strict line between privilege and abuse,<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare looks for a solution of the problem. He sees two ways leading to a happy end of the trouble. One of them is Shylock's conversion to Christianity, the other Jessica's marriage with Lorenzo. The beautiful daughter of the old usurer, but 'a daughter of his blood' only, not 'to his manners,' turns Christian and finds her happiness in the love of the Christian Lorenzo, a member of another nation. To Lorenzo, the aboriginal citizen of Venice, comes the whole wealth of the stranger, Shylock, for according to the verdict of the Duke none of Shylock's gold is lost to Jessica. Shylock accumulated his gold for his daughter only, and it goes its predestined way; nobody loses anything, nobody gains anything, through the final sentence of the Duke of Venice. In the intermarriage of the two elements of the mixed population Shakespeare sees the only possible solution of the alien question problem.

The question of intermarriages between Londoners and foreigners must have been a common subject of discussion in City circles. Indirect evidence of this may be found in the results of the official inquiry made twice in the year 1593. The first inquiry gave 'the total of all the strangers with their children and servants born out of the realm' as 4,300, 'of which 297 were denizens.' The second inquiry followed almost immediately, and now the principles of reckoning must have been somewhat different: 'The number of the strangers of the French, Dutch and Italian churches did amount to 3,325,' and then follows a very significant remark: 'whereof 212 were found to be English born.' It is evident from this statement that public opinion accused the foreigners of separating themselves from the national English life, and that the magistrates sought to alleviate the accusation by pointing out that a relatively high percentage of the foreigners belonged by now to the second generation, were 'English born' and ought to be treated as fellow-citizens. Shakespeare takes the same standpoint. He knows very well that the first generation of new-comers cannot change its national character, although he knows also that these new-comers ought to behave loyally towards their hosts. The second generation, born on English soil, has different obligations in this matter; its members ought

to be, and to feel, English, and the best way to this end is the intermarriage of the two elements of the mixed population. . . .

[Quotes Launcelot's conversation with Jessica, 3.5.21–36.]

This short dialogue which identifies Christian faith with the Venetian citizenship precedes the judgment-scene and throws some light on the other means of solving the alien problem: Shylock's compulsory Conversion. The verdict of the Duke is outrageous to our contemporary moral sense, but it certainly was meant by Shakespeare only as an allegorical expression of the necessity of changing the national attitude on the part of the foreign residents in England. Shylock, the representative of the alien element in Venice, hated his cohabitants and separated himself from the social life of his new country. Having become a Christian he is obliged to mix with his fellow-citizens, and perhaps he will learn to know them better, to esteem them, if he will not be able to love them. It is his faith that makes Shylock a stranger in Venice; it was the sense of national aloofness that made the foreign residents in London separate themselves from the current life of the capital of England. So faith is to be interpreted as an idea of nationality, and I think it may be said with some probability that Shakespeare's patriotic feeling was tinted with a slight nationalistic shade in the period of *King John*, *Richard II* and *Henry V*. The artistic flaw of allegorical expression (faith for nationality) remained and has become a source of misunderstandings as to Shakespeare's pro-Semitic or anti-Semitic views.

The contemporary theatre-goers did not misunderstand, I am sure, the social foundation of the play. . . . (402–9)

## 65 Harley Granville-Barker, Shakespeare's attention to character and story

1930

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From *Prefaces to Shakespeare*. Second Series (London, 1930).

Harley Granville-Barker (1877–1946) was a distinguished actor, producer, dramatist, and critic. In 1899 Barker played Richard II in a production by William Poel [See No. 40]. His friendship with the dramatist and critic William Archer (1856–1924) created the opportunity to produce *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the Royal Court Theatre in 1904, and cemented Granville-Barker's passion for producing Shakespeare. His 1912 productions at the Savoy Theatre of *The Winter's Tale* and *Twelfth Night*, followed in 1914 by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, set new standards for Shakespeare productions, emphasizing continuity of action and clarity of verse speaking, with less attention to staging, costuming, and set design. Granville-Barker was involved in an abortive scheme to build a national theatre to coincide with the 1916 Shakespeare tercentenary. In 1923 he became editor of the projected 'The Players' Shakespeare', but when the edition was abandoned he continued to write prefaces to some of the plays, that to *The Merchant of Venice* appearing in 1923. Granville-Barker writes about drama as a practical man of the theatre, as if advising producers and actors.

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### THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

*The Merchant of Venice* is a fairy tale. There is no more reality in Shylock's bond and the Lord of Belmont's will than in Jack and the Beanstalk.

Shakespeare, it is true, did not leave the fables as he found them. This would not have done; things that pass muster on the printed page may become quite incredible when acted by human beings, and the unlikelier the story, the likelier must the mechanism of its acting be made. Besides, when his own creative impulse was quickened, he could not help giving life to a character; he could no more help it than the sun can help shining. So Shylock is real, while his story remains fabulous; and Portia and Bassanio become human, though, truly, they never quite emerge from the enchanted thicket of fancy into the common light of day. Aesthetic logic may demand that a story and its characters should move consistently upon one plane or another, be it fantastic or real. But Shakespeare's practical business, once he had chosen these two stories for his play, was simply so to charge them with humanity that they did not betray belief in the human beings presenting them, yet not so uncompromisingly that the stories themselves became ridiculous.

What the producer of the play must first set himself to ascertain is the way in which he did this, the nice course that – by reason or instinct – he steered. Find it and follow it, and there need be no running on the rocks. But logic may land us anywhere. It can turn Bassanio into a heartless adventurer. Test the clock of the action by Greenwich time, it will either be going too fast or too slow. And as to Portia's disguise and Bellario's law, would the village policeman be taken in by either? But the actor will find that he simply cannot play Bassanio as a humbug, for Shakespeare does not mean him to. Portias and Nerissas have been eclipsed by wigs and spectacles. This is senseless tomfoolery; but how make a wiseacre producer see that if he does not already know? And if, while Shylock stands with his knife ready and Antonio with his bared breast, the wise young judge lifting a magical finger between them, we sit questioning Bellario's law – why, no one concerned, actors or audience, is for this fairyland – that is clear.

*The Merchant of Venice* is the simplest of plays, so long as we do not bedevil it with sophistries. Further, it is – for what it is! – as smoothly and completely successful, its means being as well fitted to its end, as anything Shakespeare wrote. He was happy in his choice of the Portia story; his verse, which has lost glitter to gain a mellower beauty and an easier flow, is now well attuned to such romance. The story of Shylock's bond is good contrast and complement both; and he can now project character upon the stage, uncompromising and complete. Yet this Shylock does not overwhelm the play, as at a later birth he might well have done – it is a near thing, though! Lastly, Shakespeare is now enough of the skilled playwright to be able to adjust and blend the two themes with fruitful economy. . . . [Granville-Barker discusses the play's construction, and how Shakespeare manages 'to blend two such disparate themes into a dramatically organic whole'.]

#### THE CHARACTERS, AND THE CRISIS OF THE ACTION

None of the minor characters does much more than illustrate the story; at best, they illuminate with a little lively detail their own passage through it. Not the Duke, nor Morocco, Arragon, Tubal, Lorenzo, Jessica, nor the Gobbos, nor Nerissa, had much being in Shakespeare's mind, we feel, apart from the scenes they played, and the use they were to him. It is as futile, that is to say, to discuss Jessica's excuses for gilding herself with ducats when she elopes as it is to work out her itinerary via Genoa to Belmont; we might as well start writing the life-story of Mistress Margery Gobbo.

#### PORTIA

Shakespeare can do little enough with Portia while she is still the slave of the caskets; incidentally, the actress must resist the temptation to try and do more. . . . To the very end she expands in her fine freedom, growing in authority and dignity, fresh touches of humour enlightening her, new traits of graciousness showing. She is a great lady in her perfect simplicity, in her ready tact (see how she keeps her guest Antonio free from the mock quarrel about the rings), and in her quite unconscious self-sufficiency (she jokes without embarrassment about taking the mythical Balthasar to her bed, but she snubs Gratiano the next minute for talking of cuckoldry, even as she snubbed Nerissa for a very mild indelicacy – she is fond of Nerissa, but no forward waiting-women for her!). Yet she is no more than a girl.

## Harley Granville-Barker

Here is an effect that we are always apt to miss in the acting of Shakespeare today. It is not the actress's fault that she cannot be what her predecessor, the boy-Portia, was; and she brings us compensation for losses which should leave us – if she will mitigate the losses as far as she can – gainers on the whole. But the constant play made in the Comedies upon the contrast between womanly passion or wisdom and its very virginal enshrining gives a delicacy and humour to these figures of romance which the limited resources of the boy left vivid, which the ampler endowment of the woman too often obscures. This is no paradox, but the obvious result of a practical artistry making the most of its materials. Portia does not abide in this dichotomy as fully as, for instance, Rosalind and Viola do; but Shakespeare turns it to account with her in half a hundred little ways, and to blur the effect of them is to rob her of much distinction.

The very first line she speaks, the 'By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aware of this great world' [1.2.1] is likely to come from the mature actress robbed of half its point. This will not matter so much. But couple that 'little body' with her self-surrender to Bassanio as 'an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised' [3.2.159–61] and with the mischief that hides behind the formal courtesies of the welcome to Arragon and Morocco, with the innocence of the amazed 'What no more! / Pay him six thousand and deface the bond . . .' [3.2.298–9], with the pretty sententiousness of her talk of herself, her 'I never did repent of doing good / Nor shall not now . . .' [3.4.10–11], followed by the artless 'This comes too near the praising of myself . . .' [3.4.22], and the figure built up for us of the heiress and great lady of Belmont is seen to be a mere child too, who lives remote in her enchanted world. Set beside this the Portia of resource and command, who sends Bassanio post haste to his friend, and beside that the schoolgirl laughing with Nerissa over the trick they are to play their new lords and masters. Know them all for one Portia, a wise and gallant spirit so virginally enshrined; and we see to what profit Shakespeare turned his disabilities. There is, in this play, a twofold artistry in the achievement. Unlikelihood of plot is redeemed by veracity of character; while the artifice of the medium, the verse and its convention, and the stylised acting of boy as woman, reconciles us to the fantasy of the plot. . . . [Discusses the trial scene.]

Throughout the scene a Portia must, of course, by no smallest sign betray to us – as well betray it to Bassanio – that she is other than she now seems. No difficulty here, as we said, for Shakespeare's Portia, or his audience either. There was no wondering as he faced the judges why they never saw this was a woman (since very obviously he now wasn't) nor why Bassanio did not know his wife a yard off. The liquid sentences of the Mercy speech were no betrayal, nor did the brusque aside of a young lawyer, intent upon his brief – 'Your wife would give you little thanks for that, / If she were by to hear you make the offer.' [4.1.288–9] – lose its quite casual humour. All this straightforwardness the modern actress must, as far as she can, restore. . . .

### SHYLOCK

There remains Shylock. He steps into the play, actual and individual from his first word on, and well might in his strength (we come to feel) have broken the pinchbeck of his origin to bits, had a later Shakespeare had the handling of him. As it is, his actuality is not weakened by the fantasy of the bond, as is Portia's by her caskets. For one thing, our credulity is not strained till the time comes for its maturing, and by then – if ever – the

play and its acting will have captured us. For another, the law and its ways are normally so uncanny to a layman that the strict court of an exotic Venice might give even stranger judgments than this and only confirm us in our belief that once litigation begins almost anything may happen. Despite the borrowed story, this Shylock is essentially Shakespeare's own. But if he is not a puppet, neither is he a stalking horse; he is no more a mere means to exemplifying the Semitic problem than is Othello for the raising of the colour question. 'I am a Jew.' 'Haply, for I am black. . . .' Here we have – and in Shylock's case far more acutely and completely – the *circumstances* of the dramatic conflict; but at the heart of it are men; and we may surmise, indeed, that from a maturer Shakespeare we should have had, as with Othello, much more of the man, and so rather less of the alien and his griefs. However that may be, he steps now into the play, individual and imaginatively full-grown, and the scene of his talk with Bassanio and Antonio is masterly exposition. The dry taciturnity of his 'Three thousand ducats; well?' [1.3.1] (the lure of that thrice-echoed 'Well!') and the cold dissecting of the business in hand are made colder, drier yet by contrast with the happy sound of Portia's laughter dying in our ears as he begins to speak. And for what a helpless innocent Bassanio shows beside him; over-anxious, touchy, over-civil! Shylock takes his time; and suddenly we see him peering, myopic, beneath his brows. Who can the new-comer be? And the quick brain answers beneath the question's cover: They must need the money badly if Antonio himself comes seeking me. Off goes Bassanio to greet his friend; and Shylock in a long aside can discharge his obligations to the plot.<sup>1</sup>

How like a fawning publican he looks!  
I hate him for he is a Christian;  
But more, for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis . . . [1.3.41–52]

These eleven lines are worth comment. In them is all the motive power for drama that the story, as Shakespeare found it, provides; and he throws this, with careless opulence, into a single aside. Then he returns to the upbuilding of *his* Shylock.

Note the next turn the scene takes. From the snuffling depreciation of his present store, from his own wonted fawning on these Christian clients, Shylock unexpectedly rises to the dignities of 'When Jacob graz'd his uncle Laban's sheep . . .' [1.3.71]. And with this the larger issue opens out between Gentile and Jew, united and divided by the scripture they revere, and held from their business by this tale from it – of flocks and herds and the ancient East. Here is another Shylock; and Antonio may well stare, and answer back with some respect – though he recovers contempt for the alien creature quickly enough. But with what added force the accusation comes [Quotes 1.3.106–13]. The two Venetians see the Ghetto denizen again, and only hear the bondman's whine. But to us there is now all Jewry crouched and threatening there, an ageless force behind it. They may make light of the money bond, but we shall not.

Shakespeare keeps character within the bounds of story with great tact; but such a character as this that has surged in his imagination asks more than such a story to feed on. Hence, partly at least, the new theme of Jessica and her flight, which will give Shylock another and more instant grudge to satisfy. It is developed with strict economy. Twenty-

## Harley Granville-Barker

one lines are allowed to Jessica and Launcelot, another twenty or so to her lover and their plans; then, in a scene not sixty long, [2.5.1–57] Shylock and his household are enshrined. As an example of dramatic thrift alone this is worth study. The parting with Launcelot: he has a niggard liking for the fellow, is even hurt a little by his leaving, touched in pride too, and shows it childishly. ‘Thou shalt not gormandize / As thou hast done with me . . .’ [2.5.3–4]. But he can at least pretend that he parts with him willingly and makes some profit by it. The parting with Jessica, which we of the audience know to be a parting indeed; that constant calling her by name, which tells us of the lonely man! He has looked to her for everything, has tasked her hard, no doubt; he is her gaoler, yet he trusts her, and loves her in his extortionate way. Uneasy stranger that he is within these Venetian gates; the puritan, who, in a wastrel world, will abide by law and prophets! So full a picture of the man does the short scene give that it seems hardly possible we see no more of him than this between the making of the bond and the climactic outbreak of passion upon Jessica’s loss and the news of Antonio’s ruin.<sup>2</sup>

References to him abound; Shylock can never be long out of our minds . . . [Lists these.]

In tone and temper and method as well this scene [3.1] breaks away from all that has gone before. The very start in prose, the brisk ‘Now, what news on the Rialto?’ [3.1.1] even, perhaps, Solanio’s apology for former ‘. . . slips of prolixity or crossing the plain highway of talk’ [3.1.11–12] seem to tell us that Shakespeare is now asserting the rights of his own imagination, means, at any rate, to let this chief creature of it, his Shylock, off the leash. And verily he does.

The scene’s method repays study. No whirling storm of fury is asked for; this is not the play’s climax, but preparation for it still. Shylock is wrapped in resentful sorrow, telling over his wrong for the thousandth time. Note the repetition of thought and phrase. And how much more sinister this sight of him with the wound festering than if we had seen the blow’s instant fall! His mind turns to Antonio, and the thrice told ‘. . . let him look to his bond’ [3.1.47, 48, 50] is a rope of salvation for him; it knots up the speech in a dreadful strength. Then, on a sudden, upon the good young Salarino’s reasonable supposition that what a money-lender wants is his money back; who on earth would take flesh instead? – ‘What’s that good for?’ [3.1.52] – there flashes out the savagery stripped naked of ‘To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge.’ [3.1.53–4] Now we have it; and one salutes such purity of hatred. There follows the famous speech – no need to quote it – mounting in passionate logic, from its ‘He hath disgraced me . . . and what’s his reason? I am a Jew’ to the height of ‘The villany you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction’ [3.1.53–73].

This is a Shylock born of the old story, but transformed, and here a theme of high tragedy, of the one seemingly never-ending tragedy of the world. It is the theme for a greater play than Shakespeare was yet to write. But if this one cannot be sustained on such a height, he has at least for the moment raised it there.

Solanio and Salarino are quite oblivious to the great moral issue opened out to them; though they depart a little sobered – this Jew seems a dangerous fellow. There follows the remarkable passage with Tubal; of gruesome comedy, the apocalyptic Shylock shrunk already to the man telling his ill-luck against his enemy’s, weighing each in scales

*Shakespeare's attention to character and story, 1930*

(love for his daughter, a memory of his dead wife thrown in!) as he is used to weigh the coin which is all these Christians have left him for his pride. It is technically a notable passage, in that it is without conflict or contrast, things generally necessary to dramatic dialogue; but the breaking of a rule will be an improvement, now and then, upon obedience to it. So Shakespeare, for a finish, lowers the scene from its climax, from that confronting of Christian and Jew, of hate with hate, to this raucous assonance of these two of a kind and mind, standing cheek to cheek in common cause, the excellent Tubal fuelling up revenge. [3.1.108–30]

Such a finish, ousting all nobility, both shows us another facet of Shylock himself (solid man enough now to be turned any way his maker will) and is, as we saw, a shadow against which the high romance of Bassanio's wooing will in a moment shine the more brightly. Sharp upon the heels of this, he comes again; but once more apocalyptic, law incarnate now.

Gaoler, look to him; tell me not of mercy;  
This is the fool that lent out money gratis. . . .  
I'll have my bond; speak not against my bond:  
I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond. [3.3.1–5]

Verse and its dignity are needed for this scene; and note the recurring knell of the phrases 'I'll have my bond' [3.3.4, 5, 12, 13, 17]. Here is a Shylock primed for the play's great scene; and Shakespeare's Shylock wrought ready for a catastrophe, which is a deeper one by far than that the story yields. For not in the missing of his vengeance on Antonio will be this Shylock's tragedy, but in the betrayal of the faith on which he builds. 'I've sworn an oath that I will have my bond . . .' [3.3.5]. How many times has the synagogue not heard it sworn? 'An oath, an oath. I have an oath in Heaven . . .' [4.1.228]. He has made his covenant with an unshakable God: 'What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?' [4.1.89] – and he is to find himself betrayed.

It is the apocalyptic Shylock that comes slowly into Court, solitary and silent, to face and to outface the Duke and all the moral power of Venice.<sup>3</sup> When he does speak he answers the Duke as an equal, setting a sterner sanction against easy magnanimity – at other people's expense! One could complain that this first appeal for mercy discounts Portia's. To some extent it does; but the more famous speech escapes comparison by coming when the spell of the young doctor is freshly cast on us, and by its finer content and larger scope. Structurally, the Duke's speech is the more important, for it sets the lists, defines the issue and provokes that

I have possessed your grace of what I purpose;  
And by our holy Sabbath have I sworn  
To have the due and forfeit of my bond. [4.1.36–8].

So confident is he that he is tempted to shift ground a little and let yet another Shylock peep – the least likable of all. He goes on:



## Harley Granville-Barker

You'll ask me why I rather choose to have  
A weight of carrion flesh than to receive  
Three thousand ducats. I'll not answer that.  
But say it is my humour . . . [4.1.40–3].

Legality gives license to the hard heart. Mark the progression. While the sufferer cried 'The villany you teach me I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.' [3.1.71–3], with the law on his side it is 'What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong? . . .' [4.1.89], from which he passes, by an easy turn, to the mere moral anarchy of 'The pound of flesh, which I demand of him, / Is dearly bought; 'tis mine, and I will have it . . .' [4.1.99–100], and in satanic heroism stands defiant:

If you deny me, fie upon your law!  
There is no force in the decrees of Venice,  
I stand for judgment. Answer: shall I have it?' [4.1.101–3]

There is a dreadful silence. For who, dwelling unquestioningly under covenant of law, shall gainsay him?

It says much for the mental hypnosis which the make-believe of the theatre can induce that this scene of the trial holds us so spell-bound. Its poetry adds to the enchantment – let anyone try re-writing it in prose – and the exotic atmosphere helps. But how much more is due to the embroidering of character upon story so richly that the quality of the fabric comes to matter little! Shakespeare, at any rate, has us now upon the elemental heights of drama. He cannot keep us there. Portia must perform her conjuring trick; perhaps this is why he gives Shylock full scope before she arrives. But he brings us down with great skill, manoeuvring character to the needs of the story, and turning story to character's account.

The coming of the young judge's clerk does not impress Shylock. How should it? Little Nerissa! He has won, what doubt of it? He can indulge then – why not? – the lodged hate and loathing he bears Antonio. The Duke is busy with Bellario's letter and the eyes of the Court are off him. From avenger he degenerates to butcher. To be caught, lickerish-lipped, by Bassanio; and Gratiano's rough tongue serves him as but another whetstone for savagery! He turns surly at first sight of the wise young judge – what need of such a fine fellow and more fine talk? – and surlier still when it is talk of mercy. He stands there, he tells them yet again, asking no favours, giving none. 'My deeds upon my head! I crave the law, / The penalty and forfeit of my bond.' [4.1.206–7]

Why does Shakespeare now delay the catastrophe by a hundred lines, and let Portia play cat and mouse with her victim? From the story's standpoint, of course, to keep up the excitement a while longer. We guess there is a way out. We wonder what it can be; and yet, with that knife shining, Antonio's doom seems to come nearer and nearer. This is dramatic child's play, and excellent of its sort. But into it much finer stuff is woven. We are to have more than a trick brought off; there must be a better victory; this faith in which Shylock abides must be broken. So first she leads him on. Infatuate, finding her all on his side, he finally and formally refuses the money – walks into the trap. Next she plays upon his fanatical trust in his bond, sets him searching in mean mockery for a

charitable comma in it – had one escaped his cold eye – even as the Pharisees searched their code to convict Christ. Fold by fold, the prophetic dignity falls from him. While Antonio takes his selfless farewell of his friend, Shylock must stand clutching his bond and his knife, only contemptible in his triumph. She leads him on to a last slaveringly exultant cry: then the blow falls.

Note that the tables are very precisely turned on him: ‘if thou tak’st more, / Or less, than just a pound . . .’ [4.1.324–32] is exact retaliation for Shylock’s insistence upon the letter of his bond. Gratiano is there to mock him with his own words, and to sound, besides, a harsher note of retribution than Portia can; for the pendulum of sympathy now swings back a little – more than a little, we are apt to feel. But the true catastrophe is clear. Shylock stood for law and the letter of the law; and it seemed, in its kind, a noble thing to stand for, ennobling him. It betrays him, and in the man himself there is no virtue left. ‘Is *that* the law?’ [4.1.314] he gasps helplessly. It is his only thought. The pride and power in which legality had wrapped him, by which he had outfaced them all, and held Venice herself to ransom, are gone. He stands stripped, once more the sordid Jew that they may spit upon, greedy for money, hurriedly keen to profit by his shame. ‘I take this offer then; pay the bond thrice, / And let the Christian go.’ [4.1.318–19] Here is Shakespeare’s Shylock’s fall, and not in the trick the law plays him.

He is given just a chance – would the story let him take it! – to regain tragic dignity. What is passing in his mind that prompts Portia’s ‘Why doth the Jew pause? Take thy forfeiture’. [4.1.335] No, nothing, it would seem, but the thought that he will be well out of the mess with his three thousand ducats safe.

Shakespeare has still to bring his theme full circle. He does it with doubled regard to character and story. ‘Why, then the devil give him good of it! / I’ll stay no longer question’. [4.1.345–6] If he were not made to stay, by every canon of theatrical justice Shylock would be let off too lightly; wherefore we find that the law has another hold on him. It is but a logical extending of retribution, which Gratiano is quick to reduce to its brutal absurdity. Here is Shylock with no more right to a cord with which to hang himself than had Antonio to a bandage for his wound. These quibbling ironies are for the layman among the few delights of law. Something of the villainy the Jew taught them the Christians will now execute; and Shylock, as helpless as Antonio was, takes on a victim’s dignity in turn. He stays silent while his fate, and the varieties of official and unofficial mercy to be shown him, are canvassed.<sup>4</sup> He is allowed no comment upon his impoverishing for the benefit of ‘his son Lorenzo’ or upon his forced apostasy. But could eloquence serve better than such a silence?

*Portia.* Art thou contented, Jew? What dost thou say?

*Shylock.* I am content. [4.1.393–4]

With the three words of submission the swung pendulum of the drama comes to rest. And for the last of him we have only

I pray you give me leave to go from hence,  
I am not well. Send the deed after me,  
And I will sign it. [4.1.395–7]

## Harley Granville-Barker

Here is the unapproachable Shakespeare. 'I am not well.' It nears banality and achieves perfection in its simplicity. And what a completing of the picture of Shylock! His deep offence has been against human kindness; he had scorned compassion and prayed God himself in aid of his vengeance. So Shakespeare dismisses him upon an all but ridiculous appeal to our pity, such as an ailing child might make that had been naughty; and we should put the naughtiness aside. He passes out silently, leaving the gibing Gratiano the last word, and the play's action sweeps on without pause. There can be no greater error than to gerrymander Shylock a strenuously 'effective exit' – and most Shylocks commit it. From the character's point of view the significant simplicity of that 'I am not well' is spoiled; and from the point of view of the play the technical skill with which Shakespeare abstracts from his comedy this tragic and dominating figure and avoids anticlimax after is nullified.

### THE RETURN TO COMEDY

The tragic interest is posted to oblivion cavalierly indeed. Seven lines suffice, and the Duke's processional departure. The business of the rings is then briskly dispatched, and made the brisker by the businesslike matter of the signing of the deed being tacked to it. Thence to Belmont; and while Lorenzo and Jessica paint its moonlit beauty for us, Balthasar and his clerk have time to change costume and tire their heads again for Portia and Nerissa. They have evidently, as we saw, none too much time; for Launcelot is allowed a last – and an incongruously superfluous – piece of clowning. But the musicians can play ahead for an extra minute or two if hooks and eyes refuse to fasten, and no one will notice the delay. The last stretch of dialogue is lively; a comic quartet coming after the consort of viols, and it asks for a like virtuosity. The play ends, pleasantly and with formality, as a fairy tale should. One may wonder that the last speech is left (against tradition) to Gratiano; but one practical reason is plain. Portia and Bassanio, Antonio, Lorenzo and Jessica must pace off the stage in their stately Venetian way, while Gratiano's harmless ribaldry is tossed to the audience as an epilogue. Then he and Nerissa, now with less dignity than ever to lose, skip quickly after. (84–6, 89–102)

## 66 Cecil Roth, Shylock the Venetian

1933

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From 'The Background of Shylock', *Review of English Studies*, 9 (April 1933), pp. 148–56.

Cecil Roth (1899–1970) was born in north London, and educated at the City of London School. After active service in France during the 1914–18 war, he read History at Merton College, Oxford, graduating in 1922 with a first in Modern History. In 1924 he gained his doctorate with a dissertation on *The Last Florentine Republic*, which was published the following year. At first a professional writer, Roth was Reader in post-biblical Jewish studies at Oxford from 1939 to 1964, subsequently becoming a visiting professor at Queen's College, City University of New York, and Stern College. His books include *The History of Marranos* (1932), the *History of the Jews in England* (1941), the *History of the Jews in Italy* (1946), and *The Jews in the Renaissance* (1959). In 1965 he became editor of the sixteen-volume *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1965–70). The Italian government awarded him the title of Commander of the Order of Merit in 1969 for his contributions to Italian culture.

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[Roth examines the 'genesis' of Shylock.]

Even the name Shylock is obscure in its Jewish connection. It is conceivable that Shakespeare derived it from 'Shiloch the Babylonian' mentioned in the apocryphal Chronicle of Joseph ben Gorion, which was so popular in his day. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that all the Jewish names which occur in the *Merchant of Venice* – Shylock (Shelah), Jessica (Jesca), Chus (Cush) and Tubal – are closely paralleled in two successive chapters of the Book of Genesis (x, 2, 6, 24; xi, 14–15, 29). There is on record, moreover, a contemporary pamphlet, *Caleb Shillocke, his Prophecie, or the Jewes Prediction*, published in 1607. It is not, however, quite certain whether the nomenclature was borrowed from Shakespeare, or whether an earlier edition, as yet unrecorded, served as the latter's inspiration. In any case, as far as the Ghetto was concerned, the name Shylock was absolutely unknown; and nothing approaching it is to be found in Venetian sources, printed or manuscript. This may now be stated, for the first time, without equivocation.<sup>1</sup>

The question of nomenclature aside, it is not difficult in our present state of knowledge to reconstruct Shylock's actual background and to depict, without leaving much margin for error, those details which Shakespeare relegated to the imagination. Israel Zangwill pictured him as a Spanish Jew who had fled from the persecutions of the

Inquisition with his mind filled with hatred against Christianity.<sup>[2]</sup> Hunter, in 1845, asserted that he was a Levantine.<sup>[3]</sup> As a matter of fact, both conjectures happen to be out of the question, on the author's own showing. Venetian Jewry, in Shakespeare's day and long after, was divided into three 'nations,' which were accorded absolutely different treatment one from another, and maintained their own separate institutions. Among these, there were, indeed, 'Pontines,' comprising refugees from Spain and Portugal, and 'Levantine,' consisting of Turkish subjects from the Near East. More prominent than these, about the streets of the city and on the Rialto, was the *Nazione Tedesca*, or German nation. This was the oldest of all in establishment, dating from the beginning of the sixteenth century, or even earlier. Though the least wealthy of the three, it was by far the most numerous, supporting a majority of the synagogues and easily surpassing all other local elements combined. (It may be mentioned, *en passant*, that old Gobbo's inquiry for the house of 'master Jew,' in sixteenth-century Venice, would have been somewhat lacking in precision: and it was fortunate that he found his son to guide him.)

