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William Shakespeare , Edited by Charles Edelman
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INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain is thought to have said that Shakespeare was not really the author of the plays, 'they were written by someone else of the same name'. Although the comment appears nowhere in Mark Twain's works, and has been attributed to others in relation to Homer, not Shakespeare, it still serves as the most sensible solution to the perennial authorship question. Similarly, this introduction, especially when looking at the play as it was first performed, is not about Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, but about another play, also by Shakespeare, of the same name.

In fact, it is very possible that our play was not originally known as *The Merchant of Venice*: on 22 July 1598, perhaps a year or two after the first performance, 'a booke of the Merchaunt of Venyce otherwise called the Jewe of Venyce' was entered for printing at the London Stationers' Register. This is both revealing and reassuring, since *The Jew of Venice* is a more appropriate title – when printed in 1600, *The Merchant of Venice* may have been preferred only to avoid confusion with Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.

Critics are fond of pointing out that Shylock is not the 'Merchant of Venice', and that his is not an especially long role, appearing in only five scenes. But amongst the male characters, Shylock has the largest part, with nearly *twice* as many lines as Antonio – no less than *Hamlet*, this is a play with a central star role, one so famous that like Cervantes's Quixote and Dickens's Scrooge, he has become a common word, a distinction not even Hamlet can claim; today, in our age of 'director's theatre', *Merchant* performances are, like *Hamlet* performances, usually identified by the name of the main actor, not the director.

There is one enormous difference, however, between Shylock and Hamlet or any other great Shakespearean character: *The Merchant of Venice* is unique in that we are told that a performance in Shakespeare's time, and the audience's appreciation of it, would have been entirely different from what we experience today.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE IN THE 1590S

In his review of Peter Hall's 1989 production, Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* (1 January 1990) makes what has been a standard observation in *Merchant* criticism for over two hundred years, that 'Shakespeare's first audience would

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have been amazed' by a sympathetic portrayal of a Jew. Although Kroll finds Dustin Hoffman's 'painfully real' Shylock impressive, he qualifies his approval by quoting Harold Bloom's opinion, ' "an honest production of the play, sensitive to its values, would now be intolerable in any Western country" '.

Indeed, in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Bloom proves an eloquent spokesman for this most enduring of Shakespearean myths:

> One would have to be blind, deaf, and dumb not to recognize that Shakespeare's grand, equivocal comedy *The Merchant of Venice* is nevertheless a profoundly anti-Semitic work . . . The unfortunate Dr Lopez, Queen Elizabeth's physician, was hanged, drawn, and quartered (possibly with Shakespeare among the mob looking on), having been more or less framed by the Earl of Essex and so perhaps falsely accused of a plot to poison the Queen. A Portuguese *converso* [converted Jew] whom Shakespeare may have known, poor Lopez lives on as a shadowy provocation to the highly successful revival of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* in 1593–4, and presumably Shakespeare's eventual overcoming of Marlowe in *The Merchant of Venice*, perhaps in 1596–7.[1]

However, like the famous non-barking dog in the Sherlock Holmes story, the curious thing about the evidence connecting Lopez to Marlowe and Shakespeare is its non-existence. Marlowe's play was always a money-spinner; Henslowe records that it took in thirty-five shillings when acted in February of 1593, and the following year it played to good houses *before* Lopez's execution.[2] There is no good reason to think that things would have been different had Lopez never existed, for Lopez's being, or having been, a Jew was hardly mentioned at his trial. So far as can be found from prosecutor Sir Edward Coke's notes, neither he nor anyone else said, or even implied, that being a Jew was an indicator of treacherous intention – Coke was trying to establish a Catholic, not a Jewish assassination plot.[3] Whether or not Lopez was guilty (current scholarship indicates that he was)[4] is beside the point – if he was railroaded, his having been Jewish had nothing to do with it. From the time of Lopez's indictment and trial to his execution on 7 June 1594, there is no record of victimisation of other Jews in London, or of any call to expel Jews or *conversos* residing there.

Obviously, one may still argue that even without the inspiration of Lopez, the original Shylock conformed to an anti-Semitic stereotype, but no such theatrical tradition existed. The only Jew to appear in extant Elizabethan

1 Bloom, *Shakespeare*, pp. 171–2.
2 Foakes and Rickert, *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 255.
3 *Calendar of State Papers*, pp. 90–6, 453–62.
4 Berek, 'The Jew as Renaissance Man', pp. 149–53; D. Katz, *Jews*, pp. 90–6.

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drama before Marlowe's Barabas is the moneylender Gerontus in Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London* (1584) – he is the most honourable character in the play, the most contemptible being Mercadore, an Italian merchant. Still, John Gross writes, 'to an Elizabethan audience, the fiery red wig that [Shylock] almost certainly wore spelled out his ancestry even more insistently than anything that was actually said. It was the same kind of wig that had been worn by Marlowe's Barabas, and before that by both Judas and Satan in the old mystery plays.'[5]

This 'fiery red wig', which will reappear in our story, has a rather strange history. There is no mention of Barabas's hair colour in Marlowe's play, neither is there any real connection between Barabas and Judas; even if there were, while 'it is an old and familiar tradition that Judas Iscariot had red hair, the actual evidence is rather scattered and not very abundant'.[6] In 1846, the noted scholar John Payne Collier discovered and published a poem written on the occasion of Richard Burbage's funeral, which reads, in part,

> Heart-broken Philaster, and Amintas too
> Are lost forever, with the red-hair'd Jew.[7]

Like most of Collier's 'discoveries', this was a forgery – he claimed to have seen and copied it from an original in the library of the antiquarian Richard Heber (conveniently Heber had died in 1833, and his entire collection was auctioned off). Why Collier decided to give Shylock red hair is hard to say; perhaps he was influenced by Thomas Jordan's crude ballad, 'The Forfeiture', published in 1664. Sung to the tune of 'Dear, let me now this evening dye', it starts

> You that do look with Christian hue
> Attend unto my Sonnet
> I'le tell you of as vilde a Jew
> As ever wore a Bonnet

and goes on to tell a twisted version of the *Merchant* in which Jessica, not Portia, dresses up as a lawyer and tricks her father, who

> . . . by usury and trade
> Did much exceed in riches:
> His beard was red, his face was made
> Not much unlike a Witches.

5 Gross, *Shylock*, pp. 16–17. For a more detailed argument denying that Shylock conformed to a stereotype, see Edelman, 'Which is the Jew'.
6 Baum, 'Judas's Red Hair', p. 520.
7 Collier, *Memoirs of the Principal Actors*, p. 53.

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To think this doggerel could have anything to do with *The Merchant of Venice* as it was performed more than sixty years previously is positively ludicrous, yet E. E. Stoll, in his often-cited argument for the 'traditional' Shylock, accepts the work of the 'old actor' (Jordan had