Now, there can be no doubt whatsoever that Shylock, had he existed, would have belonged to this 'nation.' The proof is very simple. He was by profession a moneylender – the whole of Shakespeare's story, indeed, turns upon this fact. But, as it happens, it was only the *Nazione Tedesca* which was allowed to practise this occupation. Both the Levantines and the Pontines were rigorously restricted, by law, to commerce: and they controlled a great part of the maritime trade of Venice – particularly that with the Levant, which owed its prosperity to them. The so-called 'Germans,' on the other hand, were tolerated in Venice solely on condition of maintaining the essential money-lending establishments in which the tender conscience of the Serenissima would not allow any Christian to engage. They were not permitted to dabble in trade, however much they desired to do so: and the only occupation legally open to them beside that of money-lending was dealing in second-hand clothes. The other two categories, on the other hand, were specifically prohibited, in their periodical *condotte*, or licences, from engaging in either of these two callings. This very strong legal differentiation between the two classes continued until the close of the seventeenth century. Hence, by the fact of his engaging in the profession of financier, and of making Antonio a loan, it is perfectly obvious that Shylock must have belonged to the *Nazione Tedesca* – the German nation.

The variety of pledges which Venetian Jews accumulated in their hands in the course of business was bewildering. All the treasures of palaces along the Grand Canal, from roof to cellar, sometimes succumbed to the magnet of the Ghetto. They were well known to have in their possession a splendid assortment of gems and jewellery, so much so that sumptuary laws were necessary to put a check on the amount worn. Shakespeare's picture of the nature and extent of Jessica's depredations in her father's house is absolutely true to life in this respect. And it would be far from unlikely that a rich Jewish moneylender would have 'in readiness' among his unredeemed pledges a 'page's suit,' in which his errant daughter might disguise herself for the purpose of flight.<sup>4</sup> In this, as in other respects, Shakespeare's intuition has enabled him to sketch in trivial details with such remarkable fidelity as to render it quite conceivable that (as has been conjectured) he knew Italy at first-hand, from a visit with the English players in 1593.

The fact that Shylock belonged to the German 'nation' does not imply that he was of German birth, or even of immediate German origin: though his relations with Frankfort,

where he had bought the ring stolen by Jessica, render this hypothesis possible. The *Nazione Tedesca*, as we have seen, was the oldest in establishment of all sections of the Jewish community in Venice, dating back by Shakespeare's day for a full century. From the very beginning it had comprised, not only immigrants from across the Alps, but also native, semi-autochthonous, Italian elements: and by now it was fully assimilated to the dominant culture of the country and of the city. Indeed, whereas the Levantines and Ponentines spoke Spanish or Portuguese amongst themselves, carrying on a great part of their communal business in those languages, the *Nazione Tedesca* had, for the most part, completely abandoned the last relic of their ancestral German, and used Italian for all ordinary purposes. There were, of course, some arrivals of more recent date, but the latter followed willy-nilly the fashion predominant in the Ghetto. Shylock was therefore, in all probability, a native. It is obvious, indeed, that Shakespeare did not consider him a foreigner; had he done so, the temptation of making him speak a broken English, like Dr. Caius in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, would have been irresistible.

It is true, on the other hand, that Shylock is not a citizen. Shakespeare makes this fact absolutely plain [Quotes 4.1.348–51].

With reference to this crucial passage, it must be borne in mind that the Jew of the Ghetto period was considered something less than a native of the country, even if he were born there. It is remarkable, and it is perhaps something more than a coincidence, that this was nowhere given such precise juridical expression as it was in Venice. The attempts made there so consistently to exclude the Jews from economic life were based upon the assumption that the Jews were, in fact, aliens, however long they and their fathers before them had resided under the protection of the Lion of St. Marco. Indeed, as late as the last decades of the eighteenth century, it was expressly laid down in their recurrent *condotte* that 'the Jews of Venice, and of the State, or any other Jew, cannot claim nor enjoy any right of Citizenship.' Juridically, Shylock was therefore an alien, whether born in Venice or no.

Having thus decided upon his ancestry, it is possible to go even a little further, and to state the precise situation of 'the next turning of all, on the left,' where he lived. The Ghetto at Venice was a commodious area, capable of giving accommodation (with an unconscionable degree of overcrowding) to as many as five thousand souls. It consisted of streets, and alleys and squares, leading all the way from the Cannaregio to the Rio S. Girolamo. But, in Shakespeare's day, it was rigorously divided off into districts. The 'Ponentines' and the 'Levantines' were supposed to live in the *Ghetto Vecchio*, or Old Foundry, which had been set aside as an exclusive place of residence for them in 1541. The *Nazione Tedesca* were confined to the *Ghetto Nuovo* – that same area, surrounded on all sides by water and thus easily cut off from the outside world, to which they had been first relegated in 1516 (the *Ghetto Nuovissimo*, the last extension, had not yet come into existence). It is true that the two areas were contiguous; but the two ethnic elements which inhabited them remained quite distinct. Thus, for example, when in 1586 a tide of migration set in from the crowded *Ghetto Nuovo* to the more ample Levantine quarter, the local authorities (who were responsible for seeing that the rents of all the houses, occupied or unoccupied, were punctually paid) intervened with a menace of excommunication to stop the movement; and in 1609 the assistance of the civil authorities was invoked to force the 'German' Jews back into their own overcrowded

district. There can be no doubt, accordingly, that Shylock, as a moneylender and therefore one of the *Nazione Tedesca*, lived in the *Ghetto Nuovo* – a broad square, with ramshackle houses seeking vertically the expansion which they were unable to obtain laterally. It should be added that, owing to the oppressive restrictions which continued to prevail until the Napoleonic era, Shylock would have got into severe trouble had he actually left the Ghetto at night to have supper with Bassanio; while Launcelot Gobbo was wise in quitting his service before his misdemeanour was known to the authorities, who sternly prohibited the employment of Christians by Jews in a subordinate capacity, under whatever pretext.

Even as to dress, it is possible to speak with a certain degree of confidence. Shakespeare presumably knew of the institution of the Jewish badge, intended to mark off the Jew for contumely from all other men. It was, indeed, all but universal in Europe in his day; and contemporary visitors to Germany or Italy or the South of France brought back detailed descriptions of it, as one of the most characteristic features of the Jewish Quarter. . . .

‘Go, Tubal, and meet me at our Synagogue.’ It is not difficult to say what synagogue is intended. Obviously, it is not the Spanish Synagogue, at present the show-place of the Venetian Ghetto, in which sentimental tourists think of Shylock and of Jessica. This, indeed, dates back in its present form to the period subsequent to Shakespeare’s death, having been remodelled in 1635 by Longhena, architect of Santa Maria della Salute. In any case, Shylock, as a ‘German’ Jew, would not have frequented it. He would have attended one of the ‘Ashkenazic’ Synagogues, where the service was carried out according to his ancestral tradition. Of these, those two which were in existence in his day are still standing, though no longer regularly opened for service; the *Scuola Grande Tedesca*, founded in 1529, and the *Scuola Canton*, founded in 1532, side by side in a corner of the *Ghetto Nuovo*. It was in one of these that Shylock must have worshipped, and in which, if anywhere, his restless spirit must be sought to-day.

With this architectural detail, we may finish the picture of the historic Shylock. We are to imagine a bearded figure, soberly dressed save for his crimson hat, living in the *Ghetto Nuovo* at Venice. By ancestry, he was a German, though probably belonging to a family which had long been resident under the protection of the Lion of St. Marco. It is hardly to be doubted that he spoke excellent Italian, though possibly with a slightly guttural accent and with a few peculiar turns of phrase. Professionally he was a moneylender, his activities being regulated by the terms of the periodical *condotte* of his ‘nation,’ renewed every ten years. Incidentally, he sometimes came into possession of a variety of second-hand wares, as well as precious stones: though traffic in them was not his main activity. As, according to legend, Pope remarked, with reference to Macklin’s production, in the most execrable couplet in English literature:

‘This is the Jew / That Shakespeare drew.’ (149–53, 155–6)

## 67 Thomas Arthur Ross, Antonio a depressive homosexual

1934

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From 'A Note on *The Merchant of Venice*', *The British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 14, Part 4 (1934), pp. 303–11.

Thomas Arthur Ross (1875–1941) was born into an intellectual Edinburgh family, his father being a doctor of Law. Having completed his medical education at the University of Edinburgh, Ross specialized in neurosis and medical psychology. His publications include *An Introduction to Analytical Psychotherapy* (1932), *An Enquiry into Prognosis in the Neuroses* (1936), *The Common Neuroses: An Enquiry into Prognosis in the Neuroses* (1937), and with Arthur F. Hurst and others, *Medical Diseases of War* (1940). For Ross, *The Merchant of Venice* is not a comedy but 'a record of human misery and sorrows, relieved in the manner of high tragedy by the nobility of character of the chief sufferer' (p. 303) – Antonio.

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There is nothing melodramatic in this play, no corpses, few tears; it is a record of something that, to us who are interested in psychology, is commonplace, usually unsympathized with, frequently condemned, often borne badly, but often enough met with great patience and fortitude. It deals with pleasant people and with extremely unpleasant people, generosity and meanness jostle each other as in everyday life. But its main theme is connected with the Merchant of Venice, and I do not think that we shall ever understand this play properly until we grasp that its title was chosen deliberately.

The opening lines announce a psychiatric problem. The Merchant enters with his friends in the middle of that compulsive kind of talk which stamps the mildly depressed person, who cannot get away from his illness, but who is still not so ill but that he can talk [Quotes 1.1.1–7].

Here is a definite problem, definitely stated. It would be strange if the answer were nowhere in the play. It seems extraordinary that so little attention should have been paid to something which is stated so unequivocally. The commentators have not been entirely silent. Financial disaster overtook the Merchant later on; perhaps he had a premonition. This indeed is immediately suggested by the two friends to whom he is talking, and is summarily dismissed by the Merchant, who announces that his affairs have been so well distributed that it is practically impossible that disaster could overtake them all. This is stated in the calmest, most businesslike way possible, and I think it is quite certain that Shakespeare meant us to be quite sure that that was not what Antonio could possibly be worrying about. Against this it must be admitted that the Merchant was not



speaking the exact truth. He says that his whole estate is not adventured. However, he had to admit presently that he had no liquid cash and that all his fortunes were at sea. If the play is read carefully it would seem that this is merely careless writing on Shakespeare's part. He forgot in these opening lines that Antonio would soon have to be borrowing money. He wanted, as I see it in this opening, to emphasize that Antonio's sadness was not connected with finance. (303–4)

Before we go on, however, we may look again at these opening lines, and admire in detail the vivid clinical picture presented. The sadness without cause apparent to the patient, how fatiguing it is, and how the friends have not scrupled to show how bored they are with it, the longing of the patient to know the cause, the feeling that his brain won't work properly. One feels that unless Shakespeare was engaged in psychiatric practice – which I admit is possible from his immense knowledge of the subject – he must at some time have felt exactly as the Merchant was feeling. No better description of the essential symptoms of mild depression has been penned.

Immediately all the usual explanations are thrust at him, at first good-naturedly, but on the patient's rejection of them one by one, less so. I think we are all familiar with that phenomenon also – the bystanders losing their patience when their obviously correct explanations are rejected by the patient. The first explanation we have already dealt with – financial worry. Proof is given that this is probably not true.

The next cause alleged – also a usual one – is that he is in love. To which Antonio replies 'Fie, fie' [1.1.46]. This answer is ambiguous. It is not a denial though his friends apparently think it is, and the friend who suggested it becomes a little rude, and tells Antonio that he had better just say that he is sad because he is not merry. The two friends see Bassanio with others approaching, and say that as better company is coming they will leave. The Merchant lets them know that he knows that they have seized the chance of leaving him. 'I take it your own business calls on you / And you embrace the occasion to depart.' [1.1.63–4]

To the newcomers the Merchant, with that curious insistence of the mildly depressed to talk about themselves, seizes the opportunity, afforded by one of them who says that he is not looking very well, to emphasize that his part in life is a sad one. He is immediately fallen upon and told some home truths about himself in the manner with which we are all so familiar. He is told that he poses as the grave solemn man; such people are reputed wise because they say very little, they go about with the air of 'I am Sir Oracle / And when I ope my lips let no dog bark' [1.1.93–4], he is told that altogether he is an inferior person trying to put on an air of superiority. And so this friend leaves him.

All this is clinical description of the highest order, not only of the patient's case, but also of what all these poor people have usually to put up with from their friends.

Some hundred and fifty lines are expended on this story of Antonio's depression, so that it cannot be said that the matter is slurred over. As plain as plain can be it is said over and over again that he is depressed, that he can hardly talk of anything else, that he cannot think why it has happened, and it is also made abundantly clear that everybody is sick of it.

Antonio is now left alone with Bassanio, and, after a passing reference to the last quip of the friend who has just departed, he immediately asks Bassanio to tell him about the lady to whom Bassanio had sworn a secret pilgrimage. It is a point of importance that

this should be the first subject which he broaches when left alone with Bassanio. It is also of importance to note that he must have known of this intention before the play opens, not in detail indeed, but that there was something afoot of the nature of a love affair. Unfortunately there is no indication of how long he did know of it, or whether this knowledge preceded the onset of the depression or not. The reader is also reminded that when he, Antonio, was challenged with being in love, he could reply only 'Fie, fie.' It is also important to remember that this love affair of Bassanio's must have been of vast importance to Antonio. Psychiatrists will agree that it is not common for persons obsessed with their own depression to ask a friend straightway at the first opportunity about his love affairs. It must have been something very telling which put a stop to the flow to talk about himself, which had hitherto been steady and unrelenting.

Bassanio does not answer the question immediately, but says that he has been very extravagant and that he has now no money, but that he knows that Antonio from his love will help him to clear his debts. Bassanio is an utterly worthless person; he is not in the least anxious to pay his debts; on the contrary he wants to borrow a considerable further sum from his principal creditor – Antonio himself. The latter instantly assures him that he can rely on him to his uttermost farthing.

This certainly implies great friendship. Shakespeare did not approve of people borrowing money from their friends. 'Loan oft loses both itself and friend' [*Hamlet*, 1.3.76]. It must in his mind have been something very exceptional in the way of friendship that made so shrewd a person as the Merchant of Venice so ready to lend money to this fortune-hunting bankrupt.

There follows after this the unpleasant bargaining between Shylock and the Merchant, but in this we have no reference to Antonio's illness. . . . It might seem as if the Merchant had become infused with a new energy because he was doing something to help his friend. With the same proviso the terms of the bond are of importance. This loan had to be raised to serve Bassanio, and it mattered not a whit to Antonio what became of him personally provided that Bassanio was served. Indeed it might have seemed that at the moment a dangerous bond was attractive.

It is from now on that the play seems to drop Antonio as the principal character. Bassanio sets out for Belmont, which cannot have been very far off seeing that many of the characters made the journey subsequently so easily. But the farewell between the Merchant and his friend was conducted by the former as if it were a final parting. The distance in space might not be great, but there was in the Merchant's mind the thought that this was no mere *au revoir*. Bassanio, with his usual mode of trying to make other people think he was a fine fellow, because he was not sure of himself but felt uncomfortable, said that he would be back soon, but Antonio told him not to hurry, to wait till he had completed his business properly; nothing mattered to him except that Bassanio's affairs should be successful. The parting was described later by one of his friends whom we met in the first act:

And even there, his eye being big with tears,  
Turning his face, he put his hand behind him,  
And with affection wondrously sensible  
He wrung Bassanio's hand, and so they parted. [2.8.46–9]

To which his auditor replied: 'I think he only loves the world for him' [2.8.50].

There are two more quotations to be made. Bassanio at Belmont received a letter from Antonio, then fully persuaded that he must die. He cannot bring himself to do so without seeing Bassanio once more. Not only the opening words but also the whole tenor of the letter bespeak intense affection; and characteristically he puts Bassanio's pleasure and convenience as of more importance than his wish [Quotes 3.2.315–22].

The last words which Antonio speaks before the trial are these: 'Pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay my debt, and then I care not!' [3.3.35–6].

My thesis is now fairly plain. Antonio was in love with Bassanio, and the depression had been precipitated by the knowledge which he had received some time before the play opens, that he was going to leave him. This is a common enough story. A homosexual love affair is broken by one of the parties marrying, and the other reacts by depression.

It may be well to summarize the evidence of the love affair.

In an early conversation, Antonio calls out 'Fie, Fie' at the suggestion of love; he does not deny it; he is slightly upset by it as these words suggest. Later he informs an extravagant swaggering bankrupt that he can have as much money as he likes for any purpose not strictly dishonourable because of his love for him; thirdly there is this farewell, though physically it was not a great separation either in space or time, but it threatened to be a complete one spiritually.

There is also recurring evidence on the part of Bassanio of inward feeling of discomfort. The deserter in practice usually shows some sign of this.

There remain a number of interesting questions. . . .

(1) Why did the matter of Antonio's depression and love affair disappear? It seems to do so; in fact it reappears here and there as will become evident when we discuss the third question. But its seeming to disappear was probably because Shakespeare wanted to get his play acted. The censor of obscene books is probably always with us, and therefore, though the beginning of the play was easy, the subject was bound to become more difficult in its presentation as it went on. The farewell scene, which I regard as one which clinches the matter, is not stressed or emphasized in any way. Puritanism of the repressive sort was already strong in England in Shakespeare's time.

Bernard Shaw has called attention in one of his prefaces to the fact that the serious open presentation of a sexual subject will usually ensure its suppression by the censor. Undisguised frivolous presentation is passed easily. Shakespeare may well have had the same difficulty. He apparently had no difficulty in getting leave to display the open jokes of Sir Toby Belch [in *Twelfth Night*] or Sir John Falstaff. But a serious discussion would probably then as later have been taboo.

(2) Is Antonio's opening speech to be regarded as a proof of Shakespeare's belief in the unconscious? I suppose that most people are aware by now that Freud did not invent the unconscious, so that this question is not an anachronistic absurdity. I have myself used the first lines on other occasions as a most excellent statement of the fact of the unconscious, and taken by themselves this is indubitable. 'In sooth I know not why I am so sad' [1.1.1]. If these words are true they necessitate an unconscious. But are they true on this occasion? To answer that we must look wider afield. I do not think that they are true. The statement 'I do not know' is used very often when the speaker does not wish

to tell the whole truth about something. Antonio was sad, he was a very popular and well-liked person, and his friends were plaguing him about something which he did not wish to explain. Antonio is one of the most honourable figures in all Shakespeare, and we shall not think the less of him if he should prefer the polite untruth rather than tell people to mind their own business. I do not think he was unconscious either of the cause of his sadness or of his homosexual love, the fact that he broached the subject of the lady the first moment he found Bassanio alone showed that the subject of love was very much in his conscious mind. Some might say that he would not have found the money so readily if he had consciously recognized that its use would utterly destroy his own happiness. I do not think much of that argument. It is clear and will become clearer that he was a continent lover – as indeed was the lover in Sonnet XX, who freely gave his beloved physically to women – and that he was a man for whom love meant giving rather than receiving, whose great aim was the happiness of the beloved rather than his own.

(3) How is homosexual love regarded in the play? Throughout the play Antonio seems to have regarded it as wrong. In a way he seems to further Bassanio's cause though it gave him pain. He pushed the money on him though it was to his own undoing. We are very familiar with the conscientious scrupulous patient who acts like this. If he regarded it as sin it would be an act of expiation that he should do this. Far on in the play there is evidence that he did so regard it. In the trial scene Bassanio makes a hearty and, as I read it, insincere offer to let the Jew have his flesh instead of Antonio's. To which the latter replies, 'I am a tainted wether of the flock, / Meetest for death' [4.1.114–15].

It is obvious that Antonio held that he had a stigma, and that it was well that he should not live. These words are not merely those of a man whose interest in life has disappeared, but those of one who holds that he is not worthy to live, they have some value too as proof for the main thesis. In what way was Antonio tainted? In no way that we know of. It is certain that he was in love with Bassanio, and for the mass of mankind that is a taint.

How did other people regard him? Though his friends were tired of his illness, and there is no illness which wearies friends so quickly as this one, they were fond of him; Salarino, the friend who reported his breakdown on parting with Bassanio, said, while he was actually telling the very story of the parting, that a kinder gentleman treads not this earth. His friend, on hearing the story of the parting, says of Antonio [Quotes 2.8.50–3].

This would seem to indicate, taken with the story of the parting, that they regarded the affair as more than ordinary friendship Throughout they all remain friendly, so that if they knew they did not disapprove.

(4) But how did Shakespeare view the matter? We have here the question. If an author puts a view of a case into the mouth of a character, how far does that view represent the author's? As already stated it seems to me that Antonio considered his sexual anomaly as a somewhat disreputable thing. We are not sure whether the friends had detected it; if they had they remained unmoved. But is Antonio's view Shakespeare's? I am of course talking of conscious views. Antonio's view of himself probably represented, does indeed at the present day represent, the usual view of the general public, that a state like this is disgraceful and that if one is in it one had better keep quiet about it.

## Thomas Arthur Ross

Shakespeare does not directly state a view at all. Throughout the play Antonio is depicted as an upright, lovable, courageous man, so that if Shakespeare disapproved, he at least considered that a man with such a condition might otherwise be a very fine person. It is, however, more particularly in the fifth act that Antonio is revealed as a much finer person than anyone else in the play. If this act were not intended to show something of the kind it is hard to see why it was ever written. If the play were really a melodrama where the villain is discomfited in the end, that end has been reached at the end of the trial. That is the climax Shylock, poor man, is finished and done with when the trial is over. Portia, the other possible central figure, cuts a rather poor figure also after the trial. Antonio does not, which brings me back to my original thesis that the play was intended to be about the person whose identity is given in the title, that the play is about the Merchant of Venice. It ends with him as it began. Anyone who reads that fifth act superficially will say 'What nonsense.' Antonio speaks only twelve lines in the whole act, and these of no importance. Let us, however, examine the act in some detail. This act is spoken chiefly by several married couples whose marriages have not yet been consummated. The urgent news of the danger in which Antonio stood had come before this could be accomplished. They all meet now on a beautiful moonlight night to which they pay compliment, for Shakespeare could never resist any occasion for glorifying the beauties of nature. After that they have a little rather vulgar joking about the rings which Bassanio and Gratiano had given to the alleged lawyer and his clerk. This leads up to more open sexual jokings about what is going to happen when they get to bed. It is all rather undignified. In the midst of them stands Antonio, loftily remote from all this vulgarity, a solitary figure of great dignity.

I think we may say from this play and also from Sonnet XX that Shakespeare's attitude towards continent homosexuality was one of respectful admiration. He saw, as some of us see now, how unfortunate these poor people are, despised for something they cannot help, a something which cuts them off from the greatest joys of life, and in this play he depicts a man who bore these trials nobly. (304–6, 308–11)

## 68 John W. Draper, Shylock a London usurer

1935

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From 'Usury in *The Merchant of Venice*', *Modern Philology*, 33, no. 1 (August 1935), pp. 37-47.

John William Draper (1893-1976) was educated at New York University and Harvard. After various posts, he held a Chair of English Literature at West Virginia University from 1929 to 1964. Draper's prolific output extends from many articles to monographs on *The Hamlet of Shakespeare's Audience* (1938, repr. 1966), *The Humors and Shakespeare's Characters* (1945, repr. 1971), *The Othello of Shakespeare's Audience* (1950, repr. 1967), and *Stratford to Dogberry: Studies in Shakespeare's Earlier Plays* (1961). His wide interests, which extended to comparative literature, Iranian, and Parsi, is reflected in his *Orientalia and Shakespeareana*, posthumously published in 1978.

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The character portrayal of Shakespeare shows the widest human sympathy, but Shylock is an exception. He is an object of loathing and contempt; he is depicted as unprincipled in business and unfeeling in his home. In the end he pays a terrible penalty, even more severe than does his prototype in *Il Pecorone*, the probable source of the play, or indeed in any of the other versions of the old folk tale;<sup>1</sup> and no one, not even the kindly Antonio, says a single word in his favor: the dramatist apparently expected his audience to be even more unsympathetic toward Shylock than toward the notorious Richard III, whose overthrow had brought to the throne the glorious House of Tudor. This unwonted *saeva indignatio* of Shakespeare is usually attributed to an anti-Semitism inherited from the Middle Ages and kept alive by the illegal presence of Jews in London and especially aroused at the time by the alleged attempt in 1594 of Lopez, the court physician, to poison the Queen. As a matter of fact, however, the prejudice of the Middle Ages must have been dying out, even in clerical circles,<sup>2</sup> for under Cromwell the Jews were permitted to return; moreover, such few Spaniards of Jewish descent as lived in London<sup>3</sup> had long since been converted to at least outward Catholic conformity, and so were indistinguishable from other Spaniards;<sup>4</sup> and the *cause célèbre* of Lopez, though perhaps the occasion for one or two anti-Jewish plays, is too far removed both from Shakespeare's character and from his plot to have furnished the chief motive for either.<sup>5</sup> Shylock, the Machiavellian Jew, would seem, indeed, to have been a study not in Elizabethan realism but in Italian local color;<sup>6</sup> for Italy, especially Venice where the Jews were go-betweeners in the Turkish trade,<sup>7</sup> had become, since their expulsion from Spain,

their chief refuge in Western Europe. Merely as a Jew, therefore, Shylock could hardly call forth the contemptuous abhorrence manifest in the play, for that side of his character was the stuff of exotic romance; and, furthermore, Shakespeare's one appeal to the sympathy of the audience for Shylock is the latter's defense of his race and religion: 'Hath not a *Jew* eyes? hath not a *Jew* hands, organs, dimensions . . .?' [3.1.59 ff.]

The conflict between Shylock and Antonio is not so much a matter of religion but rather of mercantile ideals, as Shylock declares in an aside at the entrance of Antonio [Quotes 1.3.41–5].

The audience is amply informed that Shylock hates Antonio because the latter has called him 'Usurer,' and spat upon him, and 'thwarted' his 'bargaines' [3.1.51]; and Antonio openly glories in having cast such slurs. Upon the Rialto he has railed at Shylock, not for religion, but for usury – as Shylock puts it, 'all for use of that which is mine owne.' [1.3.113] In the crucial third act, Shylock twice reiterates this theme [3.1.116–17, 127–8]; and Antonio himself assures the audience

Hee seekes my life; his reason well I know:  
I oft deliver'd from his forfeitures  
Many that have at times made mone to me;  
Therefore he hates me. [3.3.21–4]

Race and religion, then, are not the main theme of the play;<sup>8</sup> it is rather conflicting economic ideals.<sup>9</sup> In Elizabethan parlance, 'usurer' meant anyone who took even the lowest interest on money.<sup>10</sup> Antonio follows the medieval ideal, and, like Chaucer's Merchant, is supposed 'neither to lend nor borrow' [1.3.61–2] at interest; and Shylock, like the modern capitalist, makes interest the very basis of his business.

Again and again, in Shakespeare, this allusion to usury recurs, and commonly with a fling at its un-Christian ethics and its bitter consequences. It is 'forbidden';<sup>11</sup> and the usurer is a simile of shame;<sup>12</sup> the citizens in *Coriolanus* are outraged that the senators pass 'edicts for usury to support usurers';<sup>13</sup> and *Timon* is full of attacks upon the system as undermining the Christian virtues and the state.<sup>14</sup> In other Elizabethan dramatists also<sup>15</sup> the usurer is a common object of hatred shading into contemptuous ridicule. Partly classical, partly medieval<sup>16</sup> in origin, he is often, like Vice in the old Morality plays,<sup>17</sup> both wicked and comic: Shylock is clearly in this tradition,<sup>18</sup> and follows directly upon Marlowe's Barabas, who also combines moneylender and Italianate Jew. The widespread currency of this theme and the intensity of emotion that it aroused suggest that it could not have been purely a dramatic convention,<sup>19</sup> and that it struck closer home to the Elizabethans than a mere medieval tradition or a bit of Venetian local color. Like the *miles gloriosus*, the Elizabethan usurer owes something to Latin comedy; but, like Falstaff,<sup>20</sup> Shylock is more than a classical survival: if not a characteristic London type, he at least exemplified an immediate and crying problem, the iniquity of English usurers and the interest that they charged; and this theme in *The Merchant of Venice* can hardly be the accidental petrified remains of Shakespeare's 'clerical predecessor,' the author of the lost play *The Jew*;<sup>21</sup> for it is too prominent both in this and in other plays by Shakespeare. . . .

Shakespeare, however, took the regular attitude of the 1590's. Indeed, most revelatory of the dramatist's point of view are the excuses that Shylock gives for his trade: they

are not the arguments just summarized, but the very reasons urged most bitterly against it. Like the devil, he quotes Scripture to his purpose [1.3.71 ff.], though the audience doubtless had by memory more than one text that forbade it. He parodies Aristotle's attack on usury as if it were an argument in favour [1.3.77 ff.]. He declares that he is unjustly hated 'all for use of that which is mine owne' [1.3.113]; and anyone would have told him that since a usurer's goods were got by a sort of theft, they were not his own.<sup>22</sup> Of course, it was this feeling on the part of the audience that justified the treatment of Shylock at the denouement. He calls Antonio a 'prodigall' [3.1.45], though the term is clearly misapplied; for usurers preyed on the youthful heirs of noble families, and so, to the horror of the age, brought ruin on ancient houses. He hates Antonio for reducing the rate of interest 'here with us in Venice,' [1.3.45] and so upholds the extortionate charges of the day. With a callous presumption, he publicly demands 'justice' for his compounded iniquities; he calls upon his oath in a 'heaven' [4.1.228] whose law he flouts; and he claims the support of the Venetian commonwealth, whose well-being his practices were supposed to undermine.<sup>23</sup> To the Elizabethans all this was mordant casuistry; and, by making Shylock himself call up almost every argument against his own way of life, Shakespeare, with keen dramatic irony, implies that not one honest word can be said in his favor. For Shylock the Jew, there is no such rationale of bitterness; and so utter and thorough a philippic must surely have been intentional.<sup>24</sup>

Not only does *The Merchant of Venice* reflect the Elizabethan attitude toward interest, but the details of the play constantly refer to current business customs. Such a 'merry bond,'<sup>25</sup> signed under pretense of friendliness,<sup>26</sup> was not without precedent in actual fact. Bassanio, to seal the bargain, follows the usual etiquette of asking the lender to dine; and later Shylock actually goes to a feast, like a true usurer, to help use up the borrowed sum and so insure a forfeiture.<sup>27</sup> The accounts of Sir Thomas Gresham show that in Antwerp alone the feasting of Queen Elizabeth's creditors cost him £25 a year.<sup>28</sup> Shylock, moreover, carefully avoids the term 'usury,' is insulted at being called a 'usurer' [3.1.47-8], and, with an exquisite delicacy, objects even to having his 'well won thrift' described as 'interest' [1.3.50-1] – though this euphemism was commonly allowed by contemporary moneylenders.<sup>29</sup> London usurers – perhaps because they had risen from poverty by extreme penuriousness – were supposed to run their households in a stingy, not to say starveling, expenditure;<sup>30</sup> and Shylock and Gobbo mutually complain of each other in this regard [2.2.104-7, 132-3; 2.5.46-51]. Usurers regularly wished the forfeiture rather than the repayment of the loan; and in Lodge's *Looking-glasse*, the young gentleman, like Bassanio, offers much more than the nominated sum; but the moneylender, like Shylock, refuses and demands the forfeiture. Contemporary London, therefore, would seem to have supplied both the commercial decorum and the business trickery of Shakespeare's Venice; and this suggests that the dramatist intended to bring before his audience with immediate realism his economic theme.

Even the idealized Antonio reflects Elizabethan London. He 'was wont to lend out money for a Christian curtsie,' [3.3.5, 25, etc.] according to the highest ethics of the age; and he was not without living prototypes. In 1571 the House of Commons considered a bill to establish banks to loan money at a mere 6 per cent;<sup>31</sup> a few years later one Stephen Parrott projected a bank that would make loans for pure Christian brotherhood, 'a good, godly and charrytable work';<sup>32</sup> and, as late as 1598, Berwick-on-Tweed made



pawnbroking a town monopoly in order to reduce the exactions of creditors.<sup>33</sup> The comparison of Antonio to a 'royal Merchant' [4.1.29] suggests England as well as Venice;<sup>34</sup> for the London merchants had grown rich, and in their 'comely entertainment' were not to be 'matched by any foreign opposition.'<sup>35</sup> Hunter, on Shylock's word, declared that Antonio condemned interest 'through simplicity,' and that, as Shylock says, he was a 'prodigal' wasting an ample patrimony;<sup>36</sup> but the dramatist clearly expects us to admire his probity rather than condemn his ignorance and waste. Even Cardozo<sup>37</sup> thinks him an 'angelic simpleton' for signing the bond. As a matter of fact, Antonio knew well the exactions of usurers, and realized that if he would accommodate his friend, he must accept hard terms. Elsewhere he appears as a skilful merchant who does not risk his 'whole estate / Upon the fortune of this present yeere' [1.1.43-4]; and, like a shrewd man of affairs, he does not seem over anxious early in the play to divulge his business secrets. He is, indeed, the ideal merchant, very much as Othello<sup>38</sup> and Henry V are the ideal of army life; and, just as Shakespeare heightened his effect by contrasting Hotspur and Prince Hal with the poltroonery of Falstaff,<sup>39</sup> so, in *The Merchant of Venice*, he put Shylock and Antonio side by side as comparative studies in business ethics.

Shylock the Jew was merely exotic local color; Shylock the usurer was a commentary on London life.<sup>40</sup> The moneylender had been hated for centuries; and, in Shakespeare's day, the difficult transition from the medieval economic system to modern capitalism especially subjected both rich and poor to his exactions. Efforts to find realism in Shylock have generally looked to Venice or the Orient<sup>41</sup> — regions of which Shakespeare knew none too much and the groundlings even less: the crux of the play is nearer home; and it reflects the current uses of commercial life and the current attitude toward them. Nevertheless, *The Merchant of Venice* is not strictly a problem play like *All's Well*,<sup>42</sup> or even mainly one as is *Othello*,<sup>43</sup> for it is written *ex parte*; to Shakespeare there is but one answer, and so there is no problem; and, moreover, the old stories upon which it is founded dictated a happy ending that forbade the logical conclusion of the theme and kept the play a romantic comedy; but, to the Elizabethans, it had a verve and realism that is lost upon the present reader. Just as the stories of the romances were changed and reinterpreted century by century, so Shakespeare gave timely significance and telling vividness to his borrowed origins; and this intensified reality is perhaps his chief contribution to Elizabethan drama. Usually the matrix from which his play developed was a plot, as in *King Lear*; sometimes both plot and character, as in *Henry V*; and, on this matrix, he built a drama that, almost certainly in details of setting and style and often in motivation and theme, shows the immediate impress of his age. *Julius Caesar* is full of English setting;<sup>44</sup> the background and motives of Desdemona are thoroughly Elizabethan;<sup>45</sup> in *Twelfth Night* he transplanted an English household and staff of servants to the confines of Illyria;<sup>46</sup> the character of Falstaff is a realistic foil to the romantic wars of chivalry;<sup>47</sup> and, in *Merry Wives*, even the plot would seem to have been borrowed from common contemporary situations. *The Merchant of Venice* is a romantic comedy built of old folk material, to which has been added a realistic theme and motivation; and this theme, although Shakespeare has not yet learned to make it entirely implicit in his plot, obviously portrays the downfall of hated usury and the triumph of Christian charity in the person of a princely merchant. (37-40, 43-7)

## 69 Caroline Spurgeon, the distribution of imagery within the play

1935

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From *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge, 1935).

Caroline Francis Eleanor Spurgeon (1869–1942) was educated at Cheltenham Ladies College and University College, London (1896–1900), gaining first class honours. In 1911 she obtained the Docteur (Lettres) from the University of Paris. She taught at Bedford College for Women in London from 1901 to 1929, becoming (in 1913) the first woman appointed in open competition in a British university to a Professorial Chair. During the 1930s she moved to the United States, where she was active in university women's organizations. In addition to her pioneering study of Shakespeare's imagery,<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon also published *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion 1357–1900* (1914–25, Chaucer Society; 3 vols., Cambridge 1925), *Keats's Shakespeare* (1928; 1929, with additions), a study of Keats' reading of Shakespeare reflected in his marginalia, and *Mysticism in English Literature* (1913). This excerpt is from the chapter on 'Leading Motives in the Comedies'.

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[*The Merchant of Venice* is] remarkable, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for its high proportion of poetical images, eighty out of a total of a hundred and thirteen, some of them very beautiful and among the best known in Shakespeare. [Provides examples.]

Bassanio uses the greatest number of images and Portia runs him very close, so that between them they are responsible for nearly half the images in the play. Next to them, but at a long distance, comes the gay and talkative Gratiano, who, though Bassanio thinks he 'speaks an infinite deal of nothing' [1.1.114], possesses a lively imagination and a pretty wit.

The distribution of images is unusual; it is very uneven, varying with the tone and subject, and in no other play, I believe, is this unevenness so marked. . . . The high points of emotion in the *Merchant of Venice* are the third casket scene, when Bassanio makes his choice, the trial scene, and the preparation for the final gathering together of the pairs of lovers in the moonlit garden, and it is in the first and last named of these that the images are chiefly grouped.

It is worth while to note – as an indication of the difference of tone and feeling – the difference in the number and use of images in the three casket scenes. In the first [2.7], 79 lines in length, there are four images only, somewhat frigid and detached, used by Morocco, who rather pettishly describes Venice as the 'watery kingdom, whose

ambitious head / Spits in the face of heaven', [2.7.44–5] where Portia's suitors come 'as o'er a brook' [2.7.47] to see her, and who has a play of words on a gem set in gold, and an 'angel in a golden bed' [2.7.58]. In the second [2.9] of 84 lines, we find three images, two used by Arragon, the martlet's nest, and the picking of seed from chaff (real merit from mere titles and dignities), finished off by Portia's dry and caustic summing up of the incident, 'Thus hath the candle sing'd the moth' [2.9.79].

But when, immediately afterwards, the servant arrives to say that Bassanio's messenger is at the gate, he describes him with one of Shakespeare's most charming similes of spring: 'A day in April never came so sweet' [2.9.93], thus striking the note of beauty, romance and true love which rings through the great scene when Bassanio makes his happy choice [3.2].

It opens quietly, for Portia has herself well in hand, but when the actual moment of choice arrives, and the tension of emotion increases, images crowd thick and fast in the speech of both lovers, so that in eighteen lines spoken by Portia [3.2.44–62], no less than seven follow one another without a break, as she orders music to be played, and stands back, tense and excited, longing to give a hint, but loyally refraining, to watch the decision being made; while Bassanio, in thirty-five lines of anxious musing [3.2.73–107, tumbles out image after image, twelve of them, each fast on the heels of the other, each taking light from the one before it and in turn fading into the next.

The opening of the fifth act, so full of romance and glamour, is naturally full of images, though the decoration in the very beginning is given, not by images in the technical sense, but by the well-known exquisite series of direct pictures drawn from old romance and the great love stories of the world. It is not until Lorenzo and Jessica are sitting on the bank in the sleeping moonlight, awaiting the sounds of sweet music they have ordered, that the images proper begin [5.1.54]. Then they come with a rush, close together [5.1.55–126], so long as Lorenzo and Jessica, and later Portia and Nerissa are, or think themselves, alone in the garden listening to the music, but after they meet, and the music stops and the others come trooping in [5.1.127], the glow of romance fades, and the tone changes to badinage and light comedy. On this note the play ends, so that in the remaining hundred and seventy lines, only four sparsely scattered images occur.

We find therefore that the images are chiefly grouped round these two high points of emotion. In addition, we get a good many in the opening scene where Antonio, Gratiano and Bassanio all speak at length, revealing the setting of the story and their own characteristics, one of which, as regards the speech of the two latter, is that they delight in simile and metaphor. So it is that 59 images – nearly half the total number in the play – are crowded into the space of 392 lines [1.1; 3.2.24–148; 4.1.69–77; 5.1.53–126], while the remaining 77 are spread out over the other 2,162 lines.

Naturally in the prose scenes, or the semi-comic ones, such as the talk between Launcelot and Gobbo [2.2], or those chiefly occupied with practical affairs, such as Portia's preparations for departure, there are few images, or none; but it is surprising that the trial scene, where we are conscious of great tension of emotion, has so few. It is much the longest scene in the play – 457 lines – and there are only ten images throughout the whole of it. Five of these are Antonio's, used under great stress of emotion, three of them to express the futility of hoping to touch Shylock, and two in despairing descriptions of himself; two are the duke's, two are Shylock's (when he likens

*the distribution of imagery within the play, 1935*

Antonio to a serpent, and Portia to Daniel); while Portia, in her great opening speech and subsequent arguments and decision, makes use of one image only, which is perhaps the best known one in the whole of Shakespeare.

The truth is, it would seem, that the tension and deep feeling of the trial scene are maintained chiefly through the quality of the plot itself, its fears, doubts, suspense and surprises: first the apparent hopelessness of Antonio's position and the obduracy of Shylock, then the appearance of Portia and the continued obduracy of the Jew, followed by the swift and dramatic turning of the tables upon him, so that except at the moments when Antonio is most exasperated or depressed, imagery is not needed either as an outlet or expression of feeling.

There does not appear to be any continuous symbol in the images, though there is an instance of a twice repeated image giving the key to the whole action. This occurs first in Antonio's earliest business interview with Shylock, conducted on Antonio's side with a contemptuous coolness, detachment and assurance which almost frighten the spectators, and is in strong contrast to Shylock's burning but suppressed emotion, which rises as he details his grievances, and finally bursts forth like an erupting volcano, when he turns on Antonio and cries

You call me mis-believer, cut-throat dog . . .  
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard,  
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur  
Over your threshold . . . [1.3.111-19].

This is one of five images only in the whole scene of 181 lines, and it is clear from the way the Jew dwells on it (5 times in 17 lines) that it is the outcome of his deepest feeling, and sums up symbolically in itself the real and sole reason for his whole action – bitter rancour at the contemptuous treatment he has received, and desire for revenge. (280-5)

## 70 G. Wilson Knight, the idea of riches, true and false

1936

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From *Principles of Shakespearian Production with Especial Reference to the Tragedies* (London, 1936).

George Wilson Knight (1897–1985), was the younger son of an insurance executive. (His older brother, W. F. Jackson Knight, achieved distinction as a Virgilian scholar.) Following his education at Dulwich College (1909–14), and war service, Knight read English at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, graduating in 1923 with second class honours and representing Oxford in Chess. In 1931, having spent nine years teaching in English preparatory schools, he was appointed to a Chair of English at Trinity College, University of Toronto. From 1946 to 1962 Knight held a Readership and Chair of English Literature at the University of Leeds. His last years were spent writing and touring North America with his one-man show ‘Shakespeare’s Dramatic Challenge’. Wilson Knight’s many books include *The Wheel of Fire. Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare’s Sombre Tragedies* (1930), *The Imperial Theme* (1931), *The Shakespearian Tempest* (1932), *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare’s Final Plays* (1947), and *The Sovereign Flower* (1958). Knight was a keen actor and producer of Shakespeare’s plays.

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The meaning of *The Merchant of Venice* is never sufficiently brought out. You will say that it has no ‘meaning’: but if you do, I maintain strongly that you are wrong. We must take the play seriously. Its deeper significances do not, it is true, correspond at every point with a surface realism as they do in *Macbeth*. But for this very reason we must take care to bring the inherent meanings out as harmoniously and as naturally, yet powerfully, as we can.

This play presents two contrasted worlds: Venice and Belmont. The one is a world of business competition, usury, melancholy, and tragic sea-disaster; the other, a spelled land of riches, music and romance . . . I know many of our Venetian scenes are comparatively jovial: but Gratiano is scarcely a pleasant man. Venice has romantic associations but here it is darkly toned. The supposedly pleasant people are not all they might be. Antonio is cruel to Shylock, Bassanio a spendthrift, Gratiano vulgar, and honesty certainly not the strongest point of Lorenzo and Jessica. Shylock towers over the rest, grand, it is true, but scarcely amiable. Observe that the tragedy depends on sea-wreck, tempests, and such like: Shakespeare’s usual tragedy associations.<sup>[1]</sup> But at Belmont all this is changed. All the people become noble as soon as they arrive there: Bassanio is the loyal friend,

Lorenzo the perfect lover, Gratiano is, comparatively, subdued. The name Belmont suggests a height overlooking the water-logged world of Venetian rivalry and pettiness. At Belmont we have music continually: at Venice, none. The projected Masque [2.4.22] we may observe does not, as far as our persons are concerned, come off after all; but it serves for Shylock's significant lines about the 'vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife' [2.5.30], which might be compared with his even less pretty 'bagpipe' reference later. Certainly, Venice is not here a place of romantic music. Belmont is. And the Belmont world is dominated by Portia; expressly Christian, as against Shylock, her only rival in dramatic importance; and of infinite wealth as against the penurious Bassanio and thieving Lorenzo. Everyone in Venice is in money difficulties of some sort, even the rich ones. Antonio's fortune is all at sea. Shylock has to borrow from Tubal, and later loses great part of his wealth with his daughter, and bemoans his lost ducats in the street. But Portia is infinitely rich. Her riches hold, dramatically, an almost spiritual quality.

Our permanent set must help to mark out these contrasted worlds. I suggest dividing the stage into two levels, the rise making a straight diagonal from up L to down R. The higher level is thus mainly on stage right. Half-way along this diagonal steps can be used to lead from one level to the other. Venetian scenes will concentrate on the lower, Belmont on the higher, level. I do not mean that no Venetian in Venice should ascend the higher: merely that the Venetian action should always *focus* on the lower with a force proportional to the particular significance. And certainly in the Belmont scenes, the lower space must never be quite empty, which would tend to rob the figures above of any dignity their raised position gives them. . . . We can arrange a background that gives a wide and variable range of tones according to the lights: this will help. For the casket scenes the suitors enter down R or down L and ascend the steps ceremoniously. Nothing must seem too rigid, however. Portia, standing aside during Bassanio's meditations, would probably come down L on the lower level; and later meet him as he descends the steps, an action which suits the submissive femininity of her speech, and his victorious choice.

The three caskets will be large and solid-looking, and must be allowed to dominate. Perhaps they should even be evident throughout the action. At the heart of this play is the idea of riches: false and true wealth. Jesus' parables are suggested. Venice is lost in the varied complexities of the false. Portia possesses the true. Not only is love and beauty continually in Shakespeare metaphorically a matter of riches, but Portia is vitally associated with Christianity, and is, moreover, an heiress with an infinite bank-balance. In this play of greed her serene disregard of exact sums has something supernal about it [Quotes 3.2.297-300].

He shall have gold 'to pay the petty debt twenty times over' [3.2.307]. We must note further that Portia's office in the play is to demonstrate the futility, as a final resort, of business and legal exactitudes. The action drives home the truth that money is only an aspect of life, and that life itself must come before money and the laws of money. The contrast is exquisitely pointed by the situation of a man giving a pound of flesh as security. Everyone wants to save his life, but there seems no loophole. His life is now subject to laws made only for money. Observe how Portia deals with the absurd situation. She dispels the clouding precisions and intellectualities of the law court by a serene common-sense. This is something very like the common-sense of Jesus. Her

## G. Wilson Knight

Mercy speech exactly reflects His teaching. Moreover, the white beam of her intuition shows, as genius has a way of showing, as Jesus' teaching so often shows, that the academic intelligence is itself vulnerable at every point by its own weapons. Shylock's worst danger is to be allowed the rights he fights for [Quotes 4.1.307–10].

This is what comes of not distinguishing between the counters of finance and the bread and wine, the silver flesh and golden blood, of life itself. The serene wisdom of life works always by refusing validity to false abstractions. You can cut money into bits, but not life; there any piece involves the whole. Such are the lines of Portia's reasoning; it is fundamentally a poetic and holistic reasoning. And as soon as you begin to think in such poetic and holistic terms there are always certain supposed exactitudes that lose all meaning: so next Portia supports her first argument by insisting that poor Shylock shall take exactly a pound of flesh, neither less nor more by the weight of a hair. His whole position crumbles.

Clearly then the caskets, gold, silver and lead, containing respectively death, folly and infinite love and wealth, must be solid and dominating. This play is not all so silly as many a modern critic would have it and many a modern production makes it.

So Venice and Belmont alternate. The play works up to the climax of the Trial Scene, where the protagonists of the two worlds, Portia and Shylock, meet for the first time. Portia descends from Belmont almost as a divine being; her office is, anyway, that of a *dea ex machina*. I would have the court sitting on the high level R, some using the level itself for a seat. The Duke's chair will be half-way along. Bassanio and Antonio are down R; Shylock moves between up L, L, and C. Some spectators can edge in down L and Gratiano stand L between them and Shylock, coming forward for his big speeches.

Portia enters down R, circles up-stage to the steps, and ascends the higher level, standing beside the Duke. Her doctor's gown is better neither black nor red. Her doctorate is one of serene Christian wisdom and feminine intuition. She never gained it at Padua. Let her therefore wear a correctly cut doctor-of-law's gown of *spotless white*. She is high and central, dominating the whole court. The light should be intensified on her white gown and golden hair just showing under her cap as she speaks her Mercy speech. But, as the situation ripens, she descends: observe how this movement uses our levels to capture the essence of her arrival in Venice to render assistance, her *descent* from the happier world of her home. She comes nearly, but not quite, down the steps at: 'I pray you, let me look upon the bond' [4.1.225], Shylock gives it her. She warns him: 'Shylock, there's thrice thy money off red thee' [4.1.227]. She is kind, is meeting these people on their own terms, descending to their level. But Shylock will have none of it. She tries again. He returns to his corner, talking to Tubal, adamant. Portia, on the steps, begins to prepare judgment. She addresses Antonio, asks for balances and a surgeon. Antonio says his farewell. Now, swaying slightly, she pronounces judgment, the speed gathers as the whirl of her repetition gains force, the whirl of a lasso: 'The court awards it and the law doth give it,' [4.1.300] and 'The law allows it and the court awards it.' [4.1.303] Shylock, in ecstasy of hatred, cries 'A sentence! Come, prepare!' [4.1.304]. Unleashed, he springs down-stage. Bassanio shields Antonio. The Duke stands. The crowds murmur. But at this instant Portia takes the last step down to the lower level and cuts off Shylock's attack with a raised hand. 'Tarry a little.' There is silence. In a quiet voice she continues: '... there is something else. / This bond doth give thee here no jot

of blood ...' [4.1.305–6]. The terrible judgment of a fathomless simplicity and divine common-sense.

It is, of course, an amazing scene, and its tremendous dramatic impact derives from the clash of the two dominating forces in the play, Shylock and Portia, and all that they stand for. Our set of two levels with Portia's descent will assist; so will her white gown, and her significant barring of Shylock's attack at the crucial moment, which must be given expressive action. We must work always from the profound issues implicit in the dramatic thrill if it is to have full power. Portia's standing on the same steps where previously we have seen her meet her suitors, with the caskets behind, priestess of the knowledge of true and false wealth, clearly helps this scene. We are aware of her bringing her own world, and all it symbolises, into the new context.

For the rest of the scene do not be afraid of an anticlimax. Portia must be firm and not too pitiful. Shylock's exit, C to down L through the crowd, can be as pathetic as you will, but not too long delayed. The play shows a Christian, romantic, and expressly feminine Portia against a down-trodden, vengeful, racially grand, usurious Jew. I do not claim that all the difficulties inherent in this opposition are finally settled in our play: but I do claim that this dramatic opposition is a profound one. You must not suppose that since Portia has all our sympathy Shylock can have none: poetic drama can be paradoxical. Portia stands serene in white purity, symbol of Christian romance. But Shylock, saying he is ill, picks up his cloak and goes out robed in purple: the purple of tragedy. Two tremendous imaginative issues conflict: the romantic dream and tragic realism. Later Shakespeare is to reconcile them. Here the opposition must be stark: neither must be watered down.

The last scene at Belmont acts itself easily: but I object to so unfortunate a back-cloth as one with *waves* painted on it, for obvious reasons. Our set here might for the first time dispose of the change in level. The action's dualism may not have been perfectly unified: but you certainly are not supposed now to be worrying about it. Or again, you might keep it: and get highly significant comedy out of the lovers chasing each other – as they usually do – about from one level to the other. On second thoughts, I think this best. It would have meaning. Lorenzo and Jessica would be comfortably placed on the steps at the beginning. (183–216)



## 71 John Middleton Murry, Shakespeare's 'matter-of-fact fairy tale'

1936

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From *Shakespeare* (London, 1936).

John Middleton Murry (1889–1957) was born in Peckham, South London, the eldest son of a civil service clerk. From a poor background, he won scholarships to Christ's Hospital and Brasenose College, Oxford, gaining first class honours in Moderations in 1910 and a second in *Litterae Humaniores* two years later. As a journalist he worked for the *Westminster Gazette* and the *Times Literary Supplement* before joining the political intelligence department of the War Office in 1916, rising to chief military censor in 1919. For the rest of his life he was a professional journalist and writer. He edited the influential intellectual journal the *Athenaeum* from 1919 to 1921, and in 1923 founded the *Adelphi*, which he controlled until 1948. The journal published important work by contemporary writers, including Katherine Mansfield (Murry's first wife), D. H. Lawrence, and others. Murry also published biographies and critical studies of Dostoevsky (1916), Keats (1925), D. H. Lawrence (1930, 1931, 1933), William Blake (1933), and Jonathan Swift (1954). Several of his Shakespeare essays were originally reviews contributed to the *Times Literary Supplement*.

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[*The Merchant of Venice* is], more than any other of Shakespeare's plays, a matter-of-fact fairy tale: a true folk story, made drama; and it makes its secular appeal to that primitive substance of the human consciousness whence folk-tales took their origin. Or, without reaching back to these dark and dubious beginnings, we may say that it is, as nearly as possible, a pure melodrama or tragi-comedy, an almost perfect example of the art-form which being prior to art itself, most evidently and completely satisfies the primitive man in us all. If the English theatre be considered as a place of popular entertainment, strictly on a level with the football field, the prize-ring and the racecourse, then *The Merchant of Venice* is the type of entertainment the theatre should supply – villain discomfited, virtue rescued, happy marriages, clowning, thrills, and a modest satisfaction of the general appetite for naughtiness. . . .

[Of] all the plays of this period, *The Merchant of Venice* is the most typical of Shakespeare – the most expressive of what Coleridge once called his 'omni-humanity'. It contains tragedy, comedy high and low, love lyricism; and, notably, it does not contain any 'Shakespearian' character. The Berowne-Mercutio-Benedick figure [in, respectively, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Much Ado about Nothing*], witty,

debonair, natural, is diffused into a group of young Venetian noblemen, all credible and substantial, but none possessing the inimitable individuality of their progenitor. Antonio, who stands apart from them, and was (if my judgment of the various verse-styles of the play is to be trusted) the last figure in it to have been elaborated, is a singular character. He supplies a background of sadness to the whole drama. He seems to be older than the friends who surround him, and detached from their thoughtless extravagance. Actually, in his final elaboration, by reason of the quality and colour given to him by Shakespeare's rewriting of Act 1, Scene 1, he becomes, as a character, slightly inconsistent with the contemptuous opponent of Shylock of later scenes, but it is not the function of Antonio to be primarily a dramatic 'character'. In that capacity, he is negative; he is a shadow beside Shylock and Portia, and unsubstantial even in comparison with his Venetian entourage. But as the vehicle of an atmosphere, he is one of the most important elements in the play. He provides, for the beginning of the play, what the lyrical antiphony of Lorenzo and Jessica supplies for the end of it – a kind of musical overtone which sets the spiritual proportions of the drama. He shades into the Duke of *Twelfth Night*.

The analogue between *The Merchant of Venice* and a musical composition is significant, I think, when taken in conjunction with the basic popularity of the play and the probability that its origin is to be sought in a play of many years before called 'The Jew', which Stephen Gosson exempted from abuse in 1579 because it displayed 'the greediness of worldly chusers and the bloody mind of usurers'. That is too apt a summary of the purely dramatic content of *The Merchant of Venice* to be accidental, and it fits too well with our impression of the play as the product of much re-writing to be ignored. [Discusses possible sources.]

Out of [his source play] Shakespeare wrought a miracle. He transformed it, and yet he left the popular substance essentially the same. What he did not, could not, and so far as we can see or guess, would not do, was to attempt to make it an intellectually coherent whole. That seems to have been no part of his purpose; he did not entertain the idea because he knew it was impossible. The coherence of *The Merchant of Venice* is not intellectual or psychological; and there has been much beating of brains in the vain effort to discover in it a kind of coherence which it was never meant to possess.

As an example of what I believe to be a radical misunderstanding of the nature of *The Merchant of Venice*, we may take the edition of the play in the *New Cambridge Shakespeare*. It will serve as a typical example of a mistaken approach to Shakespeare, for *The Merchant* in its origins, its methods of composition, and its final splendour, is typical of Shakespeare's achievement.

[Quotes Jessica's report of how she heard her father 'swear . . . / That he would rather have Antonio's flesh / Than twenty times the sum / That he did owe him' (3.2.285–91)]. On this passage, the New Cambridge editors have the following note:

We are tempted to put this speech into square brackets as one from the old play which Shakespeare inadvertently left undeleted in the manuscript. Note (1) it jars upon a nerve which Shakespeare of all writers was generally most careful to avoid: that a daughter should thus volunteer evidence against her father is hideous . . . [Dover Wilson, 1926 edn, p. 154].

## John Middleton Murry

This fits, precisely, with the description of Jessica given in the essay of general introduction to the play:

Jessica is bad and disloyal, unfilial, a thief; frivolous, greedy, without any more conscience than a cat, and without even a cat's redeeming love of home. Quite without heart, on worse than an animal instinct – pilfering to be carnal – she betrays her father to be a light-of-lucre carefully weighted with her father's ducats. [Quiller-Couch, *ibid.*, p. xx.]

This is, indeed, to break a butterfly upon a wheel. But more alarming than the severity of the sentence is its irrelevance. *The Merchant of Venice* is not a realistic drama, and its characters simply cannot be judged by realistic moral standards. Jessica, taken out of the play, and exposed to the cold light of moral analysis, may be a wicked little thing, but in the play, wherein alone she has her being, she is nothing of the kind – she is charming. She runs away from her father because she is white and he is black; she is much rather a princess held captive by an ogre than the unfilial daughter of a persecuted Jew. Whether or not it is true that Shakespeare 'of all writers' was most careful to avoid representing unfilial behaviour without condemning it – and the proposition becomes doubtful when we think of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* – it is almost certainly true that he did not himself conceive, or imagine that others would conceive, that Jessica's behaviour was unfilial. The relations between the wicked father and the lovely daughter are governed by laws nearly as old as the hills.

Yet even so, in rejecting Jessica's words as un-Shakespearian because morally hideous, the *New Cambridge Shakespeare* is not consistent; for the introductory essay discusses the problem how it is that Shylock is made 'sympathetic' to us, and argues that it is because he is deserted by his bad and disloyal daughter: 'he is intolerably wronged', and we feel for him accordingly.<sup>[1]</sup> We cannot have it both ways; we cannot argue that Shakespeare deliberately made Jessica unfilial in order to gain our sympathy for the Jew, and at the same time reject a passage as un-Shakespearian because in it Jessica reveals herself unfilial. The dilemma is absolute, but it is of the modern critic's making, not Shakespeare's. It is the direct result of applying to *The Merchant of Venice* a kind of criticism which it was never meant to satisfy.

Criticism of this kind seeks for psychological motives where none were intended or given. Shylock's hatred of Antonio is, in origin, a fairy-tale hatred, of the bad for the good. And perhaps this fairy-tale hatred is more significant than a hatred which can (if any hatred can) be justified to the consciousness. At any rate Shakespeare was at all times content to accept this antagonism of the evil and the good as self-explanatory. Not to speak of Iago, or Goneril, or Edmund, in the very next play in the folio, *As You Like It*, which was probably written at about the same time as *The Merchant of Venice*, Oliver, in plotting Orlando's death, similarly confesses his elemental hatred of his brother: 'I hope I shall see an end of him; for my soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than he.' Some would explain these simple assertions of a primal antagonism as compelled by the conditions of the Elizabethan theatre, which required the characters clearly to label themselves as villains or heroes; but it is quite as likely that Shakespeare accepted the sheer opposition of good and evil as an ultimate fact of the moral universe. Assuredly, if

it was a necessary convention of the Elizabethan theatre, it was a convention which Shakespeare found it easy to use for his own purposes. For the hatred of his villains always lies deeper than their consciousness. Thus Shylock at one moment declares that he hates Antonio 'for he is a Christian' [1.3.42], at another, because he is a trade rival: 'I will have the heart of him if he forfeit, for were he out of Venice, I can make what merchandise I will.' [3.1.127-9] If we take the psychological point of view, the contradiction should not trouble us. We may say that Shylock is trying, as later Iago will try, to rationalize his hatred of Antonio: that he contradicts himself in so doing, is in accord with everyday experience. Or, on a different level, we may say that Shakespeare himself is trying to rationalize his elemental story. Unlike Oliver, who appears only at the beginning and the end of *As You Like It*, unlike the unsubstantial Don John in *Much Ado*, Shylock is the main figure of the play. What is in reality the simple fact of his hatred has to be motivated. Oliver and Don John are not required to be credible; Shylock is.

But these two kinds of explanation are not contradictory, as some critics think they are. They are two modes, two levels, of the operation of the same necessity: the 'psychologization' of a story that is a datum. In the process, Antonio's character suffers some slight damage. He spits upon Shylock's Jewish gaberdine. If we reflect in cold blood on Antonio's reported behaviour to Shylock, we are in danger of thinking that Shylock's intended revenge was not excessive. But we are not meant or allowed to reflect upon it. We are not made to *see* this behaviour. It is a sudden shifting of the values in order to make Shylock sympathetic to us at the moment he is proposing the bond. This is a dramatic device of which Shakespeare was always a master. But because Shakespeare was Shakespeare it is something more than a dramatic device.

Shylock undoubtedly is, to a certain degree, made sympathetic to us; and it is important to discover how it is done. For this, almost certainly, was a radical change wrought by Shakespeare in the crude substance of the old play. But the effect was certainly not achieved by Shakespeare's representing Shylock as the victim of Jessica's ingratitude. On the contrary, Shakespeare is most careful to prevent any such impression from taking lodgment in our minds. At the moment when we might feel a little uneasy about Jessica's treatment of her father, any nascent misgiving is stifled by Salerio's description of Shylock's outcry at the discovery:

My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!  
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!  
Justice! The law! My ducats, and my daughter!  
A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,  
Of double ducats, stolen from me by my daughter!  
And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones,  
Stolen by my daughter! Justice! Find the girl;  
She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats. (2.8.15-22)

It is not the loss of his daughter that moves Shylock, but only the loss of his money. Shylock, at this moment, is presented as an ignoble being whom Jessica does well to escape and despoil. Shylock is deliberately made unsympathetic when it is required to cover Jessica. He is made sympathetic when Shakespeare feels the need, or welcomes the

John Middleton Murry

opportunity of making a drastic contrast between Shylock and Antonio. At critical moments he is given dignity and passion of speech and argument to plead his cause to us and to himself. His hatred then is presented as deep, irrational and implacable, but not as mean and mercenary. It is then a force of nature – something greater than himself.

So can I give no reason, nor I will not,  
More than a lodg'd hate and a certain loathing  
I bear Antonio, that I follow thus  
A losing suit against him. [4.1.59–62].

'A losing suit', because he, who grieves more for his ducats than his daughter, refuses many times the value of his debt to have his bond of Antonio, and his implacability is supplied with excuses enough to more than half persuade us – Antonio's expressed contempt for him, and the magnificent speech, which may have been hardly less magnificent in the verse from which Shakespeare seems to have changed it [Quotes 3.1.59–66].

This is much more than a dramatic device to gain a momentary sympathy for Shylock; yet it is less, or at least other, than a deliberate posing of a profound moral problem. *The Merchant of Venice* is not a problem play; it is a fairy story, within the framework of which Shakespeare allowed free working to the thoughts of his mind and the feelings of his heart. What an unfettered Shylock might say, this fettered Shylock does say.

In other words, Shylock is both the embodiment of an irrational hatred, and a credible human being. He is neither of these things to the exclusion of the other. And if we ask how can that be? The only answer is that it is so. This was Shakespeare's way of working. . . .

One cannot too often emphasize the nature of Shakespeare's dramatic 'method'. It was not chosen by him, neither was it imposed upon his reluctant genius; it was simply the condition of the work he had chosen to do. The situation was given; necessarily, therefore, the 'characters' in a certain primitive sense – much the same sense in which we can speak of 'characters' in a nursery story like *Cinderella* or *Robin Hood* or a *Punch and Judy* show. They are simply the necessary agents for that situation or that story. Shakespeare proceeded to endow them with poetic utterance, and with character in a quite different sense. He did what he could to make them credible human beings to himself. He gave them, so far as was possible, humanly plausible motives for their acts and situations, although these were often in fact prior to humane psychology. In a word, the method of Shakespeare's drama consists, essentially, in the humanization of melodrama. And each of those terms must have real validity for the Shakespeare critic who is to avoid ascending or descending into some private universe of his own and calling it Shakespeare. (189–95, 199–200)

## 72 H. B. Charlton, the two Shylocks

1938

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From *Shakespearian Comedy* (London, 1938).

Henry Buckley Charlton (1890–1961) was educated at the Universities of Leeds and Berlin. From 1921 to 1957 he was Professor of English Literature at the University of Manchester, where he also held administrative posts and helped develop the John Rylands Library. Charlton published editions of Shakespeare, and a book on *Shakespearian Tragedy* (1948). His *Shakespearian Comedy* incorporates lectures given at the John Rylands Library between July 1930 and October 1937. His lecture on Shylock, ‘Shakespeare’s Jew’ (first published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 18 (1934), 34–68), argues that the play contains ‘two Shylocks’, one villainous (as in ‘medieval legend’), one sympathetic, and that Shakespeare was unable to reconcile the two.

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[Charlton discusses the bond story and the agreement between Shylock, Bassanio and Antonio, quoting] Shylock’s question – ‘May I speak / with Antonio?’ [1.3.30–1]. Bassanio’s bonhomie suggests the appropriate occasion – ‘If it will please you to dine with us’ [1.3.32]. Thinking to get what he wants, he means the invitation in a kindly way. But its heedlessness is its sting. It touches Shylock’s religious and racial sensitiveness to the quick. It symbolises the course of his life. His fate is to dwell in an alien world, encountering at every turn the deliberate hostility of the men amongst whom he lives; and even at the rare moments when for their own advantage they mean kindly, their off-handed tolerance bites more deeply than their avowed animosity [Quotes 1.3.36–7]. . . . The collocation of phrase, eating, drinking, and praying, sufficiently indicates the intensity of Shylock’s spiritual sensitiveness. But a moment later, he relapses into the self-possession and the conventional demeanour of the part he has schooled himself to play in a hostile world – ‘What news on the Rialto?’ [1.3.38] – buying and selling amongst a people alien in race, in custom, and religion, and making his own life amongst them only tolerable by practising a disciplined imperturbability for the public hours of the day, in the strength that he secures for himself in the privacy of his own home where he may realise the instinctive demands of his own spiritual life.

Then enter Antonio: and the stage is set for the first time for its protagonists. At an initial juncture of this kind, Shylock is called upon by the prescription to exhibit himself as the unrelieved villain he was taken by the audience to be. His soliloquy aside [1.3.41–52] is a sort of diploma piece, his qualification for the role he had been brought in to

H. B. Charlton

play. And Shakespeare does it well. Shylock utters an incoherent jumble of furious revilings, urging confusedly religious, racial, and commercial rivalry as his promptings to revenge, just, indeed, as popular prejudice willed him to do. . . .

With the deliberately characterising soliloquy over, Shylock responds to Bassanio's invitation – 'Shylock, do you hear?' – and applies himself with a lie to the business in hand. But once he is again brought into a dramatic situation, once he is again involved in the interplay of a group of men, the specifically dramatic sense of the playwright is stimulated, and once more two Shylocks cross each other's shadows [Quotes 1.3.54–8].

Shylock is obviously temporising. But what is at the back of his mind? A scheme to inveigle Antonio, according to the legend. But his actual question, 'How many months / Do you desire?' [1.3.58–9] is exactly what he would be turning over if he were calculating possible profits, and preparing to stipulate such and such a rate of interest. Antonio's entry, however, gives a fresh direction to his thoughts. In substance, and in form, Antonio's first remarks to the Jew are a pattern of unconscious effrontery and of half-conscious offensiveness. Self-righteously, he protests against usury in the act of asking a loan from a usurer: and his excuse for his breach of principle, 'to supply the ripe wants of a friend,' [1.3.63] enhances the unpleasant savour of his self-righteousness. . . . The contemptuousness in Antonio's attitude is emphasised by his turning from Shylock to Bassanio for a piece of information, as if to save himself further contamination from the Jew's mouth –

Is he yet possessed  
How much ye would? [1.3.64–5]

But a new and exciting notion is fermenting in Shylock's mind: to catch Antonio on the hip, of course, according to the story – but one must await its utterance to distinguish its real character. It is, at all events, a notion which makes it urgent for Shylock to maintain direct contact with Antonio. So, neglecting the slight, he himself replies to the question which has not been addressed to him: 'Ay, ay, three thousand ducats.' Antonio peremptorily names the other relevant term – 'for three months.' The only point left for agreement is the rate of interest. But, his mind running along that line, Shylock is struck by a new notion. He speaks absent-mindedly – 'I had forgot, three months, you told me so. / Well, then, your bond.' [1.3.67–8]

The new notion is beginning to take definite shape; and, of course, in the old tale, it is in some such way that he devises his diabolical plot. But that hardly squares with the plain sense of the immediate text. Shylock's thoughts are running on the question of rate of interest. The morality of usury is, as his own bitter experience daily teaches him, a fundamental consideration which sharply divides Jew from Gentile. Christian doctrine and law traditionally forbade the lending of money at interest. But here now is Antonio, a representative Christian, proposing to borrow money at interest. The occasion suggests itself at once to Shylock as a proper one for trying to get Antonio to see the moral problem of money-lending from the Jew's point of view:

Methought you said you neither lend nor borrow  
Upon advantage. [1.3.69–70]

It is Shylock's bid for mutual understanding; but Antonio's brusque 'I do never use it,' hardly promises a willingness to try to understand. Yet Shylock persists in the attempt. He wants some common ground from which to start, something with common authority for Jew and for Gentile. Hence the Old Testament example of Jacob's 'thriff.'

It is strange that commentators have almost invariably missed the point of Shylock's illustration. Antonio, of course, misses it; and perhaps Shylock is not at his happiest in rabbinical exposition. But his argument is particularly cogent. He is, in fact, exposing the fallaciousness of the formal principles underlying the Christian condemnation of usury. [On English laws and usury.]

But how does Jacob's exploit bear on the argument? It is meant to undermine the factitious differentiation between 'natural' and 'unnatural' kinds of money-making, by quoting an established case in which, though the 'productivity' is by natural procreation, yet the quality of the production and the producer's profits are controlled by the exercise of human skill and ingenuity. Jacob's device was in accord with the law of nature and the law of God [Quotes 1.3.89-90]. Shylock's exegesis, however, is too subtle for Antonio, (probably also for Shakespeare who very likely took it confusedly from the old Jew play), who brushes it aside with unintelligent contempt: 'this was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for.' He disregards the clear sense of the biblical story, denying that Jacob's scheme had succeeded [Quotes 1.3.91-3]. And so, of course, he has not even a glimmering notion of the relevance of Shylock's argument. . . .

There is apparently nothing for Shylock to do further than to complete the transaction as a mere business undertaking: 'then, let me see, the rate.' [1.3.104] But he is moved to another kind of appeal by Antonio's irritable anxiety to have done with the irksome affair as quickly as possible - 'Well, Shylock, shall we be beholding to you?' [1.3.105] in which the formal phrasing, 'beholding,' cannot but make Shylock consider what obligation indeed he can be thought to owe to his clients. He has failed in his appeal to Antonio's intellect; now that other sanctions are suggested, will it be possible to reach him on the broader grounds of mere humanity? Hence Shylock's moving recital of the sufferings of his tribe, and of the ignominies daily heaped upon them. Yet now the oppressors come uninvited and ask a favour of the oppressed. [Quotes 1.3.115-16.] What in such circumstances can they expect for an answer? Shylock is evidently leading to an offer of friendly accommodation. But it seems destined to fail, for the recital awakens no spark of tolerance in Antonio:

I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too. [1.3.130-1]

The offer is indeed rejected before it has been formally made. And Antonio himself, Antonio, not the Jew, suggests that the transaction be conducted by a bond incorporating as harsh a penalty for default as may be devised [Quotes 1.3.132-7].

It is Shylock's great opportunity, whether he be the mob's Shylock, or the artist's. Even the mob's Shylock has so far shown little initiative in arranging circumstances to secure the bond for which he is supposed to be lusting; Antonio, in fact, is determining circumstances which are thrusting a bond on Shylock. But Shylock's great moment has come. So far he has never hinted that he has thought of foregoing interest; he has indeed



H. B. Charlton

from the beginning exercised himself as to the rate he might impose. But now, Antonio's phrasing of the Christian condemnation of interest, 'a breed for barren metal,' provides Shylock with an opening to a supreme gesture:

I would be friends with you, and have your love,  
Forget the shames that you have stain'd me with,  
Supply your present wants, and take no doit  
Of usance for my moneys. [1.3.138-41]

The Jew will take a leaf from the Christian's book, and in friendship's name, will break a custom. He will out-Christian Antonio, for he will forego his legitimate and reasonable profit in favour of one who has nothing but scorn and contempt for him. 'This were kindness' [1.3.142], Bassanio cannot help but say. And Shylock, jumping at this first expression of sympathy ever spoken to him, will settle the thing at once. Let them immediately devise a bond, and, remembering the general terms suggested previously by Antonio, but glossing them as if they could now be taken with friendly humour, let the bond include a forfeiture penalty, never likely, of course, to fall due, which will be a sort of extravagant parody of the contractual forfeits customary in bonds. The naming of the pound of flesh is 'a merry sport': it is so put by Shylock; it is so accepted by Antonio: [Quotes 1.3.152-3]. It is, may be, a poor sort of joke; but Shylock has had little practice in developing his sense of humour. At once Bassanio, whose friendly word has called forth Shylock's offer relapses into the usual distrust and enmity. And Shylock, the mood of magnanimity shrivelled within him, sinks despairingly from the high level on which he has been contemplating the transaction; as if desperately realising that no noble sentiment can touch a Christian heart, he translates his offer into a purely material form, feeling by the need to do so, that its chief intention is doomed to fail:

If he should break his day, what should I gain  
By the exaction of the forfeiture?  
A pound of man's flesh taken from a man  
Is not so estimable, profitable neither,  
As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats. [1.3.163-7]

Therefore, if Antonio will take the bond, 'so: if not, adieu' [1.3.169].

As the scene closes, Bassanio's remark, 'I like not fair terms and a villain's mind,' [1.3.179] brings us sharply back to the original outline of the Shylock of the mediaeval story. But the scene has run its course under our eyes without need for these assumptions; the situations of the drama have made the characters appropriate to the essential incidents. . . .

On closer scrutiny, Shylock's proceedings show little sign of cunning. He defends usury; but his bond dispenses with usury. He recounts his sufferings, and the story of them is hard to fit into any scheme of diabolical strategy. If the retort it brings from Antonio be taken as a lash which roused fury in Shylock, then even less intelligible is Antonio's acceptance of the Jew's offer. The terms of the bond were, of course, determined centuries ago in mediaeval legend; yet in the play they have the air of arising

from the situation without pre-arrangement, and their general tenour is not Shylock's, but Antonio's proposal. . . .

Shylock's discourse with Bassanio shows him fully informed of the extent of Antonio's resources. He knows, therefore, that it is the highest degree unlikely that a situation can arise in which Antonio's forfeit will fall due. Of course, as we saw, in his bargaining with Bassanio, Shylock tried to exaggerate the risks to which Antonio's fortunes were subject; but that was plainly his proper move. He knows, and Antonio himself knew, that save by the intervention of a malicious fate to raise storms simultaneously on all the seven seas of the world just at the very place where Antonio's ships happened to be, and at a time, too, when they happened simultaneously to be in proximity to rocks or to pirates, save by some such series of miracles as this, indeed, he knows that Antonio will be able to pay on the appointed day. Even with the signed bond and its forfeiture clause in his possession, Shylock's chances of demanding the forfeit are in fact almost equal to the chances of a first prize through the holding of one ticket in the Irish Sweepstake. A Shylock diabolically bent on ensnaring an enemy for whose blood he lusted might surely have shown sufficient ingenuity to scheme for shorter odds: or if he were satisfied with chances so remote as to be almost non-existent, then the poor plotter is his own weak victim, a pitiful, maundering madman, but certainly no mighty demon of guile and craft.<sup>1</sup> The only madness visible in this Shylock of the early scene is the madness of supposing that Antonio may be persuaded to extend to him a common human sympathy and understanding. But if the making of the bond does not in the dramatist's version necessarily presuppose the mob's Shylock, and if, on the contrary, it provides the outlines of another Shylock who is to be made by the play, how far will the mob's Shylock impose himself on the action after the bond has been signed? There is, indeed, a long interval before Shylock appears again, and then (II. v.), it is merely for a few moments in a scene between Shylock, Jessica, and Launcelot. This is a scene primarily needed to carry on the plot by disclosing the preparations for Jessica's elopement. . . .

But a scene or two later . . . brings in a Shylock completely caught up in the turmoil of significant action. Jessica has eloped, and the effect of the elopement on Shylock had already been gleefully depicted by Salarino and Salanio [Quotes 2.8.12–14]. Shylock has been visited by all the torments of mob hilarity: [Quotes 2.8.23–4]. But even in this description Salanio's unintelligent version of Shylock's outcries needs the qualification of closer examination:

'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!  
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!  
Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter!' [2.8.15–17]

What indeed is running through Shylock's distracted mind, and particularly the values in it of the alternating cry of daughter and of ducats, will be more truly measured when they come to us not in the callous version of Salanio, but from the mouth of Shylock himself: and as yet, since his daughter's elopement, he has not been seen on the stage. . . .

At length, the idea that with the bond, he has a means of righteous vengeance against

Antonio and the Christians at large has entered Shylock's mind. But even yet it is not implanted there. Tubal enters, and eagerly Shylock questions him – 'What news from Genoa?' Not however, news about Antonio, but about the infinitely more pressing preoccupation – 'Hast thou found my daughter?' [3.1.80] When he hears of Tubal's failure to track her, his desolation returns; an impossible frame of mind, be it remembered, for a Shylock who, bent on Antonio's flesh, now has his first promise that he may get it – 'The curse never fell upon our nation till now: I never felt it till now' [3.1.85–6]. This is not the mood of a man whose far-flung contrivances are proving successful. It is the desolate mind of a man whose nearest and dearest possessions are torn from him, daughter, diamonds, ducats, and his loss harries his mind to a frenzied and confused iteration of what he has lost – 'two thousand ducats,' and 'other precious, precious jewels,' [3.1.87] as well as his daughter. To a modern ear, doubtless, this joining of daughter and ducats argues something of heartlessness in Shylock: and no doubt it was meant to do so. But ducats are more to Shylock than mere material possessions. They are the only means by which, in an alien world, he preserves a refuge for the true life of his own spirit [Quotes 4.1.374–7]. They are the guarantees of his house, as Jessica was its only pledge: and the two hang together as the sole joy in which his Hebrew soul may delight itself in a hostile community. Moreover, even in this speech, in which ducats and daughter are intermittently spoken, Shylock is patently above and beyond the merely material valuation of material assets. He has lost all that satisfied his deepest religious instincts, his sense of Judaism. His Jewish daughter has deserted the faith: to avoid that, he would have buried her and all his wealth in her grave: 'I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! I would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin' [3.1.87–90]. And this is palpably no miser's placing of the things of this world above those of the spirit. Here is Shylock's great sorrow, and in the throes of it, merely accidental affairs like Antonio's fortunes have no place in his mind. So much so that Tubal has to bring Antonio's misfortunes to Shylock's notice – obviously a Shylock different from the prescribed one. 'Yes,' says Tubal, 'other men have ill luck too; Antonio . . . hath an argosy cast away' [3.1.97–100]. It is only by the gradual and interrupted account from Tubal of Antonio's losses that Shylock is brought to full consciousness of his opportunity for condign vengeance. . . . Immediately following on this desecration of his most sacred memories, pat comes Tubal's 'But Antonio is certainly undone,' [3.1.124] and Shylock is irrevocably committed to his vengeance. Yet even in the moment of the avowal, it is a vow bound by the holiest sanctions: 'Go, Tubal, and meet me at our synagogue' [3.1.129].

Clearly the Shylock who has been brought to his determination in this way is a Shylock who has been wrought by circumstance to an impassioned mood of frenzy. He has been transformed into the intelligible fanatic who with perfect naturalness may play the pathetically demented role he must fulfil in the trial scene. He provides an admirable example of the way in which the dramatist's instinct secures dramatic reality.

The play exhibits many other strokes of this intuitive sense in operation. Even from the beginning, Shakespeare's picture of Venice and of the Venetians is the representation of a world in which a Shylock would suffer the extreme torments of racial antipathy. . . .

As the play runs its course, . . . even more effective means suggest themselves to the dramatist for hounding Shylock into madness. The most powerful, as we have seen, is

Jessica's elopement, and this brings in, not only Jessica and Lorenzo, but the instruments of the elopement, Launcelot on the one hand, and Lorenzo's friends on the other.

Launcelot's desertion of Shylock is doubtless meant to add to the Jew's ignominy. But Launcelot's testimony to the truth of circumstance carries little weight. . . . The behaviour of Lorenzo and his friends in scheming the elopement is no less likely to wound by its flippant callousness. Shylock is invited to dinner by Bassanio. The friends of Bassanio are planning to steal away his daughter, and as a perfectly gratuitous piece of cruel fun, are bringing her disguised as torch bearer to the very banquet where her father is a guest. All that prevents the enactment of this revolting joke is not anybody's thought for Shylock's feelings, but a mere veering of the winds which makes it necessary to put off the masque and get aboard. The veering wind, however, does not save him from the loss of his daughter.

But the worst stab of all comes from Jessica's own action in her elopement. Her lie to her father who sees Launcelot whispering the arrangements to her is perhaps forgivable on the romantic assumption that all is fair in love and war. But it is no less a lie. . . . [In her elopement Jessica shows] a strikingly flippant temper in robbing her father of his wealth, and a cruel indifference to her destruction of his family happiness. . . . Such is Jessica, not unworthy, in the values which are beginning to pierce through the play, of Gratiano's appraisal: 'Now by my hood, a Gentile, and no Jew' [2.6.51]. A Jessica who does these things in this way, and so unexpectedly, is clearly a girl whose revolt will strike to her father's heart. She flippantly desecrates all that Shylock holds sacred. She destroys the foundations of his universe. His frenzied comprehension of her elopement, and other actions after the elopement, drives him from distraction to maniacal frenzy. He is now ready to settle into the fixed madness which, despite argument and circumstance, will insist on the one retaliation left to his soul – 'An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven' [4.1.228].

That is the mood in which he is made apt for the trial scene. He is now irrevocably 'a stony adversary, an inhuman wretch incapable of pity' [4.1.4–6]. But the fury of his wrath has also brought out his cunning. The Duke's invitation to him to show human gentleness and love only reminds him of the cruelty he suffered when he made his gesture of friendship. He becomes the chosen vessel of his tribe's vengeance, sworn to it by 'our holy Sabbath'. The law of the Gentiles and their interest, the charter of the city's freedom, are now in his hands the instruments of the greater laws of his Prophets. To stand for judgment he will sacrifice all thought of his own selfish and material profit. He is impervious to entreaty and unruffled by abuse, a towering figure, dominating over the little men who spit at him – until Portia enters, charged by the story, of course, with the office of outwitting Shylock. But he has become too portentous a figure to be merely tricked out of his own, and Portia's is an unenviable task. At first, she rises magnificently above the petty part she is destined to play. She attempts to lift the issue to a higher plane of mercy and humanity. But Shylock is by this beyond the sense of all but justice, and with frenzied fanaticism he sees in the plea nothing but a temptation to lay perjury upon his soul. Portia, incapable of understanding, is blind to his motive and to his state of mind. Her dallying with the manuscript of the bond, her trifling with the preparation for the judgment, aimed apparently at giving Shylock further chances to show mercy, are merely further practices to make the littleness of the formal decision appear more

## H. B. Charlton

adequate to an occasion larger altogether than its nominal scope. In retrospect, they suffer even more. For the passion for Jew-baiting imposes a further task on Portia, and this makes her moral exaltation little better than a pose. Her hesitation to give judgment appears exactly opposite to its intention. Instead of an attempt to lead the Jew to a sense of higher things, it seems a callous trifling with a certain victim, a cat toying with the poor mouse it is about to kill. She leads him from hope to hope, to cast him more desperately down. But the Elizabethans in their racial hatred went further. Portia had to invent a law by which the broken victim could be still more tormented. 'The law hath yet another hold on you' [4.1.347]. The office puts her in a false position. It is strange that the Duke and all the law officers of Venice had been ignorant of a positive enactment so material to the constitution of their state. But Portia's knowledge of its existence is not merely strange. It colours her whole procedure at the trial. With this trump card in her possession, she could have won the case with a word. Neither Shylock nor Antonio need have been stretched so long on the rack of expectation and despair. The Portia who keeps them so is merely a callous barrister conducting a case with no more exalted a motive than what concerns a professional and spectacular triumph. As such, even her renowned discourse on the quality of mercy, counts against her character. Its sentiments are unquestionably noble, but they are for her no more than a pleader's rhetoric. In the act of glorifying the name of mercy, she is selfishly inflicting needless suffering on the poor mortals who provide her opportunity for a mere forensic display. Little wonder that the play cannot end with the trial scene.

The episode of the rings comes in perhaps to provide what was covenanted in the comic tradition. It is made out of the hoariest motive, confusions arising from mistaken identities. It is but superficial matter after the trial scene. Nor does it enhance the sense of Portia's nobility. But at least it takes her back to Belmont and its moonlit gardens. Even hoydenish tricks there are sweeter than questionable devices in law courts. The air of Belmont is restorative. Many of the sufferers in the play are brought by the last act to something near the pleasant disposition they were vainly meant to show from the beginning.

For however one reads the play, it is certain that the intentions of the author were in many ways defeated. Shylock, Antonio, Portia and Jessica do not stand forth as they were meant to do. The parts they were called upon to play by their author's prejudices did not square with those the dramatist worked out for them. There is throughout the clash of rival schemes, the proposals of Shakespeare's deliberate will, and the disposals by his creative imagination. . . . (137-49, 151-60)

## 73 John Dover Wilson, anti-Semitism, ancient and modern

1938

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From 'Merchant of Venice in 1937' [Lecture delivered in 1938] in *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies* (Evanston, IL, 1962).

John Dover Wilson (1881–1969) was born at Mortlake in Surrey, near London. After gaining a scholarship to Lancing College, and then to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, he graduated in 1903 with a second in History. He won the Harness Prize at Cambridge in 1904 with what became his first book, *John Lyly* (Cambridge, 1905). In 1909 Dover Wilson joined Goldsmith's College, London, as a lecturer in English Literature, and in 1912 became an Inspector of Education. He was appointed Professor of Education at King's College, London in 1924, and in 1935 he became Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at Edinburgh University, where he taught until the 1950s. In 1919 he was chosen to edit the Cambridge University Press's 'New Shakespeare' edition, jointly with Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, continuing the series after Q's death in 1944 with the help of other editors (Alice Walker, J. C. Maxwell), and completing the thirty-ninth volume in 1966. His prolific output included *The Essential Shakespeare* (1932), *What Happens in Hamlet* (1935), *The Manuscript of Shakespeare's Hamlet*, 2 vols. (1934), and *The Fortunes of Falstaff* (1943).

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[Dover Wilson discusses the play's opening, the casket episodes, and the trial scene, before turning his attention to Shylock.]

There are . . . good reasons, I think, why we ought to regard Shylock as a tragic and not a comical figure:

(1) If he is merely comical, the play assuredly loses a great deal dramatically, and it is a sound principle to view with suspicion any critical interpretation which involves dramatic loss – Shakespeare may generally be relied upon to make the greatest possible capital out of his material.

(2) *The Merchant of Venice* is not the only play of the period containing a detailed study of Jewish character. Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* preceded it, had been (and still was) an exceedingly popular play on the London stage, and belonged to the Admiral's Men, the rival company to Shakespeare's. Shakespeare's Jew would, therefore, inevitably be compared with Marlowe's, and Shakespeare would have striven to the utmost to excel his predecessor. What kind of character, then, was the Barabas of Marlowe? He was, like all Marlowe's heroes, 'conceived of on a gigantic scale . . . a very terrible and powerful

alien, endowed with all the resources of wealth and unencumbered by any Christian scruples'.<sup>1</sup> Is it likely that Shakespeare would have set up a ludicrous Shylock to outbid this Barabas? Surely he would have desired, especially with Burbage at his elbow also desiring to outdo Edward Alleyn, to create a figure equally terrible, but human and convincing at the same time, which Marlowe's Jew never succeeds in being?

(3) And my third reason is that a ridiculous villain is un-Shakespearian. Can you find such a villain in any other of his plays? Is Iago, or Macbeth, or Edmund, or even Richard III in this sense comical? But these, it may be said, come from the tragedies, and therefore do not count. Very well, where in the comedies is he to be seen? There are plenty of such villains in Ben Jonson. The Jonsonian comedies are full of them; they are his chief stock-in-trade. Indeed, that is one of the main differences between his conception of comedy and Shakespeare's. Villainy is never comic with Shakespeare; and Shylock is not to be fitted into the formulae of Bergson or George Meredith. He does not belong to what is called 'pure comedy' at all.

Yet, if he is not comical, he is not a mere villain of melodrama like Barabas either. He is a 'tragic' villain, i.e. he is so represented that we feel him to be a man, a terrible and gigantic man enough, but with 'hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions – fed with the same food, hurt by the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is' [3.1.60–4]. Shylock is a far greater character than Barabas, not because he is less blood-thirsty – his lust for blood is more awful because more convincing – but because he is one of ourselves. And, as he goes out, what we ought to exclaim is not (with Heine's fair Briton), 'The man is wronged',<sup>[2]</sup> but 'There, but for the grace of God, go I', as I suggested should be our comment upon a very different character in *The Merry Wives*.

It is, of course, just this common humanity, which Shakespeare brings out and insists upon in stroke after stroke, that the Christians of Venice deny (like the Nazis of modern Germany). And if Shylock is a villain, an awful and appalling human being, who made him such? People like Antonio. Antonio, we are told by one of his friends, is the perfect Christian gentleman [Quotes 3.2.291–4] yet, when the Jew reminds him [Quotes 1.3.111–12, 117–18] he raps out: 'I am as like to call thee so again, / To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.' [1.3.130–3] But Shakespeare, we are told, shared the prejudices of his age against Jews; he would himself have applauded Antonio's action, might even have imitated it. Shylock excites our modern sympathies because Shakespeare allowed his imagination to run away with him. The humanity of the Jew was an unconscious by-product of his dramatic genius.<sup>3</sup> . . .

Nothing is more difficult than to pin a dramatist (and Shakespeare above all dramatists) down to definite opinions and a definite point of view. And though it is hard to associate the author of *The Tempest*, most humanly compassionate of all dramatic poems, [Quotes Nazi propaganda] with the standpoint of Herr Julius Streicher, many years lie between that play and *The Merchant*, and Shakespeare may conceivably, like Prospero, have been converted in the interval.

In this instance, however, we are able to put the matter to the test, by comparison with another early play on a similar theme. There lies in the British Museum, as all the world is now aware, a MS. play-book on *Sir Thomas More*, one scene in which is

acknowledged by most competent authorities to be of Shakespeare's composition and actually in his own hand. It is a crowd scene, representing a riot of the 'prentices of London, who on May Day, 1517, rose against the aliens resident in the city, sacked their house, stole their goods, and generally behaved very much as the Nazis behaved in the streets of the cities in Germany. With this difference, however, that what was done in Germany under the authority, or with at least the full approval, of the government, was in Tudor England a rising against the powers that be, who suppressed it with due severity.

In the scene I speak of, this point is forcibly brought out in a long speech to the crowd by the Sheriff of London, who was according to the play at that date Sir Thomas More himself. More insists that the 'prentices are rebels, rebels against the King, and since the King is God's deputy on earth, rebels against God Himself. But the portion of the speech relevant to our present purpose is that which pleads with the rioters to put themselves in the place of the foreigners they have attacked. More bids them

Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,  
Their babies at their backs, and their poor luggage,  
Plodding to th'ports and coasts for transportation  
[*Sir Thomas More*, 1.3.80–2].

It might have been written yesterday, might it not? 'Imagine all this,' he continues – and here we have prophecy. [Quotes at length from More's evocation of what it would be like to be a stranger in some foreign]

nation of such barbarous temper  
That breaking out in hideous violence  
Would not afford you an abode on earth,  
Whet their detested knives against your throats  
Spurn you like dogs . . . [2.3.142–6].

Not merely are the situations of the Jews in Shakespeare's Venice and the strangers in Sir Thomas More's London closely similar, but we can be pretty safe I think in identifying the views expressed by More with those of the dramatist who writes his speech. Observe too the parallels in phrase and thought. In 'spurn you like dogs' we have the very words of *The Merchant*, while Shylock's great outburst on the subject of Jewish humanity, with its particular assertion that the Jew is 'warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is', finds a clear echo in More's declaration that the 'elements' were 'appropriate to the comforts' of all mankind, not 'chartered' by Englishmen, to the exclusion of the foreigners they disliked.

But what More makes explicit, is not explicit in *The Merchant*. The Jew is allowed no defendant in the court to plead for him as a fellow human being and a defenceless alien. There is no one to speak for him except himself. In the light of the parallels from the *Book of Sir Thomas More* I have no doubt at all that Shylock was intended by Shakespeare to be a comment upon the treatment of Jewry throughout the Christian dispensation.

Why does he not say so? Why did he not even . . . oppose to the cruelty of Shylock,



clemency, charity, and specifically Christian charity? Imagine the author of *The Tempest* and of More's great speech to the pogrom-rioters, living in Nuremberg a few years ago and ordered by the Nazi party to compose a play upon the subject of some Jew who had conspired against the life of Herr Hitler. Could he speak out? Would he not depict the ferocious assassin in all his dire ferocity, and yet contrive to *imply*, for those who had ears to hear, that there was another side to the question?

This is no rhetorical flourish. The actual position of Shakespeare when he wrote *The Merchant* was not unlike that I depict in imagination. Shortly before the play was first staged, the London crowds, from whom he drew his audience, had watched in their thousands, and with howls of gleeful execration, a venerable old Hebrew, Dr. Lopez, falsely accused of attempting to poison the Queen, done to death with the hideous ritual of hanging and disembowelling before their blood-lustful eyes. There is even I believe an allusion to the event in the play itself. You remember that strange image which Shakespeare places in the railing mouth of Gratiano [Quotes 4.1.133-7]. What does it mean? A wolf hanged for human slaughter, who ever heard of such a thing? This wolf was no quadruped, it was a Jewish animal, in other words it was Lopez himself, who is commonly called Lopus or Lupus in the literature of the time.

And there was still more involved. Not only would the groundlings in the audience at the play be inflamed with anti-Semitism at the time, the great ones who might be found among the judicious spectators were in a like mood. Lopez had unhappily incurred the hatred of the all-powerful Earl of Essex, who was the main instrument in bringing him to the gallows; and the earl's bosom friend was another young lord, the Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's own patron and in all likelihood his intimate.

Such were the perilous circumstances in which the compassionate Shakespeare was compelled to write his Jew play. I say compelled, for the rival company to his own had revived Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* for the occasion, and were drawing large houses, while his friends at court would doubtless look to him for a Jew-baiting spectacle in the theatre. Well, he gave them what they asked, he gave them an appalling Shylock and the coarse-grained storm-trooper Gratiano to express their sentiments about him; he even represents the best man in the story spurning him like a dog and bespitting him – would not his friends the earls have done the same?

But he did more, by making Shylock a suffering human being, he revealed 'the mountainish inhumanity' [*Sir Thomas More*, 2.3.150] of the behaviour of Christians towards the Hebrew race, and in the speech on Mercy, at the very centre and climax of the play, he revealed his own standpoint. Portia's speech, one of the greatest sermons in all literature, an expression of religious thought worthy to set beside St. Paul's hymn in praise of Love, is of course addressed to the Jew. But I find it incredible that Shakespeare intended it for Jews alone. The very fact that it is based throughout upon the Lord's Prayer, which would mean nothing to a Hebrew, suggests that it was composed to knock at Christian hearts.

And Shylock . . . is let off very lightly. He loses the money he had made by usury – that was only right and proper. He is compelled to become a Christian – that was only an enforced benefit. But he was not hanged, drawn and quartered as Dr. Lopez was – much to Gratiano's disgust.

Shylock is a terrible old man. But he is the inevitable product of centuries of racial

persecution. Shakespeare does not draw this moral. He merely exposes the situation. He is neither for nor against Shylock. Shakespeare never takes sides. Yet surely if he were alive today he would see in Mercy, mercy in the widest sense, which embraces understanding and forgiveness, the only possible solution of our racial hatreds and enmities.

*Belmont*

But the exit of Shylock is not the end of the play. The cloud which had been gathering since the opening scene and looked so black for Antonio, instead of breaking, passes over, leaving him unharmed and even the villain himself with only a light punishment. And so the tension is relaxed for the audience. The trial is followed by an amusing interview between the disguised women and their lovers, together with the surrender of the rings, which promises further fun to come.

Is the incident, as I asked earlier, too trivial, too light to counterbalance the stress of emotion from which we have just emerged? Only if our sympathies have been with Shylock the man, rather than Jewry; and as I said, we misapprehend Shakespeare the dramatist if they are. Certainly, Shakespeare knew that the audience for which he wrote would have no sympathy with Shylock; and it is just because he knew that, that he could afford to exhibit his humanity.

Yet the crisis of the trial scene was unusually serious for a comedy. That he knew also; and realized that all his efforts would be needed to send his spectators home in the mood he wished to leave with them. And so, we have the scene at Belmont – the gayest, happiest, most blessed scene in all Shakespeare. Suddenly we are caught away from Venice, from its scorns, its hatreds and revenges, and transported to a world of magic in which men and women live like gods, without care, without toil, without folly, and without strife – except such folly and strife as lovers use one with another. Belmont is not heaven, because there is much talk of marrying and giving in marriage, and withal a roguish touch of Boccaccio now and again. Rather it is Elysium, a Renaissance Elysium, a garden full of music under the soft Italian night, with a gracious and stately mansion in the background.

Shakespeare paints the scene with all his wonderful artistry. Observe, for instance, the part the moon plays in it, how she rides in and out of the shifting clouds as the action goes forward – at one moment it is bright as day, at the next ‘The moon sleeps with Endymion’ [5.1.108] so that Lorenzo cannot see Portia’s face.

Music and the moon are the twin themes of this final movement [Quotes 5.1.49–65, 82–8]. After Mercy – Harmony!

Grossly closed in by our muddy vesture of decay, it is difficult – perhaps impossible – for us poor mortals to hear it, and missing it we, Jew or Christian, grow ‘fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils’, and our ‘affections dark as Erebus’, the Erebus which Shylock and Jew-baiter alike inherit; but the music is there all the while.

Some day, one blessed day we shall not live to see, perhaps the world may come to Belmont and be moved not with internecine hatred and racial scorn, but ‘with concord of sweet sounds’. [Reflects on the connection between music and politics.]

The impending dissolution of the universe, though in other terms than ours, was

never far from the mind of Shakespeare and his contemporaries; and Prospero supplies a calmer because more contemplative account of it in his famous epilogue after the masque in *The Tempest*. The Prospero however who gave us the vision he called *The Merchant of Venice* had no wish to trouble us at Belmont with thoughts of doomsday or any apocalyptic imaginings. And even our memories of cruel Venice begin to fade when we hear Lancelot winding his mock postman's horn in and out among the trees to announce to Lorenzo and Jessica and to us, the audience, that the travellers are about to return home. And presently, when we return home, or shut our books, the characters themselves begin to fade and melt into thin air, as we realize that Bassanio the young lover, his bosom friend Antonio, Portia the great lady and learned judge, yes, even the fierce Jew himself, rushing with uplifted knife upon his victim – all are spirits, the creatures of dramatic art.

Yet if we are to go home happy, the characters all but Shylock must first of all be given happiness. How was this to be accomplished for Antonio, who though saved from the knife was still a ruined merchant? It was Portia who saved him; it was given to her to restore his fortune. But mark how she does it [Quotes 5.1.273–8]. That three of Antonio's argosies should be 'richly come to harbour suddenly' would be unbelievable if Shakespeare had allowed us a moment to ponder it, yet not more difficult of credence than the 'strange accident' by which Portia chanced upon the letter that told it. [Provides an example of 'Shakespearian legerdemain'.] When we edited the play together in 1926 Q<sup>[4]</sup> and I were delighted to catch Shakespeare out over it, the more so that we fancied we were the first to do so. And I cannot conclude this little essay of my own more happily than by quoting the conclusion of the Introduction by Q, the more so that I have dared to wrestle with him on an earlier page. 'You shall not know', says Portia, and Q replies, 'No, nor anyone else' – and he then goes on to point out that Shakespeare had already made at least one attempt to rid Antonio of his burden before this. But let him speak for himself. 'Upon Lorenzo's and Jessica's lovely duet there breaks a footfall. Lorenzo, startled by it, demands.' [Quotes 5.1.25–35.] 'Nothing', continues Q, 'loose in literature – in play or in poem – ever caught Dr. Johnson napping. "I do not perceive", says Johnson, in his unfaltering accent, "the use of this hermit, of whom nothing is seen or heard afterwards. The Poet had first planned his fable some other way; and inadvertently, when he changed his scheme, retained something of the original design"'.<sup>[5]</sup>

And while all this has been passing, the moon has sunk and every thicket around Belmont has begun to thrill and sing of dawn. Portia lifts a hand: 'It is almost morning, / Let us go in.' [5.1.295, 297] And so the comedy comes home. (107–19)

## 74 Mark Van Doren, no hint 'where Shakespeare's sympathies lay'

1939

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From *Shakespeare* (New York, 1939).

Mark Van Doren (1894–1972) was a versatile writer and scholar. He took his PhD at Columbia University, New York, and taught there until his retirement in 1959. He was for many years on the staff of the *Nation*; his publications included *Collected Poems*, 1922–38, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1939; critical studies of John Dryden (1920), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1949), three volumes of short stories, novels, and a play.

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When Bassanio declares, early in the comedy of which he is so casually the hero, 'To you, Antonio, / I owe the most, in money and in love' (1.1.130–1), he characterizes the world he lives in and the only world he knows. It is once more, and fully now, the gentlemen's world whose tentative capital for Shakespeare had been Verona. The capital moves to Venice; the atmosphere enriches itself until no element is lacking; and a story is found, or rather a complex of stories is assembled, which will be adequate to the golden air breathed on fair days and through soft nights by creatures whose only function is to sound in their lives the clear depths of human grace. In such a world, or at any rate in such inhabitants of it, there is no incompatibility between money and love. Shylock cannot reconcile the two; but Shylock is not of this world, as the quality of his voice, so harshly discordant with the dominant voices of the play, will inform any attentive ear.

In Belmont is a lady richly left, and Bassanio does not hesitate to say that Portia's wealth is necessary to his happiness. But it is necessary only as a condition; that she is fair and good – how much of either he has still to learn – is more than necessary, it is important. She will tell him when he has won her by the right choice of caskets that she wishes herself, for his sake, still richer than she is – not merely in money but in 'virtues, beauties, livings, friends' (3.2.158). All of which, sincerely as it is spoken, does not obscure or deny the background for this life of an enormous and happy wealth. . . .

Antonio is abstracted and sad for no reason that he knows. Shakespeare's source named a reason, but it has been suppressed in the interest of a mood the play must have. Melancholy in this world must not have in it any over-ripeness as in the case of Jaques, any wildness as in the case of Hamlet, any savagery as in the case of Timon. It must remain a grace, perhaps the distinctive grace of this life which is still young enough for satiety to mean not sourness, not spiritual disease, but a beautiful sadness of that sort which it is the highest pleasure not to explore. Much is said of satiety. Portia and Nerissa

Mark Van Doren

begin their scene (1.2) with talk of weariness and surfeit. But it is charming talk, unclouded by any such 'unmannerly sadness' as Portia soon criticizes in her suitor the County Palatine, who suggests 'a death's-head with a bone in his mouth' [1.2.51]. The sadness of her class is a mannerly sadness. Antonio knows with Gratiano that all things 'Are with more spirit chased than enjoy'd' (2.6.12-13). But he has not known it long enough to become other than what Bassanio calls him:

The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,  
The best-condition'd and unwearied spirit  
In doing courtesies. (3.2.292-4)

He wearies himself with his want-wit sadness, and thinks he wearies others; but he is not too tired for courtesies, and Bassanio's concern for him when news comes to Belmont of Shylock's insistence on the bond is deep, unspoiled, and serious. Antonio can say

I am a tainted wether of the flock,  
Meetest for death, (4.1.114-15)

without causing embarrassment in his hearers or incurring the charge of self-love. He is in short one of Shakespeare's gentlemen: one who wears darker clothes than his friends but knows perfectly how to wear them.

Love is the natural language of these men and women: love, and its elder brother generosity. Not generosity to Shylock, for he is of another species, and cannot receive what he will not give. But generosity to all friends, and an unmeasured love. The word love lies like a morsel of down in the nest of nearly every speech, and the noblest gestures are made in its name, Portia's surrender to Bassanio of 'This house, these servants, and this same myself' (3.2.170) is absolute. And so is the gift of Antonio's life to Bassanio, for there are more kinds of love here than one. 'I think he only loves the world for him' (2.8.50), says Salanio, and Antonio counts on Bassanio's silent understanding of the truth. 'If your love do not persuade you to come,' he writes to him at Belmont, 'let not my letter' (3.2.321-2). Nor is there any rivalry between Antonio and Portia. It is enough for her that he is her husband's friend:

that this Antonio,  
Being the bosom lover of my lord,  
Must needs be like my lord. (3.4.16-18)

And it is enough for him that she is his friend's beloved:

Commend me to your honourable wife.  
Tell her the process of Antonio's end;  
Say how I lov'd you, speak me fair in death,  
And, when the tale is told, bid her be judge  
Whether Bassanio had not once a love. (4.1.273-7)

Neither man knows that Portia is listening to this, but the fact that she is, and that *The Merchant of Venice* is after all a comedy, does not invalidate the mood.

The language of love is among other things intellectual. So we are not surprised to encounter abstractions in the graceful discourse of our lords and ladies. They are what make it, indeed, as graceful as it is, with its expert alternation of short and long words, its accomplished and elaborate ease such as Shylock's tongue never knows. It is natural for Portia to credit Antonio with 'a like proportion / Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit' (3.4.14–15) to that of Bassanio, 'her governor, her king'. It is as natural for her to speak of mercy as a 'quality' and an 'attribute' as it is for her to reveal upon occasion that nippiness of wit which keeps the conversation of all such people sound and sweet.

Fie, what a question's that,  
If thou wert near a lewd interpreter! (3.4.79–80)

I'll have that doctor for my bedfellow. (5.1.233)

The intellect and the wit, and the familiarity with abstractions, have much to do with the effect of music which is so strong and pure throughout *The Merchant of Venice*. Not only do the words of the lovers maintain an unbroken, high, golden chime; but actual music is frequently in our ears.

Let music sound while he doth make his choice;  
Then, if he lose, he makes a swan-like end,  
Fading in music. (3.2.43–5)

So Portia commands as Bassanio broods before the caskets. And there is no clearer sign that the world is itself again when Shylock goes than the burst of melody, both verbal and performed, with which the fifth Act soars upon recovered wings. . . . Music no less than love is absolute in the world of Venice and Belmont.

Nicholas Rowe in 1709 was of the opinion that Shylock's contribution to the play made it a tragedy. 'There appears in it such a deadly Spirit of Revenge, such a savage Fierceness and Fellness, and such a bloody designation of Cruelty and Mischief, as cannot agree either with the Stile or Characters of Comedy.' As time has gone on this has come more and more to seem true. Yet it is but a seeming truth. Shylock is so alien to the atmosphere of the whole, so hostile and in his hostility so forceful, that he threatens to rend the web of magic happiness woven for the others to inhabit. But the web holds, and he is cast out. If the world of the play has not all along been beautiful enough to suggest its own natural safety from such a foe, it becomes so in a fifth Act whose felicity of sound permits no memory of ducats and bonds and long knives whetted on the heel. Comedy or not, *The Merchant of Venice* by such means rescues its tone. If this is not comedy, there is no other in the play. The possibilities in Gratiano's loquacity are never developed, and the Gobbos are poor clowns.

The voice of Shylock comes rasping into the play like a file; the edge of it not only cuts but tears, not only slices but saws. He is always repeating phrases, half to himself, as

Mark Van Doren

misers do – hoarding them if they are good, unwilling to give them wings so that they may spend themselves generously in the free air of mutual talk.

Three thousand ducats; well. . . .  
For three months; well. . . .  
Antonio shall become bound; well. (1.3.1–6)

They are short phrases; niggardly, ugly, curt. They are a little hoarse from their hoarding, a little rusty with disuse. And the range of their sound is from the strident to the rough, from the scratchy to the growled.

The patch is kind enough, but a huge feeder;  
Snail-slow in profit, and he sleeps by day  
More than the wild-cat. Drones hive not with me. (2.5.46–8)

The names of animals are natural to his tongue, which knows for the most part only concrete things, and crackles with reminders of brute matter. Salarino, musing of shipwrecks in the opening scene, bethinks him straight of dangerous rocks,

Which, touching but my gentle vessel's side,  
Would scatter all her spices on the stream,  
Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks. (1.1.32–4)

Shylock in the third scene rewrites Salarino's passage in his own idiom:

But ships are but boards, sailors but men; there be land-rats and water-rats, water-thieves and land-thieves, I mean pirates, and then there is the peril of waters, wind, and rocks. (1.3.22–5)

Land-rats and water-rats: the very sound of the words announces their malice, confesses the satisfaction with which their speaker has cursed them as they left his lips. He will go on in the play to remind us of the cur, the goat, the pig, the cat, the ass, the monkey, and the mule.

*Tubal.* One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey.

*Shylock.* Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys. (3.1.118–23)

An animal itself is howling, and the emphasis upon 'wilderness' is shrill beyond the license of human rhetoric. We may feel pity for the man who remembers Leah, but the spectacle of such pain is not pleasant, the wound is animal, self-inflicted, and self-licked. 'I never heard,' says Salanio,

*no hint 'where Shakespeare's sympathies lay', 1939*

a passion so confus'd,  
So strange, outrageous, and so variable. (2.8.12–13)

This was when Shylock ran out into the streets and declared the loss of his ducats with his daughter; but he is always strange to the play and outrageous, though in most crises he can cover his agitation with the curt voice of craft, with the insistent sound of a cold hatred.

I'll have my bond; I will not hear thee speak.  
I'll have my bond; and therefore speak no more. . . .  
I'll have no speaking; I will have my bond. (3.3.12–17)

Nor is he disposed to justify his conduct by a show of reason. If he knows the language of reason he does not use it; if he knows his motives he will not name them.

So can I give no reason, nor I will not,  
More than a lodg'd hate and a certain loathing  
I bear Antonio. (4.1.59–61)

It is by no means odd that such a man should detest music. The favored citizens of this world love it so much that they live only for the concord of sweet sounds, and Lorenzo can dismiss any other kind of man as fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils (5.1.85). Shylock is another kind of man. Music hurts his ears as it does Malvolio's, and he is as contemptuous of merry-making, which he calls 'shallow foppery'. A masque in the street brings no comfort of melody; he notes only 'the vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife' (2.5.30), and holds his ears. So must we hold ours against so hideous a phrase; and withhold, perhaps, our assent from the implication that any musical instrument can be a deformed thing. Or a perverting thing, for there are men, says Shylock in another place, who

when the bagpipe sings i' the nose,  
Cannot contain their urine. (4.1.49–50)

That is the sort of interest he has in music, in the ridiculous noises which dull and soft-eyed fools with varnished faces can only pretend to believe ennobling. And that is why, since also he is without the concord in his thoughts which love composes, the repetitions of his speech are so lacking in resonance, so sullen in their accent and so blighting in their tone.

Ho, no, no, no, no! (1.3.15)

Why, there, there, there, there! A diamond gone, cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfort! The curse never fell upon our nation till now. I never felt it till now. Two thousand ducats in that; and other precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hears'd



Mark Van Doren

at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin! . . . I thank God, I thank God. Is't true, is't true? . . . I thank thee, good Tubal; good news, good news! Ha, ha! . . . Thou stick'st a dagger in me. I shall never see my gold again. Fourscore ducats at a sitting! Fourscore ducats! . . . I am very glad of it. I'll plague him; I'll torture him. I am glad of it. . . . Nay, that's true, that's very true. Go, Tubal, fee me an officer; bespeak him a fortnight before. . . . Go, Tubal, and meet me at our synagogue; go, good Tubal; at our synagogue, Tubal. (3.1.83–130)

That repetitions like these occur in prose is not what distinguishes them. The prose of Falstaff will contain as many with an entirely different result, with the effect indeed of a great man spending his breath freely. What distinguishes the style of Shylock is in the end, no doubt, one of its author's secrets. But we can hear the difference between him and the brethren of Antonio. And in the quality of that difference we should have no difficulty in recognizing Shylock as the alien element in a world of love and friendship, of nightingales and moonlight sleeping sweetly on a bank.

Where Shakespeare's sympathies lay it has long since been useless to inquire. His gentlemen within the code are as harsh to Shylock as Shylock is to them; however much love they have, they cannot love him. Nor has Shakespeare made the least inch of him lovely. He would seem in fact to have attempted a monster, one whose question whether a Jew hath eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, and passions would reveal its rhetorical form, the answer being no. Yet Shylock is not a monster. He is a man thrust into a world bound not to endure him. In such a world he necessarily looks and sounds ugly. In another universe his voice might have its properties and its uses. Here it can issue as nothing but a snarl, an animal cry sounding outrageously among the flute and recorder voices of persons whose very names, unlike his own, are flowing musical phrases. The contrast between harmony and hate, love and discord, is here complete, and Shakespeare for the time being is content to resolve it in comedy. Even in his tragedies it cannot be more complete.

# Notes

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## 1 GEORG LICHTENBERG

- [1] Furness added a note: 'this lawsuit was brought by Macklin against certain citizens, who, in their opposition to him as an actor, behaved so riotously one evening that they obliged the manager to discharge Macklin before they would allow the play to proceed. Macklin gained his suit, and was awarded exemplary damages. In this lawsuit the public took extraordinary interest, involving, as it did, the right to hiss an actor' (H. H. Furness, *New Variorum Edition of The Merchant of Venice* [Philadelphia, 1888], p. 374).

## 2 RICHARD HOLE

- 1 William Prideaux Courtney, 'Hole, Richard (1746–1803),' *DNB*, IX (London, 1921–2), p. 1021.  
2 Furness, *ed. cit.*, p. 403.  
[3] See Vickers, *Shakespeare: the Critical Heritage*, Vol. 6, 1774–1801 (London and Boston, 1981), pp. 622–6.  
[4] *Deuteronomy*, 23:20.  
[5] In this period 'interesting' meant 'affecting, involving'.

## 3 AUGUST WILHELM VON SCHLEGEL

- 1 George L. Geckle (ed.), *Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition. Measure for Measure* (London, 2001), p. 49.

## 5 WILLIAM HAZLITT

- [1] Charles Edelman, in his volume on *The Merchant of Venice* (Cambridge, 2002) in the 'Shakespeare in Production' series, rejects this account of the theatrical tradition before Kean as fictitious (p. 14).

## 6 AUGUSTINE SKOTTOWE

- 1 See P. F. Skottowe, *The Leaf and the Tree: The Story of an English Family* (London, 1963).  
2 Bassanio is guilty of detestable selfishness in suffering his friend to risk his life for him. As the story advances, Shakespeare has represented him in a more amiable light than the novelist has done: in the play no blame is imputable to the young bridegroom on account of the non-repayment of the money; but the novelist makes him dream away his life in love, utterly forgetful of honour.  
3 'The Jew shown at the Bull, representing the *greediness of worldly choosers*, and the *bloody minds of usurers*.' Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse*, 1579.

## Notes

### 7 GEORGE FARREN

- [1] John Haslam (1764–1844), author of, amongst other works, *Observations on Insanity* (London, 1798), *Observations of Madness and Melancholy* (London, 1809) and *Illustrations of Madness* (London, 1810).
- [2] But Shylock's actual words are: 'pay the bond thrice / And let the Christian go'.

### 8 ANNA BROWNELL JAMESON

- [1] Hazlitt, No. 5 above.
- 2 In that age, delicate points of law were not determined by the ordinary judges of the provinces, but by doctors of law, who were called from Bologna, Padua, and other places celebrated for their legal colleges.
- [3] Shakespeare, Sonnet 111.

### 12 CHARLES KNIGHT

- [1] See No. 11.
- [2] A jingle attributed to Alexander Pope.
- [3] *Characteristics of Women* [1833], I, p. 75. See No. 8.

### 13 GEORGE HENRY LEWES

- [1] Lewes himself had played Shylock at the Theatre Royal Manchester on 10 March 1849, twenty months before his *Leader* review of Macready's Drury Lane London performance.
- [2] *Scolpito*: appropriateness.

### 14 HENRY NORMAN HUDSON

- [1] Wordsworth, 'Presentiments' [1830], ll. 50–4, in Philip Wayne (ed.), *Wordsworth's Poems*, 3 vols. (London, 1955), 2.244.
- 2 See No. 8.
- [3] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 546–8, in *The Poems of John Milton*, eds John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London, 1968), p. 843.
- [4] John Marshall (1755–1835), Fourth Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (1801–35), who established the Supreme Court as the ultimate body for interpreting the United States' Constitution.
- [5] A. W. von Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Poetry*, transl. John Black (London, 1815), Vol. II, pp. 2, 169.

### 16 WILLIAM WATKISS LLOYD

- 1 Lloyd misquotes; it should be 'ventures he hath squand'red about'.

### 17 HENRIETTA PALMER

- [1] See No. 3.
- [2] See No. 8.

### 19 CHARLES COWDEN CLARKE

- 1 Richard D. Altick, *The Cowden Clarkes* (London, 1948), pp. 89, 196.

## Notes

- [2] See No. 5.
- [3] Clarke's misquotation. Lancelot says 'you are not the Jew's daughter' [3.5.12].
- [4] See No. 3.

### 20 GEORG G. GERVINUS

- [1] See No. 11.
- [2] *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579). Cf. E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1923), 4, 204.

### 21 JOHN RUSKIN

- [1] A proverbial expression, dating back to the Greeks.
  - 2 Shakespeare would certainly never have chosen this name had he been forced to retain the Roman spelling. Like Perdita, 'lost lady', or Cordelia, 'heart-lady', Portia is 'fortune' lady. The two great relative groups of words, Fortuna, fero, and fors – Portio, porto, and pars (with the lateral branch op-portune, im-portune, opportunity, etc.), are of deep and intricate significance; their various senses of bringing, abstracting, and sustaining being all centralized by the wheel (which bears and moves at once), or still better, the ball (spera) of fortune. . . .
- [3] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.2.1–4, where Socrates argues that ingratitude to a benefactor is a form of injustice. See Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, transl. H. Tredennick and R. Waterfield, Penguin Classics (London, 1990), pp. 109–10.
- [4] 1 Timothy 1:2.

### 22 JAMES SPEDDING

- [1] Horace, *Ars poetica*, 373–4: '*mediocribus esse poetis / non homines, non di, non concessere columnae*': 'But that poets be of middling rank, neither men nor gods nor booksellers ever brooked' (Loeb). Columns were the sign of a bookseller's shop in ancient Rome.
- [2] The Bancrofts had much success with a revival of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* in 1874. *Society* was a successful comedy by Thomas William Robertson (1829–71), first produced in 1865.
- [3] See No. 8.
- [4] Ellen Terry (1847–1928) made her first stage appearance in 1856. She acted for the first time with Henry Irving in 1867, and was his leading actress from 1878 to 1902.
- [5] *Paradise Lost*, 1.105–9.
- [6] Charles F. Coghlan, whose acting as Shylock 'killed the production', according to Odell (2.262).
- [7] A comedy by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Money* was first produced in 1840.

### 23 FREDERICK JAMES FURNIVALL

- 1 I do not forget the redeeming, 'I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor' (3.1.118). Shylock could care for love as well as revenge, before money; but it wasn't love for his girl.
- 2 And, like Fenton in *The Merry Wives*, he smells April and May, 'A day in April never came so sweet', &c., II. ix. 91. (Portia implies Shakspeare's rise into the society of such English ladies as he'd not known in earlier life.)

## Notes

### 25 FREDERICK WILLIAM HAWKINS

- [1] See No. 32.
- [2] See No. 4.

### 27 FREDERICK JAMES FURNIVALL

- [1] *The Leopold Shakespere: The Poet's Works, in Chronological Order, From the Text of Professor Delius . . . and an Introduction by F. J. Furnivall, Illustrated* (London, 1877), Introduction, p. xli.
- [2] See No. 32.

### 28 JAMES SPEDDING

- 1 *The Letters of Edward Fitzgerald*, edited A. B. Terhune and A. M. Terhune, vol. I (Princeton, NJ, 1980), p. 61.

### 29 ISRAEL DAVIS

- 1 See *The Letters of George Henry Lewes Volume III with New George Eliot Letters*, edited William Baker (Victoria, BC, 1999), pp. 87–9.

### 31 OSCAR WILDE

- 1 My text and the citation from Mason is taken from *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Volume I, Poems and Poems in Prose*, ed. Bobby Fong and Karl Beckson (Oxford, 2000), p. 121 [text], pp. 278–9 [notes].
- [2] Veronesé: 'Paolo Veronese (1528–88), Italian painter of the Venetian school who was born Paolo Caliari but called "Il Veronese" after his birthplace, Verona' (*ibid.*, p. 279, n. 7).

### 32 SIDNEY LEE

- 1 *Calendar of Spanish State Papers, 1485–1525*, vol. i, p. 164.
- 2 *The Wandering Jew telling Fortunes to Englishmen*, p. 17, reprinted in J. O. Halliwell's *Books of Character* (London, 1857).
- 3 Cf. *Emanuel Tremellius von F. Butters*. Zweibrücken, 1859. This is a sketch of a Jewish professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, who received his appointment in 1549. Besides the historical notices, of which we have given several instances below, it would be interesting to collect the numerous references to Jews in contemporary dramatists. Outside the *Merchant of Venice* seven well-known passages in Shakespeare call attention to them. Readers of Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* will remember how Zeal-of-the-Land Busy is nicknamed Rabbi Busy, and how in his fear of being confounded with the Jews, he declares his intention 'by the public eating of swine's flesh to profess our loathing of Judaism.'
- 4 The only other introduction so far as we know of a Jew in person by Shakespeare's contemporaries, occurs in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Customs of the Country*, where 'Zabulon, a Jew,' plays an important part. Douce mentions a play acted at Cambridge in 1597 whose hero was a Jew.
- 5 Before either Marlowe's Barabas, or Shakespeare's Shylock appeared, Stephen Gosson, in his *School of Abuse*, had commended a play entitled 'The Jew showne at the Bull.' Unhappily no further trace of this play is extant.
- 6 Henslowe's *Diary* (Old Shakespearean Society), p. 37, &c.

## Notes

- [7] In his *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, who lived about the time of Shakespeare, with notes* (London, 1808) Charles Lamb added this note on Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*: 'Marlowe's Jew does not approach so near to Shakspeare's as his Edward II. does to Richard II. Shylock in the midst of his savage purpose is a man. His motives, feelings, resentments, have something human in them. "If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" Barabas is a mere monster brought in with a large painted nose to please the rabble. He kills in sport, poisons whole nunneries, invents infernal machines. He is just such an exhibition as a century or two earlier might have been played before the Londoners, *by the royal Command*, when a general pillage and massacre of the Hebrews had been previously resolved on in the cabinet.' Cf. Jonathan Bate (ed.), *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (London, 1992), p. 456.
- 8 Ellis' *Original Letters*, 1st series; iii. 52.
- 9 Knight's *Life of Shakespeare*.
- 10 In the *Il Pecorone* of Ser Giovanni Fiorentino (Milano, 1558), which Shakespeare certainly consulted in his treatment of the bond-episode, the name of the merchant is Ansaldo. The fanciful name of *Belmont*, which the Italian author gave to the palace of the lady holding Portia's position in the novel, was transferred by Shakespeare to his play.
- 11 *Merry Wives*, IV. v. 70.
- 12 Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 40.
- 13 Some of these discrepancies are still retained in the ordinary texts. In the second scene of the first act, Portia describes *six* strangers as visiting her, but when announced to take their leave only *four* are mentioned (1.2.110–18). Two were probably added in the revised form of the play. Cp. III. ii. 49, and IV. i. 206 and 223.
- 14 Arber's Transcript of the Stationers' Company's Register, iii. 22; Halliwell's Folio Shakespeare: Introduction to the *Merchant of Venice*.
- 15 Mr. Furnivall in his Trial Order of Shakespeare's plays marks the supposed date of the *Merchant of Venice* as (?) 1596, but in his *Leopold Shakespeare*, which has since appeared, he has placed it a year earlier, without giving any reasons for the alteration. Whatever may be Mr. Furnivall's final judgment, the metrical tests to which recent criticism gives so much importance bear stronger testimony to the date we have adopted than to any later one. The play has the same percentage of rhymed lines as *Richard III.*, which few critics place later than 1594. It has fewer double endings by one per cent. than the third part of *Henry VI.*, which is referred to the end of the same year. It has as many irregular lines as the second part of *Henry VI.*, of about the same date, and has little more prose than the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and some fifty per cent. less than that contained in the later comedies, such as *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. These calculations can be verified by reference to Mr. Furnivall's Metrical Table.
- 16 *State Papers*, 1589, July 12.
- 17 *Ibid.* 1591–94, pp. 443, 454.
- 18 Clarendon Press Edition, p. 105.
- 19 [4.1.]394–96. These are the last words addressed to Shylock in the play.
- 20 *State Papers*, p.16.
- 21 *Ibid.* pp. 444, 446, 455, 462.
- 22 *Ibid.* p. 452.
- 23 Beaumont and Fletcher's play of *Women Pleased* seems, however, to give further confirmation of our theory, if it does not show that the identification between Shylock and Lopez that we have been trying to establish was recognised by some in Shakespeare's lifetime. The comic part of the piece is sustained by one Penurio, who bears much resemblance to Launcelot Gobbo. He is 'the half-starved servant' of an old man who, like Shylock, is described as 'a sordid usurer.' How closely related that profession was in popular

## Notes

estimation to the practices of Judaism readers of the dramatists well know. *To this character Beaumont and Fletcher have given the name of Lopez*. Surely this is a circumstance of much significance.

### 33 HENRY JAMES

- [1] Irving's *Macbeth* was first performed in the Lyceum, 25 September 1875, and revived 29 December 1888: see Alan Hughes, *Henry Irving, Shakespearean* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 88–116.
- [2] Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833–98), the great Victorian painter and designer.

### 34 CHARLES KENSINGTON SALAMAN

- [1] Sir Giles Overreach is a cruel and rapacious villain in Philip Massinger's drama *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (c. 1633).
- [2] A reference to D'Blossiers Tovey, *Anglia Judaica; or, The history and antiquities of the Jews in England: collected from all our historians, both printed and manuscript, as also from the records in the Tower, and other publick repositories* (Oxford, 1738).

### 35 JOSEPH HATTON

- [1] In 1878 Irving enjoyed great success in the title role of Casimir Delavigne's *Louis XI*, in Dion Boucicault's translation.
- [2] Samuel Phelps (1804–78) made his London debut playing Shylock in 1837, a role he played 81 times. He took over Sadler's Wells in 1844 and ran it until 1862. See Shirley S. Allen, *Samuel Phelps and Sadler's Wells Theatre* (Middletown, CT, 1971).
- [3] On Charles Kean (1811[?]-68), see Richard W. Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean* (Cambridge, 1998).
- [4] Sir William D'Avenant (1606–68), dramatist, noted for his adaptations of Shakespeare.
- [5] Hatton misquotes: 'fee me an officer, bespeak him a fortnight'.
- [6] Hatton misquotes: 'give me leave to go from hence / I am not well'.

### 36 RICHARD G. MOULTON

- 1 It is a difficulty of literary criticism that it has to use as technical terms words belonging to ordinary conversation, and therefore more or less indefinite in their significations. In the present work I am making a distinction between 'complex' and 'complicated': the latter is applied to the diverting of a story out of its natural course with a view to its ultimate 'resolution'; 'complex' is reserved for the interweaving of stories with one another. Later on 'single' will be opposed to 'complex', and 'simple' to 'complicated'.
- 2 This seems to me a reasonable view notwithstanding what Jessica says to the contrary (3.2.286), that she has often heard her father swear he would rather have Antonio's flesh than twenty times the value of the bond. It is one thing to swear vengeance in private, another thing to follow it up in the face of a world in opposition. A man of overbearing temper surrounded by inferiors and dependants often utters threats, and seems to find a pleasure in uttering them, which both he and his hearers know he will never carry out.

### 38 M. LEIGH-NOEL

- 1 See No. 19.

## Notes

### 40 WILLIAM POEL

- [1] The single volume 'Globe edition' (reduced from the Cambridge Shakespeare), edited by William Aldis Wright, was published in 1864, and remained the standard one-volume edition for nearly a century.

### 42 FRANCIS A. MARSHALL

- [1] See Robert Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old Plays*, 12 vols., (London, 1744), VI, pp. 355–8.

### 43 SIR GEORGE HEYNES RADFORD

- [1] *Jew of Malta*, 1.2.114.  
[2] A part of English law applying general principles of justice to correct or supplement common and statute law, administered since 1875 by the Chancery Division of the High Court.

### 44 FREDERICK SAMUEL BOAS

- [1] See Ulrici (No. 11), and Gervinus (No. 20).  
[2] See Kreyssig (No. 18).  
3 See Moulton's *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, pp. 61–4 [No. 36].  
[4] Proverbs, 15:1.  
[5] See Moulton, No. 36.  
[6] Robert Browning, 'Holy-Cross Day: On which the Jews were forced to attend an annual Christmas Sermon in Rome', in *Men and Women* (1855), stanza 19.  
[7] See Lee, No. 32.  
[8] Cf. Moulton, No. 36.  
[9] A legal term, meaning barred or precluded.  
[10] Bacon, Essay 5, 'Of Adversity': in Brian Vickers (ed.), *Francis Bacon* (Oxford, 1996; the 'Oxford Authors' series), p. 349.  
[11] See No. 10.

### 45 GEORG BRANDES

- [1] Cf. Sonnet 68.5–7, and *Timon of Athens*, 4.3.145–6.

### 46 A. W. VERITY

- 1 The origin of the name is uncertain. [Howard] Staunton [*The Plays of Shakespeare*, 3 vols. (1859–60), I] says: 'This may have been an Italian name, *Scialocca*, the change of which into *Shylock* was natural. At all events, it was a name current among the Jews, for, at the end of an extremely rare tract, called "A Jewes Propheesy," 1607, is a piece entitled: "Caleb Shilock his prophesie for the yeere 1607." Although pretending to be a prophecy for the year 1607, this edition was a reprint of a much older copy.' There is extant a ballad of the same title and date as this 'prophesie.' [Joseph] Hunter, however, writes: 'We collect that Shylock was a Levantine Jew from the name: *Scialac*, which is doubtless the same name in a different orthography, being the name of a Maronite of Mount Libanus, who was living in 1614' [*New Illustrations of the Life, Studies, and Writings of Shakespeare* (1845)]. It seems more likely that the tract mentioned by Staunton was older than the play and that 'Caleb *Shilock*' suggested *Shylock*.  
2 But note Shylock's own statement (1.3.39–42) of his feelings towards Antonio. . . . See again



## Notes

- 3.1.41, 42, 47, 48. It has been said that his lust of revenge triumphs over his avarice in the Trial-scene where he refuses Bassanio's offers; yet he may be influenced partly by self-interest. Cf. 3.1.112–14: 'I will have the heart of him, if he forfeit; for, were he out of Venice, I can make what merchandise I will.'
- 3 Indeed, she does not even call it 'home.' ['Our house is hell', 2.3.2] What seems to make her conduct reflect upon Shylock is the fact that 'among no people are the ties of domestic life held more sacred than among the Hebrews' – [John] Campbell [Baron] [*Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements Considered*, 1859]. The home therefore of the Jewess must indeed have been a 'hell' to her, ere she would have acted as she does, even robbing her father.
- 4 'It is mental and moral annihilation' – Elze [*Essays on Shakespeare*, 1874].
- [5] Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.462: 'there are tears shed for things'.
- 6 'Shakespeare . . . draws so philosophical a picture of the energetic Jewish character, that he traces the blame of its faults to the iniquity of the Christian world' – Campbell. [See No. 9.] The play 'indirectly inculcates the un-wisdom of religious persecution in the mischief it works upon the persecutors as well as upon the persecuted' – Theodore Martin [cit.] (Furness 1888, p. 433).
- 7 The play is called after him because, though not himself the chief actor, he is the source and centre of the action. The battle of the Bond-story is fought round him, and it is his generosity that starts the Caskets-story. Cf. the title of *Julius Caesar*, where the chief actor is Brutus, and Caesar himself only appears in three scenes. Yet Caesar is the inner, inspiring cause of the whole, hence the title. The appropriateness of the names of Shakespeare's plays forms an interesting branch of Shakespearian study.
- 8 Shylock's conversion must be judged similarly. It was the general mediaeval belief that the Jews were 'eternally lost,' and enforced conversion to Christianity was therefore regarded as a mercy by means of which they were saved from perdition. The idea led inevitably to fanatical persecution. (K. Elze in Furness' ed. [p. 456].)
- 9 We feel in reading *The Merchant of Venice* that the supposed period is Shakespeare's own time. One allusion helps to indicate the period, viz. the mention [2.1.16] of Sultan Solymán (1490–1566).

### 47 C. H. HERFORD

- 1 *School of Abuse*, 1579 (ed. Shakspeare Society, p. 30).
- 2 New Shakspeare Society, *Transactions*, 1888.
- 3 Thus, a certain Joachim Gauntz, who spent the years 1589–91 in England, furnished the Government with information about new methods of smelting copperas (Lee).
- 4 Hazlitt, *Dodsley*, vol. vi. p. 268.
- 5 Lopez's tragic story is told in full by Mr. Lee. [See No. 32.]
- 6 *The Venetian Comedy* was possibly a further *réchauffé* of the bond story; and this is still more likely in the case of *The Jew of Venice*, printed, as by T. Decker, in 1653. But there is no evidence that this was not composed after the *Merchant*.
- [7] *The Jew of Malta*, 2.1.54.

### 49 CHARLES KNOX POOLER

- [1] See *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, vol. ii. p. 120, George Bell & Sons.
- [2] George Steevens, *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (15 vols., London, 1793).

## Notes

### 50 OTTO JESPERSEN

- 1 I have amused myself with making up the following sentences of words not used by Shakespeare though found in the language of that time: 'In Shakespeare we find no *blunders*, although *decency* and *delicacy* had *disappeared*; *energy* and *enthusiasm* are not in *existence*, and we see no *elegant expressions* nor any *gleams of genius*' etc.
- 2 The act against profane language on the stage [the Act of 27 May 1606 *To Restraine Abuses of Players*] is not sufficient to explain this reticence.
- 3 Contrast with this trait the fondness for classical allusions found in Marlowe's *Barrabas*.
- 4 He says *Abram*, but *Abraham* is the only form found in the rest of Shakespeare's works.

### 52 THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON

- [1] S. T. Coleridge, *Christabel*, Part ii.
- [2] S. T. Coleridge, *Table Talk*, March 15, 1834.

### 55 WILLIAM POEL

- [1] See No. 10.
- [2] By Henry Irving: see No. 26.
- [3] Sir Adolphus William Ward (1837–1924), author of *History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne* (1875).
- [4] Euclio is the miser in Plautus's *Aulularia* or *The Hidden Plot of Gold*; Harpagon is the miser in Molière's *L'Avare*.
- [5] Moses, the Jewish money-lender: see Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*.

### 56 E. E. STOLL

- 1 'Usurers should have orange-tawney Bonnets, because they doe Judaize': Bacon's *Essay of Usury*. [See Brian Vickers, ed., *Francis Bacon* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 421, 762–3.]
- [2] See No. 41.
- 3 See Furness's *Variation Merchant of Venice*, pp. 433–5.
- 4 Since this article was finished I have come upon the third volume of Mr. W. H. Hudson's *Elizabethan Shakespeare*, which contains the *Merchant of Venice* [See No. 14]. In the introduction Mr. Hudson declares for historical criticism almost as unreservedly as heart could wish, and except for his silence concerning the comic aspects of Shylock, his interpretation of the character is in spirit almost identical with that presented in these pages.
- 5 In the person of Guasti and others. – A fuller discussion of this point of view is to be found in my article 'Anachronism in Shakespeare Criticism', *Modern Philosophy*, April, 1910.
- [6] The Jewish money-lender in Sheridan's play.
- 7 See Hawkins in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.
- [8] Aristotle, *Politics*, i.10.1258b2ff.
- 9 It is in these passages, no doubt, that, according to Mr. Hudson [No. 14], the racial feeling rises superior to Shylock's greed and personal ferocity and Shylock becomes an impressive, tragic figure. I dislike to disagree with a critic with whom I have found myself, unawares, so often agreeing, but I think that at this point Mr. Hudson has not quite shaken off the spell of the *Zeitgeist*, of which, as he himself confesses, it is hard to rid the mind. As I show below, these appeals did not reach the hearts of the Elizabethans as they reach ours. Mr. Hudson explains them, like Professor Wendell, as moments where Shylock 'got too much for Shakespeare', and said what he liked. But that dark saying I cannot comprehend – not in

## Notes

itself and still less on the lips of a critic who protests, so justly, against treating the characters of Shakespeare as if they were real people in a real world. What else are Mr. Hudson and Mr. Wendell doing when they let the poet be inspired by those whom he himself had inspired, and so say things in a spirit of racial sympathy beyond his ken? 'Shylock spoke as Shylock would speak' – not Shakespeare – 'spoke so simply because of the life which had been breathed into him'. Granting that, Mr. Hudson surrenders all the ground he had gained for historical criticism. Shylock is thereupon free to say, regardless of his maker, whatever it enters into the head of the critic to have him say; and here is the entering in of the wedge for all those modernizing tendencies which Mr. Hudson, like a scholar, abhors.

[10] In *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* (1542).

11 Shakespeare's intention is nowhere so evident as in the case of Shylock's outcry:

O Father Abraham, what these Christians are  
Whose own hard dealings teaches them suspect  
The thoughts of others! [1.3.160–62]

The satire is not bad; but the critics forget (what Shakespeare had seen to it that the audience should not forget) that this is unctuous piety, to hide 'a villain's mind'. It is such satire as that of the atrocious Barabas and Zariph and the devils in the mysteries.

[12] See F. V. Hugo, *Commentary on the Merchant of Venice*, transl. E. L. Samuel (London, 1863).

13 Sir Theodore Martin; J. W. Hales, *English Historical Review* ix, p. 656; Frederick Hawkins, *Theatre*, Nov. 1879, p. 194 (Quoted by Furness): – 'In availing himself of the greatest popular madness of the time, he sought to appease it' [see No. 25]. I sympathize with Mr. W. H. Hudson's impatience with the theory – 'perilously near to talking downright nonsense'. [See No. 14.]

14 *Ideas of Good and Evil* [London, 1903], Essay entitled 'At Stratford on Avon' [first published in *The Speaker*, 11 and 18 May 1901; see Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London, 1961), pp. 103–5].

[15] The shipwrecked handsome youth in George Eliot's novel *Romola* (1863) set at the time of the Renaissance: Tito, a Greek scholar, ends up betraying all, and especially his own father who is left destitute. He is an example of an ungrateful child.

[16] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, p. 102.

[17] In Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*.

[18] One-sided, partial; referring to only one of the parties concerned.

19 *Elizabethan Drama* (London, 2 vols., 1908), i, pp. 232, 373.

[20] The old tutor in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*.

21 [Wilhelm Michael Anton] Creizenach, [*Geschichte des neueren Dramas*, 5 vols., Halle (1893–1916)], iv, pp. 279–80.

22 [Stoll quotes *Il Pecorone* from] Hazlitt's *Shakespeare's Library*, Pt. ii. (6 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1875), vol. i, p. 348.

## 57 WILLIAM WINTER

1 Winter wrote to Booth in the autumn of 1872: 'I wish you would restore the last act of the comedy; the play has a most lame and impotent conclusion, ending it with Shylock's exit': D. J. Watermeier (ed.), *Between Actor and Critic. Selected Letters of Edwin Booth and William Winter* (Princeton, NJ, 1971), p. 39.

2 In the same letter Winter wrote: 'I must concede the truth and force of what you say about Shylock. But nobody who sees you play the part could ever suspect how little you like it. However cruel and terrible he is, you must admit the terrible injustice and the brutal cruelty which have made him so. I cannot get up any sympathy with a man who spits in another's

## Notes

face and kicks him about the market place, because he is of a different religious persuasion. And I surmise that old Shylock's prosperity in business was as obnoxious to Antonio as his religion' (*op. cit.*).

[3] Luke 6:29.

[4] Exod. 21:24.

[5] Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Rom. 12:29; Heb. 10:30.

[6] Irving, together with Ellen Terry, acted in Tennyson's *Becket* in 1893, with great success.

### 58 SIR ISRAEL GOLLANCZ

[1] *A compendious and most marvelous history of the latter tymes of the Jewes commune weale* (London, 1558).

### 59 SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH

[1] See No. 10.

[2] See No. 5.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] A time or period when something is forbidden by law.

[5] See No. 5.

### 60 ISADOR HENRY CORIAT

1 Karl Elze: *Essays*, 1874.

[2] Hudson: No. 14; Brandes: No. 45.

3 *Human Life in Shakespeare*, 1868.

[4] See No. 10.

5 Otto Weininger: *Sex and Character* [New York, 1906], p. 303.

6 Ernest Jones: 'Anal-Erotic Character Traits', *Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, 2nd. ed. 1918, p. 682.

7 S. Ferenczi: 'The Ontogenesis of Interest in Money', *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis*, 1916, Chap. XIII.

8 *Loc. cit.*

9 Ernest Jones: 'Hate and Anal Erotism in the Obsessional Neuroses'. *Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, 2nd. Edition. 1918.

### 61 GERALD FRIEDLANDER

[1] For a discussion of Richard Cumberland's (1732-1811) *The Jew* (1794) see J. Gross, *Shylock* (1992), pp. 188-9.

### 63 E. E. STOLL

[1] See Hudson, No. 15, and G. E. Woodberry, *Great Writers, Cervantes, Scott, Milton, Virgil, Montaigne, Shakespeare* (New York, 1912).

2 *The New Criticism* (New York, 1911), p. 17.

3 See Wendell's *Shakespeare* (1894), p. 171. [Barrett Wendell, *William Shakespere. A Study in Elizabethan Literature* (New York, 1894)]

[4] Oscar W. Firkins, Shakespeare critic.

[5] For Poel see Nos. 40 and 55.

## Notes

- 6 'Malizia, quasi dello scherno', – Croce, *Ariosto*, etc., p. 115. [Benedetto Croce, *Ariosto, Shakespeare e Corneille* (Bari, 1920); English transl., New York, 1920.]
- [7] See Genesis, 31: 1–35; Exodus, 12: 35–6.
- [8] See Henri Bergson [1859–1941], *Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris, 1900), which argued that a sense of the comic is produced when human actions display automatic, repetitive or disjointed qualities alien to human spontaneity. Laughter is society's defence against such inhuman mechanisms.
- 9 May 12, 1825, Eckermann. Goethe then complains of the weakening of this effect in the German version, where the son becomes only a relative. Evidently at this time it was necessary, in order that the comedy might remain such on the stage.
- 10 *Shakespeare* (London, 1909), p. 219. [John Masefield, *William Shakespeare*, in the Home University Library series (London and New York, 1911); Brander Matthews, *Shakespeare as a Playwright* (New York, 1913).]
- 11 *Portraits littéraires*, ii. 22. [*Critiques et portraits littéraires* (Paris, 1836–46).]
- 12 *Oeuvres* (1822), ii, 24, *Lettre à D'Alembert*. [1758, which contains a long attack on the Paris theatre, including a critique of Molière's *Le Misanthrope* for making Alceste's sincerity a subject of ridicule.]
- 13 See Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (Tudor Translations), 1900, pp. 159 ff., 185 and (pp. 184–5) the joke specially delighted in and approved of, the reply of Alonso, unfit for any drawing-room, or even a tap-room, to-day. And with what gusto the practical jokes are anticipated and carried through! 'I will not give my part of this sport', says Fabian in *Twelfth Night*, 'for a pension of thousands to be paid from the Sophy'. There are many parallels in Elizabethan drama, and Ambrogio in Aretino's *Marescalco* declares that rather than miss the wedding, outrageously forced upon the misogynist, he would forego preaching, mass, and vespers (evidently a deprivation) for a year.
- 14 See a criticism of the revival of *Epicoene*, *Saturday Review*, November 22, 1924.
- 15 *Henry IV*, III, (i), 21. Here, and in the clause just preceding: 'went to a bawdy-house not above once in a quarter of a hour', there are in quartos and Folio no stops whatever; but the Clarendon editors have rightly inserted them.
- [16] See Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, 4.3.170–1; *The Rivals*, 4.1.104; 404. Eccles is a character in Thomas William Robertson's play *Castle* (1867).
- 17 Professor Jastrow and Dr. Honigmann, like Heine (*mirabile dictu!*) before them, see no fun here. Racial sympathy hinders them. 'He would prefer burying his child and his gold', says the former, 'to knowing them to be in the possession of the Christian fools'. If Shylock buried it he would not forget the spot.
- 18 I used it also in the article on Shylock before I had read Bergson; it is, therefore, not owing to a preconceived theory.
- 19 The best example, of course, is Harpagon, in his famous soliloquy, which, practically a translation of Euclio's, contains the appeal to the audience – and then the words: 'ils me regardent tous et se mettent à rire'. Despite that, the part was played tragically in the romantic period, and down to Coquelin's time. 'A contresens', with a vengeance. [Euclio is the miser in Plautus's *Aulularia*, or *The Hidden Pot of Gold*.]
- 20 In the *Faerie Queene*, III, x, 13–15, Malbecco oscillates in the same comical fashion; so does Jaques in Jonson's *The Case is Altered* (1598), Act V, i, and iv.
- [21] 'Everyone present was delighted and they all mocked at the Jew, saying, "He who lays snares for others is caught himself" (*Il Pecorone*, transl. Geoffrey Bullough in his *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. 1 (London and New York, 1957), p. 474).
- [22] Sheridan, *The Duenna*, 3.7.80–2.
- 23 Sarcey, *Quarante ans [de théâtre* (Paris, 1900, 3 vols.), ii, 132. Sarcey is replying to a critic

## Notes

who declares that at Tartuffe the audience does not laugh: having seen the play a hundred times, he knows better.

- 24 Actors when not prejudiced feel a part as no spectator or critic can, and by them nowadays Shylock's comic villainy is recognized. The kindest of men, Mr. Poel, has recently made him comic; Moskovitch, still more recently, threw the emphasis on the fierce usurious Jew. Irving himself in a letter to Miss Terry admitted Shylock's ferocity though he said he could not play it; and that fine spirit, Lady Martin, says that in the trial scene 'my desire to find extenuations for Shylock's race and for himself leaves me, I see his fiendish nature fully revealed, and I long to pour down on his head the justice he has clamoured for and will exact without pity'. [See No. 37.]
- 25 *Shakespeare as a Playwright* (1913), pp. 249–50.
- [26] Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis* (1848–50), ch. 59.
- 27 It must be remembered that Shakespeare is skirting the fringes of a horrible superstitious prejudice – the notion that the Jews not only crucified Christian children, but, when they had a chance, ate of a Christian's flesh. In John Day's *Travels of Three English Brothers* (1607), the Jew Zariph says:
- Now by my soule 'twould my sprits much refresh  
To tast a banquet all of Christian's flesh. – p. 54.
- Sweet gold, sweete Jewell! but the sweetest part  
Of a Jewes feast is a Christian's heart. – p. 60.
- [28] See Heine, No. 10.
- 29 Certainly Mr. Poel is right in saying that at line 345 Shylock should tear the bond, as he does in *Il Pecorone* [see Bullough, *ed. cit.*, p. 474]. Cf. l. 234. 'Be merciful: take thrice thy money; bid me tear the bond'. Now, to get away, he does it himself.
- 30 *Shakespeare as a Playwright*, p. 151. Cf. also an essay by Mr. Matthews in *Columbia Shakespeare Studies* (1917).
- 31 *Shakespeare as a Playwright*, p. 145.
- 32 *Quarante ans de théâtres: Shylock* [*ed. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 380–8].
- 33 The pathetic conception of Shylock I have above charged to the account of the Romantic Age, though I have taken notice of a similar tendency in French criticism, regarding Molière, as early as in Rousseau. But the ferment of sentimentality and humanitarianism had long been at work, overwhelming the comic spirit and blinding readers to it even in the writings of the ancients. See Mr. Ernest Bernbaum's *Drama of Sensibility* (1915), chap. ii, for an interesting presentation of the misinterpretation (which lingers on almost to the present day) by Steele and Lessing, Diderot and Destouches, of Plautus and Terence, as if these comedies were sentimental and pathetic like their own, and, see pp. 61–2, for further light on the eighteenth-century sentimentalizing of Molière, particularly the *Misanthrope*.

## 64 ANDREW TRETIAK

- 1 Portia's words on Mercy 'sitting on the throne in the hearts of kings,' etc.
- 2 In his Notes to the edition of *The Merchant of Venice* in the New Shakespeare, 1926, pp. 113–14, where he infers from the alleged inconsistency in the depicting of the political background of the play in these places, that *The Merchant of Venice* is a work of two dramatists.
- 3 Even in the judgment-scene Shakespeare commits two similar logical blunders concerning Shylock's religion: (1) Portia makes an allusion to the Lord's Prayer as if Shylock ought to have repeated it every day; (2) Shylock speaks contemptuously of the 'stock of Barrabas' as if Barrabas, the symbol of highest villainy for a Christian, could have meant the same for a Jew.

## Notes

- 4 The libel of 1593 complains, that '[Elizabeth] has been contented to the great prejudice of her own natural subjects to suffer you [the foreigners] to live here in better case and more freedom than her own people.' This view was probably shared by Shakespeare.

### 65 HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER

- 1 This is one of the ever-recurring small strokes of stagecraft that are hardly appreciable apart from an Elizabethan stage. Shylock and Bassanio are to the front of the platform. Antonio, near the door, is by convention any convenient distance off; by impression too, with no realistic scenery to destroy the impression. Shylock is left isolated, so isolated that the long aside has all the importance and the force of a soliloquy.
- 2 And so strange has this seemed to many a producer of the play and actor of Shylock, that we have been given scenes of pantomime in which Shylock comes back from Bassanio's supper to find Jessica flown. The solitary figure with a lantern, the unanswered rapping at the door, has become all but traditional. Irving did it, [Provides other examples]. An ingenious variation upon a theme by Shakespeare, that yet merely enfeebles the theme. The lengthier elaboration of a Shylock seen distracted at the discovery of his loss is, of course, sheer stupidity, since Shakespeare has deliberately avoided the situation.
- 3 Upon the modern stage he usually has Tubal for a companion; one has even seen him seconded by a small crowd of sympathetic Jews. How any producer can bring himself so to discount the poignant sight of that drab, heroic figure, lonely amid the magnificence around, passes understanding!
- 4 It is hard to see why Antonio's taking the money to pass on to 'the gentleman that lately stole his daughter' and providing that, for his half-pardon 'he presently become a Christian,' should be so reprobated by some critics. If we have less confidence to-day than had Antonio in the efficacy of baptism, have we none left in the rightfulness of reparation? Not much in its efficacy, perhaps. Antonio, one must insist, does not mean to keep any of the money for himself. One hopes he never lapsed into self-righteousness in recalling this. Nothing is said, however, about the original three thousand ducats!

### 66 CECIL ROTH

- 1 I make this statement categorically on the authority of prolonged and detailed research done in preparation for my exhaustive *History of the Jews in Venice* (Philadelphia, 1930; Italian translation, Rome, 1932), on which other fresh information contained in the present essay is based. It is a curious coincidence that Shakespeare happens to give both of Antonio's closest friends names which have a strong Jewish flavour. The nearest actual parallel to Bassanio is Bassano, which, in modern Italy, is considered characteristic. Similarly, Gratiano, under the form Graziano, happens to be a typically Italian Jewish name. A certain Lazzaro di Graziano Levi had collaborated with the poet Solomon Usque in writing a play on Esther. This was produced more than once in Venice in the second half of the sixteenth century, and may conceivably have been published (as a *rifacimento* of it by Leone da Modena certainly was in 1612). It would be an extraordinary flight of fact if the name of one of Shakespeare's typical Venetian Christians were actually suggested to him, in some subconscious manner, by that of a contemporary Venetian Jew and fellow-playwright!
- [2] See Israel Zangwill, 'Shylock and Other Stage Jews', *The Voice of Jerusalem* (New York, 1921), pp. 238-95.
- [3] See Joseph Hunter, *New Illustrations of the Life, Studies, and Writings of Shakespeare. Supplementary to all the editions*, 2 vols. (London, 1845).

## Notes

- 4 Similarly, Ben Jonson's *Sir Politick Would-Be*, within the first week of his landing at Venice:  
    'I had read Contarene, took me a house,  
    Dealt with my Jews to furnish it with movables' –  
a characteristic profession of theirs in Venice, facilitated by their accumulations of second-hand commodities and unredeemed pledges. For a case in point, see the contemporary *Travels of Peter Wendy*, p. 92.

### 68 JOHN W. DRAPER

- 1 See E. E. Stoll, *Shakespeare Studies* (New York, 1927), p. 263; B. V. Wenger, 'Shylocks Pfund Fleisch.' *Shak. Jhrb.*, LXV. 92–174; and M. Schlauch, 'The Pound of Flesh Story in the North,' *JEGP*, XXX, 388 ff.
- 2 See John Foxe, *Sermon Preached at the Christening of a Certain Jew* (London, 1578) (Harvard Library). Although Foxe still charges that the Jews 'murdered Christ' (sig. E iii), and notes 'Christemens children here in Englande crucified by the Jewes Anno 1189.' yet he declares the race not 'altogether forsaken of God' (sig. A viii), and reminds his hearers that 'the very first yssues of our Christian faith sprang out of that stocke' (sig. B v).
- 3 J. L. Cardozo, *The Contemporary Jew in Elizabethan Drama* (Amsterdam, 1925). The Jews had been banished from England in 1290; and unconverted Jews were still rigorously expelled as late as 1609 (pp. 36 ff.).
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 9 and *passim*. The Spanish Jews had generally submitted to conversion in 1492.
- 5 Cf. L. L. Schücking, *Character Problems* (London, 1922), p. 92. Lopez bears only slight relation to the Jews of Elizabethan drama. But two of them were physicians; and the tradition started before him, and ended long after (Cardozo, p. 195, etc.). Apparently, no one thought of Lopez as a Jew until his trial; and the tradition of Shylock's red wig, if trustworthy, suggests a relation to the Judas legend rather than to the Spanish Lopez.
- 6 Schücking, p. 92; Cardozo, pp. 53, 238–39, 329; B. Voldeba, 'Over de Shylock-figuur.' *Neophilologus*. XIV, 196 ff.; T. Gainsford, *The Glory of England* (1622), p. 268; and H. Smith (1550?-91), *Examination of Usury* ([London?], 1751), 7; Coryat (*Crudities* [London, 1611], p. 234) distinguishes between the actual Venetian Jews and the English idea of them; and Shylock belongs in the latter category.
- 7 *Shakespeare's England* (Oxford, 1917). I. 217.
- 8 Even Jessica's elopement with a Christian was hardly as important to Shylock as the money she stole.
- 9 When the present study was almost completed, the writer came upon the similar suggestion of H. W. Farnam (*Shakespeare's Economics* [New Haven, 1931], pp. 4–5, reprinted from the *Yale Review*, April, 1913).
- 10 See *NED*. s.v.
- 11 *Sonnets*, VI, 5.
- 12 E.g., *Lear*, 3.2.86, and 4.6.163; *Timon*, 2.2.91 ff.; *Measure for Measure*, 3.2.7. Friar Lawrence refers to usurers' ill-gotten wealth (*Romeo*, 3.3.123); and Autolycus pictures them as begrudging, like Shylock, their servants' food (*Winter's Tale*, 4.4.253–4).
- 13 *Coriolanus*, 1.1.81–2.
- 14 *Timon*, 2.2.60 and *passim*. See the present writer, 'The theme of "Timon of Athens,"' *MLR*, XXIX (1934), 20 ff.
- 15 Stonex (*PMLA*, XXXI, 190) lists seventy-one plays, 1553–1637.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 191–93; and W. Reinicke, *Der Wucherer im Alteren Eng. Drama* (Halle, 1907), P. 6.
- 17 See J. D. Bea, 'Shylock and the Processus Belial,' *PQ*, VIII, 311 ff.
- 18 See Stoll, p. 255; and 'Shylock,' *JEGP*, X, 235 ff.



## Notes

- 19 Schücking, p. 92.
- 20 See the present writer, 'Sir John Falstaff,' *RES*, October, 1932.
- 21 Cardozo, p. 309. Of course, usury is incidental to Barabas.
- 22 P. Caesar, *Discourse Against Usurers* (London, 1578) (Huntington Lib.), p. 8 (*ed. princ.*, 1569).
- 23 See the present writer 'The theme of "Timon of Athens,"' *MLR*, XXIX (1934), 20 ff.
- 24 If the present theory is correct, one need not suppose that Shylock represents the Huguenot and Dutch refugees in London (A. Tretiak, *RES*, V, 402). [See No. 64.] Why should a Machiavellian Jew stand for the Protestants to whom England had given hospitable refuge? How had they capital for moneylending; and, if they did, why do not those who attack the practice brand it as foreign rather than admit its being done by Londoners 'of very good respect'? See [Henry] Smith [(1550?-1591), *Examination of Usury* (London, 1751)], p. 4; [R.] Fenton, [*Treatise of Usurie* (London, 1611)] p. 108; Stowe, *Survey* (London, 1618), p. 233. Cf. [R. H.] Tawney, 'Introduction' [to T. Wilson's *Discourse Upon Usury* (New York, 1925)].
- 25 Hall, p. 53.
- 26 [T.] Overbury, [*Characters* (London, 1856)], p. 134.
- 27 See Lodge, *Alarum* [ed. Hunt. Club, I, 44]; Harrison, *Description* (London, 1587), Book II, chap. v, etc. Cf. J. U. Neff, *Rise of the British Coal Industry*, II, 33 ff.
- 28 Hall, p. 65.
- 29 Apparently he preferred 'usance' or 'advantage'; cf. Smith, p. 22.
- 30 T. Adams, *Diseases of the Soule* (London, 1616), p. 30; Overbury, pp. 134, 151-3.
- 31 Tawney, 'Introduction,' pp. 125, 159.
- 32 R. H. Tawney and E. Power, *Tudor Economic Documents* (London, 1924), pp. 370 ff.
- 33 Tawney, 'Introduction,' pp. 126-27.
- 34 See Lodge, *Alarum*, I, 13; Harrison, Book II, ch. v; and H. Peacham, *Coach and Sedan* (London, 1925) (*ed. princ.* 1636).
- 35 T. Gainsford, *The Glory of England* (London, 1622), p. 249. One must discount something for the obvious chauvinism of the author.
- 36 *Merchant of Venice*, ed. Furness, p. 444; cf. 2.5.15.
- 37 P. 324.
- 38 See the present writer, 'Captain General Othello,' *Anglia*, XLIII, 296 ff.
- 39 See the present writer, 'Sir John Falstaff,' *RES*, VIII (1932), 414 ff.
- 40 The theory that Antonio is a prototype of Heraclitus seems to be supported only by his initial melancholy (G. C. Taylor, 'Is Antonio the "Weeping Philosopher"?' *MP*, XXVI, 161 ff.). Is Antonio a philosopher?
- 41 Cf. . . . W. Creizenach, *Shak. Jhrb.*, LI, 171 ff.; B. V. Wenger, *Shak. Jhrb.*, LXV, 92 ff. Cf. the present writer in the *Shak. Jhrb.*, LXII, 125 ff.
- 42 See W. W. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (New York, 1931).
- 43 See the present writer, 'This Poor Trash of Venice,' *JEGP*, XXX, 508 ff., and 'Honest Iago,' *PMLA*, XLVI, 724 ff.
- 44 See the present writer. 'The Realism of Shakespeare's Roman Plays,' *SP*, XXX (1933), 225 ff.
- 45 See the present writer, 'Desdemona: A Compound of Two Cultures,' *RLC*, XIII, 337 ff.
- 46 See the present writer, 'Olivia's Household,' *PMLA*, XLIX (1934), 797 ff.
- 47 See the present writer, 'Sir John Falstaff,' *RES*, VIII (1932), 414 ff.

## Notes

### 69 CAROLINE FRANCIS ELEANOR SPURGEON

- 1 For an assessment of Spurgeon's influence see Michael Taylor, *Shakespeare Criticism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 80–1, 98–9.

### 70 G. WILSON KNIGHT

- [1] Wilson Knight discussed the play's contrast between 'the tempests of tragedy and the music of romance' in *The Shakespearean Tempest* (London, 1932).

### 71 JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY

- [1] See the essay by Quiller-Couch [No. 59], which he reused in his New Cambridge edition.

### 72 H. B. CHARLTON

- 1 Note also that the sum, three thousand ducats, is in itself no really considerable item for a 'royal merchant' to be wrecked on. Shylock, without a moment's hesitation, knows that Tubal will have it by him. Portia is aghast at its smallness. But as these are points, unlike the ones adduced above, which emerge sporadically in later parts of the play, their significance has not been relied on as evidence for the interpretation of the scene in which the bond is proposed and accepted. Yet they do confirm that interpretation.

### 73 JOHN DOVER WILSON

- 1 H. S. Bennett, *Introduction* to his edition of *The Jew of Malta* [1931], p. 9.
- [2] See No. 10.
- 3 Cf. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, [1904], p. 21, and Charlton, Ch. VI ('Shakespeare's Jew'). [See No. 72.]
- [4] See No. 59 and Quiller-Couch and J. Dover Wilson's Introduction to *The Merchant of Venice* (New Shakespeare Edition, Cambridge, 1926).
- [5] See A. Sherbo (ed.), *Johnson on Shakespeare*, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 7 (New Haven, CT, 1968), p. 228.

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# Index

The Index is arranged in three parts: I. References to *The Merchant of Venice*; II: References to Shakespeare's other works; III: General Index.

In part II references to individual characters that contain no specific mention of a play or plays are not repeated under the relevant works.

## I THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

- Antonio 3-5, 7-10, 12-13, 15-16, 19n., 23-6, 28, 30, 32, 33, 36, 37, 39-43, 45, 48-9, 54-5, 59-60, 61-3, 65, 66, 68-9, 74-5, 79, 82-4, 92-5, 98, 102-6, 113, 115-6, 118, 121-3, 125-6, 128, 131-5, 140, 145-6, 148, 152, 154-7, 159, 160, 166-9, 171-80, 189, 191-8, 200, 202, 204, 206-19, 221-5, 227, 228, 231, 233-9, 242, 243, 248-50, 252, 254-8, 262-4, 266-7, 270-2, 274-7, 279, 280, 282-4, 286-8, 291-2, 301, 302, 304, 305, 307, 309, 310, 314, 318, 321, 325-6, 330, 332, 335-6, 349, 351-5, 358, 361-70, 372-3, 376, 379-88, 390, 392, 395-9, 402, 408n., 409n., 410n., 416nn., 418n.
- Arragon 28, 80, 135, 216, 236, 242, 255, 306, 349-50, 372
- Balthazar 85, 184, 339, 356
- Bassanio xiii-xv, xxix-xxx, 1, 3, 7, 13-16, 28, 30, 34, 37, 41-4, 49, 55, 56, 61-4, 74-5, 79-85, 88, 93, 94, 98, 100-07, 114, 119, 122-3, 126, 135, 141, 146, 150, 152, 154, 164, 167, 170, 173-5, 178, 180-1, 184, 180, 190, 192-4, 196-8, 205, 210-8, 222, 224, 232-3, 236-9, 242-3, 247-8, 250-2, 257-8, 262-3, 266, 271, 282-4, 286-90, 304-6, 308, 314, 321, 325, 327, 332, 334-6, 339, 348, 350-1, 354, 356, 360, 362-6, 369, 371-2, 374-6, 383-4, 386-7, 389, 396-9, 403n., 409n., 416nn., 422
- Bellario 48, 92, 113, 169, 184-5, 217-9, 237, 306, 349, 354
- Belmont 3, 13, 15, 16, 50, 115, 117, 122, 146, 183, 215-7, 219-20, 227-8, 236-8, 250, 257, 266, 286, 298, 304-6, 310, 326, 356, 374-7, 390, 395-7, 399, 407n.
- Caskets 28, 35, 49, 50, 100, 113, 161-3, 170, 175, 178, 181, 215, 231, 236, 237, 295, 318, 423
- Chas 243, 267, 357
- Comedy 129, 202, 262, 268-78, 323-42, 356-73
- Count Palatine 398
- Duke of Venice [Doge] xxxvii, 4, 45, 84, 106, 126, 150, 168-9, 191, 193-4, 197, 217-8, 239, 277, 292, 310, 315, 326, 332-3, 335, 344, 346, 349, 353-6, 376
- Faery Tale 378-82
- Final Act 28-9, 34, 225-6, 238, 248, 304, 310
- Gobbo, Launcelot 8, 38, 42, 60, 62, 69-70, 75, 83, 91, 94-5, 106-7, 120-1, 175-8, 207, 224-5, 236, 239, 245, 247, 262-3, 271, 274, 277, 289, 309, 313, 325-6, 331, 334, 337-8, 347, 349, 352, 360, 369, 372, 387, 389, 399, 405n., 407n.
- Gobbo, Old 349, 358, 372, 399
- Gratiano xxvii, 8, 37-8, 45, 56, 64, 91, 94, 102-4, 119, 141, 150, 152, 157, 166, 175, 179, 198, 205, 211, 218-9, 233-4, 238, 242-3, 248, 250, 254-5, 258, 261, 263, 267, 277, 282, 286, 306, 332-3, 335, 345-6, 349, 354-6, 366, 371, 374-5, 389, 394, 398-9, 416n.
- Jailer 286, 291
- Jessica xiv-xv, xxxii-iv, 3, 6-8, 12, 16, 24, 26, 28, 34, 36, 42-3, 52, 54, 56, 60, 62-4, 66-70, 83, 85, 89, 91, 94-5, 98, 103, 107, 119, 121-2, 126, 134, 141, 154, 170, 174, 175-81, 184, 197-8, 203, 207, 210, 213-7, 219-20, 223-4, 231-2, 236, 238, 243, 252, 257, 262, 264, 266, 277, 271, 275, 280, 288, 289, 291, 298, 300-1, 306, 311, 312, 317, 325, 326, 331, 334-6, 349, 351, 352, 356-60, 372, 374, 377, 379-81, 387, 389-90, 396, 408n., 410n., 416n., 417n.
- Leah 31, 43, 63, 66, 124-5, 131, 150, 156, 186, 201, 213, 235, 276, 277, 281-2, 284, 331, 337-8, 400, 405n.
- Lorenzo 3, 5, 7, 13, 23-4, 36, 55, 60, 62, 64, 68, 85, 89, 107, 113, 119, 126, 134, 140, 146, 175, 177-80, 184, 187, 207, 211, 213-4, 217, 219-20, 224, 235-6, 238, 243, 250, 257, 264, 275, 288-90,

## Index

- 300–1, 306, 346, 349, 355–6, 372, 374, 377, 379, 389, 395–6
- Morocco 28, 34, 80, 113, 135, 164, 189, 215–6, 232, 236, 242, 285, 306, 349, 371
- Nerissa 34, 61, 64, 70, 81, 85, 89, 91, 94, 103, 113, 121–2, 146, 175, 181, 184, 197–8, 204, 216–9, 231, 234, 236–9, 243, 286, 306, 349–50, 353–4, 356, 372, 397
- Portia xiii–xv, xxii–xxiii, 2–6, 8, 11, 13–16, 28, 34–6, 44, 46–51, 55, 59, 61–4, 68, 70–3, 80–1, 84–9, 91–4, 98, 100, 102–9, 112–5, 117, 119, 121–3, 126, 128, 135, 140, 143, 145–6, 154, 157, 160–4, 168–75, 178–81, 183–90, 192, 196–8, 204–5, 207, 210, 212, 215–9, 222–3, 229, 231, 232, 236–9, 242–3, 248, 250, 255–7, 263, 265–6, 285–6, 292, 298–301, 305–10, 315, 318, 327, 332–3, 348–50, 353, 355–6, 366, 371–3, 375–7, 379, 389–90, 394–9, 405nn., 419n., 423, 427
- Portia's father 59, 231, 307
- Salerio/Salarino xv–xvi, 23, 43, 56, 62, 74, 95, 101, 166, 175–6, 179, 198, 211–2, 214, 238, 254, 256, 258, 261, 263, 290, 304, 314, 333, 337, 352, 381, 387, 400
- scriptural allusions 44, 355, 369, 375–6, 413n., 414n., 417n., 425, *see also* Bible
- Shylock xii–xli, 1–34, 36–45, 47–9, 52, 54–70, 73–5, 78–85, 89–92, 95, 101–10, 114–6, 118–9, 121–37, 140–57, 159–61, 165–70, 172–4, 176–9, 185–8, 191–219, 221–5, 227–32, 234–7, 239–40, 242–3, 245, 247–53, 255–7, 259–66, 268–77, 279–93, 295, 297–302, 304–9, 311–8, 321–2, 324–8, 330–42, 344–60, 363, 367–77, 379–402, 404–7, 409–17, 419, 420, 423–7
- Solanio xv–xvi, 43, 74, 95, 101, 166, 175, 198, 211–2, 214, 238, 242, 254, 261, 263, 273, 276, 290, 304, 325, 333, 337, 352, 387, 398, 400
- Sources xvi, 8, 35–7, 79, 125, 204, 230–2, 241, 242, 251, 270, 275, 277, 295, 311–2, 332, 367, 412n., 414n., 422 (*see also* III General Index under *Gesta Romanorum*; Giovanni, Ser; Gosson, Stephen)
- Structure xiii–xv, 35–38, 77–8, 121–3, 158–82, 203, 210, 229, 231, 233, 241, 318, 349, 410n.
- Trial scene, the 59–60, 75, 160–6, 170–1, 237, 238, 309–10, 376–7, 409n.
- Tubal 24, 43, 63, 75, 119, 121, 156, 166, 175–6, 191, 198, 215, 224, 228, 235, 239, 243, 262, 267, 271, 273, 277, 288, 290, 330–1, 349, 352, 353, 357, 360, 375–6, 388, 400, 419n.
- Usury 23, 41, 108–9, 168, *see also* in III General Index, Usury

### II SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS (EXCLUDING *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*)

- Aaron (*Titus Andronicus*) xv, 270, 272, 276
- Aguecheek, Sir Andrew (*Twelfth Night*) 325
- All's Well That Ends Well* 27, 98, 102, 327, 370
- Ariel (*The Tempest*) 242
- As You Like It* 119–20, 236–7, 255, 303, 321, 329, 380, 407n.
- Autolycus (*The Winter's Tale*) 236, 329, 417n.
- Banquo (*Macbeth*) 275
- Bardolph (*Henry V*) 275
- Beatrice (*Much Ado About Nothing*) 46, 50, 119, 204
- Belch, Sir Toby (*Twelfth Night*) 364
- Benedick, (*Much Ado About Nothing*) 205, 378
- Berowne (*Love's Labour's Lost*) 102, 378
- Bertram (*All's Well That Ends Well*) 102
- Brutus (*Julius Caesar*) 18n., 84, 211, 215, 320, 324
- Cade, Jack (*2 Henry IV*) 327
- Caius, Dr. (*Merry Wives of Windsor*) 359
- Caliban (*The Tempest*) 246, 297, 308
- Cassio (*Othello*) xxxiv, 88
- Citizens (*Coriolanus*) 368
- Clowns (in Shakespeare) 276
- Comedy of Errors, The* 202, 334
- Constance (*King John*) 204
- Cordelia (*King Lear*) 250
- Coriolanus 270
- Coriolanus* 417n.
- Cymbeline* 98, 195
- Desdemona (*Othello*) 188–9, 250, 370, 418n.
- Dogberry (*Much Ado About Nothing*) 120, 245
- Duke (*Twelfth Night*) 121, 379
- Edmund (*King Lear*) 272, 380, 392
- Edgar (*King Lear*) 39
- Fabian (*Twelfth Night*) 325
- Falstaff, Sir John (*I and II Henry IV; The Merry Wives of Windsor*) xix, xxxiv, 98, 275, 308, 324, 331, 333, 364, 368, 370, 418n.
- Fenton (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*) 405n.
- Fool (*King Lear*) 333
- Friar Lawrence (*Romeo and Juliet*) 417n.
- Goneril (*King Lear*) 380
- Hal, Prince (*I and II Henry IV*) 370
- Hamlet xxvi, 8, 14, 39, 65, 144, 200, 221, 249, 253, 397
- Hamlet* 88, 99, 244–5, 247, 311
- Helena (*All's Well That Ends Well*) 102
- Henry IV* (plays) 1, 333
- Henry V 88, 275, 370
- Henry V* 347, 370
- Henry VI, Part Two* 407n.
- Henry VI, Part Three* 244, 407n.

## Index

- Henry VIII* 110  
 Horatio (*Hamlet*) 334  
 Hotspur (*I Henry IV*) xxxiv, 370
- Iago (*Othello*) xv, xix, xxxiv, 2, 22, 149, 200, 219, 275–6, 281, 380–1, 392, 418n.  
 Imogen (*Cymbeline*) 188, 250  
 Isabella (*Measure for Measure*) 46
- Jaques (*As You Like It*) 221, 397  
 John, Don (*Much Ado About Nothing*) 381  
 Julia (*Two Gentleman of Verona, The*) 232  
 Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet*) 50, 102, 119, 188–9, 204, 300  
 Julius Caesar 410n.  
*Julius Caesar* 245, 370, 410n.
- King John* 347  
 King Lear 39, 65  
*King Lear* 98, 311, 333, 370
- Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*) 113  
 Launce (*Two Gentleman of Veron.*) 309–10  
 Leontes (*The Winter's Tale*) 65  
*Love's Labour Lost* 70, 99, 120, 140, 202, 245, 333  
 Lucetta (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*) 232
- Macbeth 65, 144, 149, 275, 320, 325, 334, 392  
*Macbeth* 144, 186, 241–2, 246, 311, 374, 408  
 Maria (*Twelfth Night*) 325  
 Mark Antony (*Julius Caesar*) 245  
 Malvolio (*Twelfth Night*) xvii, 325, 329, 401  
*Measure for Measure* 27, 270, 327  
 Mercutio (*Romeo and Juliet*) 201, 205, 276, 333, 378  
*Merry Wives of Windsor, The* 83, 140–1, 324, 370, 392, 407n.  
*Midsommer Night's Dream, A* xii, 245, 329, 348, 371  
*Much Ado About Nothing* 27, 50, 119–20, 205, 270, 329, 333, 407n.
- Navarre, King of (*Love's Labour's Lost*) 140  
 Nym (*Henry V*) 275
- Oliver (*As You Like It*) 380–1  
 Olivia (*Twelfth Night*) 418  
 Ophelia (*Hamlet*) 39, 145, 188, 250
- Orlando (*As You Like It*) 380  
 Othello xxx, 65, 88, 156, 253, 275, 418n.  
*Othello* 87, 99, 118, 141, 186, 306
- Percy (*I and 2 Henry IV*) 88  
 Perdita (*The Winter's Tale*) 405n.  
 Portia (*Julius Caesar*) 84, 215  
 Prospero (*The Tempest*) 392, 396
- Quickly, Mistress (*I and 2 Henry IV, Henry V*) 333
- Richard II 275, 348, 407n.  
*Richard II* 245, 296, 298, 347  
 Richard III xv, xix, 52, 119, 149, 219, 275, 367, 392  
*Richard III* 296, 298, 306, 407n.  
 Romeo 102, 300  
*Romeo and Juliet* 50, 98–9, 188, 209, 254, 296, 301, 378, 380, 417n.  
 Rosalind (*As You Like It*) 46, 119, 188, 204, 236–7, 350  
 Rosaline (*Love's Labour's Lost*) 102
- Shallow (*2 Henry IV*) xl, 329; (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*) xvii  
 silence (*2 Henry IV*) xl n., xvii  
 sonnets, 258; No. 6 417n.; No. 20, 365–6; No. 68, 409n.; Nos. 71–4, 119; No. 87, 119; No. 93, 119; No. 97, 119; No. 99, 119; No. 111, 404n.
- Taming of the Shrew The* 202, 310, 334  
*Tempest, The* 50, 188, 242, 300, 392, 396  
 Timon 101, 397  
*Timon of Athens* 368, 409n., 417nn.  
 Tressel (*Richard III*) 200  
*Troilus and Cressida* 244, 327  
*Twelfth Night* 348, 379  
*Two Gentlemen of Verona The* 118, 120, 132, 204, 232, 309–10  
*Two Noble Kinsmen, The* 421
- Verges (*Much Ado About Nothing*) 120  
 Viola (*Twelfth Night*) 119, 350
- Winter's Tale, The* 329, 348, 417  
 Witches (*Macbeth*) 246, 275

### III GENERAL INDEX

- Abigail (*The Jew of Malta*), see Marlowe, Christopher  
 Abraham (*Genesis*) 83, 119, 286, 411n., see also Bible  
 Adler, Alfred 15  
 Alceste (*Le Misanthrope*), see Molière  
 Alexander, Bill 13  
 Alger, William Rounseville 281  
 Aliens 343–7, 359  
 Allen, Shirley, S. 498n.  
 Allyen, Edward 268, 392  
 Alma-Tadema, Sir Lawrence 126  
 Alvarez, Alfred A. 11  
 Anderson, David John 133–4
- Anson, Peter 12, 18n.  
 Anti-Semitism 274, 276, 347, 351, 367, 390–6  
 Arden edition of Shakespeare (Charles Knox Pooler, 1905) xx, 241–3  
 Aretino, Pietro 329; *Marescalco*, 414n.  
 Argan (*Le Malade Imaginaire*), see Molière  
 Ariosto, Ludovico 329  
 Aristophanes 255, 328–9  
 Aristotle 272, 307, 369; *Politics*, 411n.  
 Arnold, Matthew xxv; *Literature and Dogma* (1873), 8  
 Arnolphe (*L'École des Femmes*), see Molière  
 Asquith, Herbert H. (Lord Oxford) 303

## Index

- Auden, Wystan Hugh 15  
*Aulularia, or The Hidden Pot of Gold*, see Plautus  
 Ayrton, Randle 10
- Babula, William 16  
 Barabas (*The Jew of Malta*), see Marlowe  
 Bacon, Francis 4, 110, 218, 409n., 411n.  
 Baker, George Pierce 270, 277  
 Baker, William 18n., 406n.  
 Bancroft, Marie Effie, Lady 110, 405n.  
 Bancroft, Sir Squire 110, 405n.  
 Barber, C. L. 14  
 Barker, Harley Granville xxx–xxxii, xxxiv–v,  
 348–356, 416n.  
 Barrett, Lawrence 282, 340  
 Barton, John 12–13  
 Belasco, David 421  
 Béline (*Le Malade Imaginaire*), see Molière  
 Benson, Frank 10  
 Bergerac, Cyrano de, *Le Pédant joué* 331  
 Bergson, Henri 326, 328–30, 339, 392, 414nn.; *Le  
 Rire* (1900), xvii, 414n.  
 Betterton, Thomas 1  
 Bible; Old Testament xl, 213, 224; *Genesis*, xxvii,  
 xxix, 23–4, 41–4, 83, 89, 95, 119, 168, 213, 224,  
 245, 272, 286, 288–9, 297, 317, 326, 338–9, 345,  
 351, 357, 385, 409n., 411n., 413n., 414n.; *Exodus*,  
 326, 413n., 414n.; *Leviticus*, xxxix; *Deuteronomy*,  
 403n., 413n.; *Psalms*, xxxix, xl; *Proverbs*, 225,  
 409n.; *Ecclesiastes*, xxxix; *Esther*, 416n., see also  
 Abraham; Cain; Hagar; Iscah; Jacob; Joseph;  
 Laban; Leah; Moses; Rachel; Rebecca; ; New  
 Testament, 298; *Luke*, 413n.; *John*, 294; *Romans*,  
 413n.; *Ephesians*, 294; *Timothy*, 405n.; *Hebrews*,  
 413n., see also Jesus; Lord's Prayer; Pharisees; St.  
 Paul
- Blinn, Hansjürgen xl n., xli n.  
 Boas, Frederick Samuel xviii, xix, xxi, xxiii–xxiv, 6,  
 209–20, 409n.  
 Boerne, Ludwig 282  
 Booth, Edmund (as Shylock) xxv, 3, 269, 334  
 Booth, Edwin Thomas (as Shylock) 200–1, 279,  
 281–3, 412n.  
 Booth, John Wilkes 200  
 Booth, Junius Brutus (as Shylock) 200, 279–82  
 Borrow, George 249  
 Brands, George xviii, 221–6, 269, 311, 314, 409n.,  
 413n.  
 Bradley, Andrew Cecil 269–70, 314, 419n.  
 Brandl, Alois 269  
 Brendl, Ulric, see Ibsen  
 Brereton, Austin xxvii, xli n.  
 Bridges-Adams, William 10  
 Bronstein, Herbert 16  
 Brock, Clutton 324  
 Brooke, Stopford Augustus xxvii, xix, 7–8, 233–40  
 Browning, Elizabeth Barrett 5  
 Browning, Robert, 5, 274; 'Holy Cross Day ...'  
 409n.  
 Bruno, Giordano 264
- Bull Theatre 251  
 Bullough, Geoffrey, trans. *Il Pecorone* 414n.  
 Bulman, James xxvi–xxvii, xxix, xxi–xxxii, xli n.,  
 18n.  
 Bulwer, Lytton Edward, *Money* 117, 405n.  
 Burnett, F. E. 97  
 Burbage, Richard (as Shylock) 82, 105, 142, 200, 268  
 Burne-Jones, Sir Edward 126, 145, 259, 408n.
- Cain (*Genesis*) 95, see also Bible  
*Caleb Shillocke, his Prophecies, or the Jewes Prediction* 357  
 Calhoun, Eleanor 8  
 Cambridge edition of Shakespeare (1863–1866) x,  
 140, 409n., see also Globe edition  
 Campbell, Thomas xvii, 52–3, 410n.  
 Cardozo, J. L. 370, 417n., 418n.  
 Carroll, Lewis, *Alice in Wonderland* 306  
 Casson, Lewis (as Shylock) 10  
 Cato 24  
 Castiglione, Baldassare, *Il Cortegiano* 330, 414n.  
 Cecchi, Giovanni Maria, *Gli Incantesimi* 329  
 Cervantes, *Don Quixote* 324–5  
 Chambers, Sir Edmund Kerchever 254–8, 405n.  
 Chapman, George 329  
 Charlton, Henry Buckley xix, xxii–xxiii, xxxvi, 11,  
 383–90, 419nn.  
 Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Prioress's Tale* 298; *The  
 Merchant's Tale*, 368  
 Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich 333  
 Child, Harold 3, 17n.  
 Clarke, Charles Cowden xviii, 6, 8, 91–6, 188,  
 404n., 405n.  
 Clarke, Mary Cowden 3  
 Clarke, William George (Cambridge edition of  
 Shakespeare) x, 140  
 Claude le Lorain 47  
 Cléante (*L'Avare*), see Molière  
 Clive, Kitty Mrs. 103  
 Clurman, Harold 12  
 Coghlan, Neville 14  
 Coghlan, Charles F. 116, 405n.  
 Coke, Sir Edward 138, 142, 274, 337  
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 91, 324, 378; *Christabel*,  
 411n.; *Table Talk*, 411n.  
 Comédie Française 145  
 Cook, Dutton xxvii  
 Cooke, George Frederick 200, 279–80  
 Coquelin, Benoît-Constant xvii, 332, 414n.  
 Coriat, Isador Henry 15, 311–5, 413n.  
 Creizenach, Wilhelm Michael Anton 269, 323, 343,  
 412n., 418n.  
 Croce, Benedetto 326  
*Croxtan Play, of the Sacrament, The* 345  
 Cumberland, Richard, 32–4; *The Jew* 319, 413n.  
*Cursor Mundi* 270
- Daniel Deronda*, see Eliot, George  
 Danson, Lawrence 15  
 Dante Alighieri 276  
 D'Avenant, Sir William 156, 408n.

## Index

- Davis, Israel 4, 131–2, 406n.  
 Day, John, *Travels of Three English Gentlemen* 273  
 Dekker, Thomas 250, 328–30, 410n.  
 Delavigne, Casimir 153, 408n.  
 Dennis, Nigel 11  
 Dexter, John 14  
 Dickens, Charles 5, 335  
 Disraeli, Benjamin xxxi  
*Doctor Faustus*, see Marlowe  
 Doggett, Thomas 1  
 Don Mathias (*The Jew of Malta*), see Marlowe  
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor Mikhailovich 333  
 Dowden, Edward 8  
 Draper, John William xxxix, 9, 367–70, 417nn., 418n.  
 Dryden, John 397  
*Duenna*, see Sheridan
- Edelman, Charles 18n., 403n.  
*Edward II*, see Marlowe  
*Edward III* (Anon.) 421  
 El Seyonpi (Isaac P. Noyes) 191–5  
 Eliot, George 4–5, 18n., 65, 131; *Daniel Deronda* (Mordecai Lapidoth), 4, 132; *Romola* (Tito Melema), 275, 412n.  
 Elizabeth I 5, 138–40, 272, 304, 318, 343, 369, 394, 416n.  
 Elze, Karl 210, 219, 311, 410nn., 413n.  
*Englishmen for My Money*, see Haughton  
 Essex, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of (Robert Devereux) 138–9, 266, 394  
 Esther, see Bible; Old Testament  
 Euclio, see Plautus  
 'Eversley' edition of Shakespeare (ed. C. H. Herford) 229
- Farnam, H. W. 417n.  
 Farren, George xviii, xxi, 39–45, 404n.  
 Faucit, Helena, Lady Martin xviii, 4, 183–7  
*Faust*, see Goethe  
 Ferenczi, S. 313, 413nn.  
 Fielding, Henry 329, 335; *Joseph Andrews*, 324  
 Firkins, Oscar, W. 325, 413n.  
 Fisch, Harold xxxviii  
 Fitzgerald, Edward 110, 129, 406n.  
 Fletcher, John 110, 329, 406n; see also Beaumont, Francis  
 Forrest, Edwin (as Shylock) 281  
 France, M. Anatole 270  
 Freud, Sigmund 15, 19n., 312–4, 364  
 Friedlander, Gerald xx–xxi, 9, 316–9, 413n.  
 Fujimura, Thomas 15  
 Furness, Horace Howard, Jr. x, 3, 5–6, 8, 20, 22, 88, 220, 245, 269, 281, 336, 403nn., 410nn., 411nn., 412nn., 418n.  
 Furnivall, Frederick James xviii, 4, 18n., 77, 97, 118–20, 128, 136, 269, 406n., 407n.
- Garrick, David (as Shylock) 20, 103, 156, 285  
 George Dandin, see Molière
- Gernutus, Ballad of* 311  
 Geronimo 142  
 Geronimo (*Le Médecin malgré*), see Molière  
 Gerontus, *The Three Ladies of London* 203, 205, 230, 295  
 Gervinus, Georg Gottfried xviii, xix, 7, 17, 88, 97–107, 118, 210, 405n., 409n.  
*Gesta Romanorum* 35–6, 79, 241  
 Gielgud, Sir John (as Shylock) xxxvi, 10  
 Giles, Henry 311, 413n.  
 Giovanni, Ansaldo 204, 242  
 Giovanni, Giannetto 251  
 Giovanni, Ser, *Il Pecorone* xvi, 8, 35–7, 88, 125, 251, 270, 277, 311, 332, 367, 407n., 412n., 414n.  
 Globe edition of Shakespeare (ed., W. A. Wright) 199, 409n.  
 Globe Theatre 116, 129, 196, 219  
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 327; *Faust*, 274; Eckermann, 414n.  
 Gollancz, Sir Israel xxxviii, 8–9, 12, 294–302, 413n.  
 Gosson, Stephen 99, 379, 403n.; and *The Jew*, 229–30, 251, 296; *School of Abuse*, 229, 232, 307, 309, 405n., 406n., 410n.  
 Gould, Thomas R. 279, 281  
 Granville, George, *The Jew of Venice* (1701) 1, 20  
 Gresham, Sir Thomas 369  
 Gross, John xxxiii–ix, xl–xli n., 1, 8, 11, 17n., 18n., 413n.  
 Grund, G. R. 15
- Hagar (*Genesis*) 42, 245, 289, 338, see also Bible  
 Hales, J. W. 412  
 Hall, Joseph (Bishop) 337  
 Hall, Sir Peter 14  
 Hallam, Henry xii  
 Halliwell (afterwards, Halliwell-Phillipps), James Orchard xix, 8, 18n., 77–8, 406n., 407n.  
 Halpin, N. J. Rev 6  
 Hardy, Thomas 5  
 Harpagon (*L'Avare*), see Molière  
 Haslam, John 44, 404n.  
 Hassel, R. C. 15  
 Hatton, Joseph xxv, 126, 153–7, 408n.  
 Haughton, William, *Englishmen for My Money* 273  
 Hawkins, Frederick xviii, xxv, 4–5, 124–8, 406n., 412n.  
 Hawkins, Sir John 272, 411n.  
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel 397  
 Hazlitt, William xviii, xxv, 2–3, 6–7, 30–4, 91–3, 125–6, 150, 269, 271–2, 281, 308, 310, 333, 403n., 404n., 410n.  
 Hebler, R. A. C. 210  
 Heine, Heinrich xii, xviii, xxxiii, 2–3, 6–7, 54–8, 219, 260, 307, 311, 338, 392, 415n.  
 Henderson, John (as Shylock) 285  
 Henslowe, Philip 139–40, 230, 406n., 407n.  
 Herford, Charles Harold x, 229–32, 410n.  
 Hitler, Adolf xxxvi, xxxvii, 394  
 Hoffman, Dustin (as Shylock) 14  
 Holaday, Allan 15



## Index

- Hole, Richard 2, 22–6, 403n.  
 Holinshed, Raphael 118  
 homosexuality 361–6, 423  
 Honigmann, D. xxxiii, 274  
 Horace, *Ars Poética* 111, 405n.  
 Horn, Franz 210  
 Howell, James 337  
 Hudson, Henry, N. xviii, 7–8, 68–76, 311, 323, 404n., 411nn., 412nn., 413nn.  
 Hugo, François Victor 275, 282  
 Hunter, John 370  
 Hunter, Joseph 358, 409n., 416n.  
 Hurst, Arthur, F. 361  
 Hyman, L. W. 15
- Ibsen, Henrik Johann 274, 30, 341; *Rosmersholm* (Ulric Brendel), 274, 412n.  
 Irving, Henry (as Shylock) xix–xx, xxiv–xxx, xxxii, xxxv, 3–4, 6, 10, 12, 110, 124, 126–7, 132, 134–6, 143–7, 153–7, 202, 269–70, 275, 279–80, 282, 285–93, 405, 408n., 411n., 413n.  
 Irving, Lawrence xxvii, xli n.  
 Iscar (*Genesis*) 297, *see also* Bible
- Jack Drum's Entertainment*, Mammon in 273  
 Jacob (*Genesis*) 42, 43, 89, 168, 213, 224, 245, 272, 317, 339, 351, 385, *see also* Bible  
 Jacques, Maître (*L'Avare*), *see* Molière  
 James, Geraldine 14  
 James, Henry xxviii, xxxv, 143–6, 408n.  
 Jameson, Anna Brownell xviii, 3, 6, 46–51, 64, 71, 86, 112, 404n.  
 Jastrow, Ignaz xxxiii, 277  
 Jerrold, Douglas 279, 281  
 Jespersen, Otto xii, 244–6, 411n.  
 Jesus, teachings of xxxviii–xi, 375–6, *see also* Bible  
*Jew, The*, *see* Gosson, Stephen  
*Jew of Malta, The*, *see* Marlowe  
*Jew of Venice* 118, 410n.  
 Jewish history 147–52, 243, 316  
 Jews in Elizabethan drama 273–4; in England, 124, 134, 136–42, 147–9, 206, 209–10, 243, 261, 296–8, 344–5, 357–60, 367–8, 406, 417n.; in Germany, 358–51; in Holland, 141; in Italy, 360; in Portugal, 359; in Spain, 155, 357–60, 367, 417n.; in Tunis, 155; in Turkey, 358–9; in Venice 151–2, 357–60, 369, 416n., 417n.
- Jewsbury, Geraldine E. 187  
 Jiji, Vera M. 15–6  
 Jonson, Ben 329, 392, 417n.; *Bartholomew Fair*, 406n.; *The Case is Altered*, 414n.; *The Silent Woman* (*Epicoene*), 330, 414n.  
 Johnson, Dr. Samuel 396, 419n.  
 Jolson, Al xxxii  
 Jones, Ernest 313–4, 413nn.  
 Jordan, Thomas 268  
 Joseph (*Genesis*) 42, *see also* Bible  
 Jourdain, M. (*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*), *see* Molière  
 Judas 273  
 Jung, Carl 15
- Katharine of Arragon 138  
 Kean, Charles (as Shylock) 153–4, 281, 307, 408n.  
 Kean, Edmund (as Shylock) xxv, 2–3, 30–1, 34, 54, 64, 124, 145, 155, 197, 200, 260, 269, 279, 281  
 Keen, Maurice 10  
 Kemble, Charles 115  
 Kemble, John Philip (as Shylock) 31, 52, 155  
 Kentrup, Norbert (as Shylock) 14  
 Kierkegaard, Søren xiii  
 Klein, David 16  
 Kleinberg, Seymour 16  
 Klopstock, Friedrich Gottlieb 52  
 Knight, Charles xviii, 7, 61–4, 404n., 407n.  
 Knight, George Wilson xviii, 13, 374–7, 419n.  
 Knight, Joseph xxvi  
 Komisarjevsky, Theodore 10  
 Kotzebue, August von 270  
 Krane, Edna 15  
 Kreyssig, Friedrich xviii, 88–90, 210, 409n.  
 Kyd, Thomas, *Spanish Tragedy, The* 8, 299–301, 343
- Laban (*Genesis*) 213, 272, 339, 351, *see also* Bible  
 Langham, Michael 11  
 Leah (*Genesis*) 43, 338, *See also* Bible  
 Lee, Sir Sidney xxxix, 5, 136–42, 209, 230, 245, 249, 334, 406n., 409n., 410n.  
 Leicester, Earl of (Robert Dudley) 272  
 Leigh-Noel, Madeline (Mrs. M. L. Elliott) xviii, 7, 188–90, 408n.  
 Lelyveld, Toby, *Shylock on the Stage* 10, 18n.  
 Lemaitre, Jules 324, 329, 341  
 Leopold edition of Shakespeare (ed., F. J. Furnivall, 1877) 118  
 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, *Nathan the Wise* 319  
 Lever, J. W. 14  
 Lewalski, Barbara 15  
 Lewes, George Henry xxv–xxvi, 35–6; (as Shylock), 404; *Letters*, 406n.; 'Macready's Shylock,' 65–7; 'On Actors and the Art of Acting,' 65  
 Lewis, Clive Staples 14  
 Lichtenberg, Georg Christoph xxv, 2, 20–1, 403n.  
 Lipps, Theodor 324  
 Lloyd, William Watkins xiv, 6–7, 79–85, 404n.  
 Lodge, Thomas, *Looking-glasse* 369, 418n.  
 London 344–6, 367–70, 393, 418n.  
 Lopez, Don Roderigo (Ruy) 5, 124–5, 128, 136–42, 209, 215, 222, 230, 301, 317, 337, 345, 367, 394, 407n., 408n., 410n., 417n.  
 Luther, Martin 273–4, 337; *Von der Juden und ihren Lügen*, 412n.  
 Lyceum Theatre 12, 110, 124, 126, 135–6, 143–7, 153, 261, 285  
 Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, 10
- Maccoby, Hyam 16  
 Macklin, Charles xxv, 2, 20, 63, 116, 200, 260, 268–9, 279–80, 289, 307, 360, 403n.  
 Macready, William Charles xxv–xxvi, 3, 65–7, 200, 269, 281–2, 340, 404n.  
 Maeterlinck, Maurice 274

## Index

- Mahood, Molly 13, 18n., 421  
 Mansfield, Richard 280  
*Marescalco*, see Aretino  
 Marlowe, Christopher xxii, 296, 299; *Doctor Faustus*, 230, 296; *Edward II*, 296, 298, 407n.; *The Jew of Malta*, xvi, 13, 16, 41, 124, 139, 203, 206, 209, 215, 224, 227, 230–2, 241, 251, 261–6, 273–4, 276, 297, 311, 317, 326, 343, 345, 368, 391–2, 409n., 410n., 411n., 412n., 418n.; *Tamburlaine*, 230, 296, 298  
 Marowitz, Charles 13  
 Marshall, Francis Albert 202–5, 409n.  
 Marston, John 329  
 Martin, Helena Faucit 183–7, 415n.  
 Martin, Theodore 4, 6, 18n., 183, 410n., 412n.  
 Masfield, John 9, 327, 414n.  
 Massinger, Philip, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* 149, 409n.  
 Matthews, Brander 327, 333, 340–1  
 Mellish, Fuller xxvii  
*Merchant, The*, see Wesker  
 Meredith, George 259, 392  
 Michelangelo, Buonarroti 270  
 Midrash 298–9  
 Miller, Jonathan xxxi–xxxii, 12, 18n.  
 Milman, Henry Hart 316  
 Milton, Ernest (as Shylock) 10  
 Milton, John, *Paradise Lost* 115, 404n., 405n.  
 Modena, Leone da 416n.  
 Molière [Jean Baptiste Poquelin] xvii, xxx, 325, 328–31, 334, 341; *L'Avare*, 122–3, 254, 263, 326–9, 331–2, 411n., 414n.; *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, 323; *L'École des Femmes*, 323; *L'École des maris*, 323, 328, 334–5; *Les Femmes savantes*, 333; *George Dandin, ou le Mari confondu*, 323; *Le Malade imaginaire*, 331; *Le Médecin malgré lui*, 323; *Le Misanthrope*, 327–8, 414n.; *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, 323; *Tartuffe*, 86, 326–8, 333, 415n.  
 Monsarrat, Gilles xl  
*Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, see Molière  
 Morality plays 368  
 Morsbach, Lorenz 269  
 Morwyng, Peter 297  
 Moscovitch, Maurice (as Shylock) 9–10, 316, 415  
 Moses 23–4, 41, 44, see also, Bible  
 Mostel, Zero 14  
 Moulton, Richard Green xii–xiii, xvii, xix, xxii, xxiv, xxx, xl n., 6, 158–82, 218, 408n., 409nn.  
 Muhel, Francisque 52  
 Muir, Kenneth 12  
 Murray, Alma 6  
 Murry, John Middleton 378–82, 419n.  
 Mystery plays 273  
  
 National Theatre London xxxi, 12, 14  
 Nazis xxxv–xxxviii, 392–3  
 New Arden Edition of Shakespeare (J. R. Brown, 1957) 14  
 'New Cambridge Shakespeare' (Quiller-Couch, J. D. Wilson) 17n., 303, 379–80, 391, 396, 419n.  
 New Globe Theatre 14  
 New Shakespere Society xxviii, 4, 77, 110, 118, 196, 410n.  
 New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, see Furness  
 Noble, Richmond xl, xli n.  
 Noyes, Isaac, P. (El Seyonpi) xix, xxi, 7, 191–5  
 Nunn, Trevor 14  
*Nun's Rule, The* 295  
  
 Odell, George C. D. 110, 405n.  
 Old Vic Theatre 10–1  
 Oliver, Sir Laurence (as Shylock) xxxi–xxxii, 12–14  
 Olivier, Richard 14  
 Other Place Theatre, Stratford 12  
 Overton, Bill 13, 18n.  
 O'Toole, Peter (as Shylock) 11–12  
  
 Palmer, Henrietta xvii, 3, 86–7, 404n.  
 Parrott, Stephen 369  
 Pater, Walter 135, 324  
 Paul, F. J. 16  
 Pembroke, Earl of 272  
*Pendennis*, see Thackeray  
 Pérez, Antonio 5, 138, 209  
 Peters, W. H. 320  
 Pharisees 355, see also Bible  
 Phelps, Samuel (as Shylock) 153–4, 408n.  
 Pisaro, see Haughton  
 Pitt Press Shakespeare for Schools (ed., A. W. Verity) 227  
 Plautus 326, 330; *Aulularia, or The Hidden Pot of Gold*, xvii, xxx, 263, 326, 330–1, 414n.  
 Plowright, Joan xxxi, 14  
 Poel, William xxviii–xxxi, xxxiv, 6, 8, 325, 327, 348, 409n., 413n., 415n.; *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, 196–9, 260–7  
 Pogson, Kathryn 14  
 Pooler, Charles Knox (Arden edition) xx, 241–3, 410n.  
 Pope, Alexander 63, 324, 360, 404  
 Prawer, Siegbert Salomon 54  
 Prince of Wales's Theatre 110–1  
 Prynne, William 334  
 Pseudo-Josephus 297, 413n.  
  
 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur xviii, 9, 17n., 303–10, 380, 391, 396, 413n., 419nn.  
  
 Rabelais, François 329  
 Rachel (*Genesis, Exodus*) 357, see also Bible  
 Radford, Sir George Heynes xix, 206–8, 409n.  
 Raleigh, Sir Walter Alexander 247–8, 269–70, 273, 327, 414n.  
 Rebecca (*Genesis*) 339, see also Bible  
 Red Letter Shakespeare (ed. E. K. Chambers) 254  
 Redgrave, Michael 11  
 Roberts, Sasha 86  
 Robertson, Graham 10  
 Robertson, Thomas William 111, 114  
 Roetscher, H. T. 210

## Index

- Rosmersholm*, see Ibsen  
 Ross, Thomas Arthur 15, 361–6  
 Roth, Cecil xix, 9, 357–60, 416n., 417n.  
 Röttscher, H. Theo 98  
 Rousseau, Jean Jacques 326, 329; *Lettre D’Alembert*, 414n.  
 Rowe, Nicholas 399  
 Rowe, Thomas 1–2, 269  
 Rowley, William, *Search for Money* 273  
 Royal Court Theatre 9  
 Rozmovits, Linda 3, 6–7, 18n.  
 Ruskin, John xix, 5, 108–9, 405n.
- Sadler’s Wells Theatre 408n.  
 St. James’s Theatre 10  
 St. Paul 159, 394, see also Bible  
 Sainte-Beuve, Charles-Augustin 324, 328, 341  
 Sajdak, Bruce T. 15–16, 19n.  
 Salaman, Charles Kensington xx–xxi, xxiii, xxxviii, 147–52, 408n.  
 Salerno, Masuccio de 36  
 Sarcey, Francisque 33, 269, 333–4, 341, 414n., 415n.  
 Schappes, Morris 16  
 Schlegel, August Wilhelm von xviii, 2, 7, 27–9, 52, 86, 95, 241, 403n., 404n.  
 Schelling, Felix E. 269–70, 274, 276–7, 327, 331, 412n.  
 Schiloch 297–8  
 Schoenfeld, S. 15  
 Scott, Sir Walter 262  
 Schücking, Levin L. 320–2, 417n., 418n.  
*School for Scandal*, *The*, see Sheridan  
*School of Abuse*, *The*, see Gosson  
*Selimus* (anon.) 273  
 Seyonpi, El, see Noyes  
 Sganarelle (*L’Ecole des maris*), see Molière  
 Shaheen, Naseeb xl, xli n.  
 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon 10–11, 13  
 Shapiro, James 16–17  
 Shaw, George Bernard 364  
 Sher, Anthony 13  
 Sheridan, Robert Brinsley, *The Duenna* 332, 414n.; *The Rivals*, 331, 414n.; *The School for Scandal*, 263, 271, 331, 405n., 411nn.  
 Sicherman, Barbara 311  
 Siddons, Sarah 113, 115  
 Silvayn, Alexander 37  
 Simrock, Karl Joseph 210, 219  
 Sir Giles Overreach, see Massinger  
*Sir Thomas More* 9, 343–4, 393–4  
 Sir Thomas More (historical person) 393–4  
 Skottowe, Augustine 35–8, 269, 403n.  
 Smith, Robert 337  
 Smith, Warren D. 16  
 Smollett, Tobias 335  
 Snider, Jaques Denton 121–3  
 South, Robert 274, 276  
 Southampton, Earl of 266, 394  
 Speaight, Robert xli n., 18n.
- Spedding, James xviii, 4, 110–7, 129–30, 269, 405n., 406n.  
 Spenser, Edmund, *The Faerie Queene* 317, 414n.  
 Spenser, Sir John 346  
 Spingarn, Joel Elias 324  
 Spurgeon, Caroline Francis Eleanor 371–3, 419n.  
 Star Theatre, New York 285  
 Stationers’ Registers 118, 230, 407nn.  
 Staunton, Howard 409n.  
 Steevens, George 5, 243, 410n.  
 Sterne, Laurence, *Tristram Shandy* 275, 412n.  
 Stewart, Patrick 12–3  
 Stoll, Elmer Edgar xv–xvii, xix, xxiv, xxx, xxxiii–iv, xxxviii, xli n., 9, 268–78, 323–42, 411n., 412n., 413n., 414n., 415n., 417n.  
 Stowe, John 346  
 Streicher, Julius 392  
 Strimatter, Roger xl, xli n.  
 Suchet, David 13  
 Swinburne, Algernon Charles 249, 259, 270, 323
- Tamburlaine*, see Marlowe  
 Taylor, Jeremy 274, 337  
 Temple Shakespeare (ed. Israel Gollancz) 294  
 Tennyson, Lord Alfred 110; *Becket*, 286, 413n.  
 Terence, *Andria* 120  
 Terry, Ellen xxvii, xxix, xxx, 110, 112–5, 126, 135, 143, 145–6, 153, 187, 405n., 413n., 415n.  
 Thackeray, William Makepeace 110; *Pendennis*, 335, 415n.  
*Theatre*, *The* xxv–xxvi, 4, 18n., 124, 126, 128–9, 131, 133, 202, 412n.  
 Theatre Royal Manchester 404n.  
 Thompson, Ann 86  
*Three Ladies of London*, *The*, see Gerontus  
 Throckmorton, Francis 141  
*Timon* (anon.) 273  
 Tito Melema, see Eliot, George  
 Toby, Uncle, see Sterne  
 Tretiak, Andrzej (Andrew) 9, 343–7, 415n., 416n., 418n.  
 Tynan, Kenneth 11, 18n.
- Ulrici, Hermann 59–60, 64, 88, 98–9, 210, 241, 282, 409n., 410n.,  
 Usury 368–9, 385, 418n.
- Valère (*L’Avare*), see Molière  
 Valère (*Le Médecin malgré lui*), see Molière  
 Valk, Frederick (as Shylock) 11  
 Van Doren, Mark xii, xxxvi, 397–402  
 Venetian Comedy 230, 410n.  
 Venice 303–4, 344, 347, 353, 370–1, 374–7, 381, 390, 392, 397–7, 399, see also Jews in  
 Verity, Arthur Wilson xix, 6, 227–8. 409n., 410n.  
 Vickers, Brian ix–xli n., 17n., 19n., 110, 403n., 409n., 411n.  
 Voldeba, B. 417n.

## Index

- Wandering Jew Telling Fortunes to Englishmen, The* 406n.
- Ward, Sir Adolphus William 262, 411n.
- Wardle, Irving 12
- Warwick Shakespeare 229
- Watermeier, D. J. 200, 412n.
- Watts-Dunton, Theodore xxiii–iv, xxxvi, xix, 7, 249–53
- Weightman, John 12
- Weininger, Otto 311, 413n.
- Wendell, Barrett 269, 411n., 412n., 413n.
- Wesker, Arnold 13–14
- West, Rebecca 341
- Wilde, Oscar xviii, xxxii, 5, 135, 406n.
- Wilson, John, 'Christopher North' (1785–1854) 6
- Wilson, John Dover xix, xxiv, xxxvi, 11, 17n., 303, 344, 379, 391–6, 415n., 419n.
- Wilson, Robert, *Three Ladies of London* 273
- Winter Garden Theatre, New York 282
- Winter, William xxv–xxviii, 3, 200, 279–93, 412n., 413n.
- Woffington, Peg (as Portia) 2
- Wolfit, Donald 11
- Wood, Stanley 7
- Woodberry, George 323, 334, 413n.
- Wright, William Aldis (Cambridge Edition) x, 140, 409n.
- Yaffe, Martin D. xxxvii, xli n., 16–17, 19n.
- Yeats, William Butler, *Essays and Introductions* 412n.; *Ideas of Good and Evil*, 275, 412n.
- Zangwill, Israel 357, 416n.
- Zariph 273, 412n., *see also* Day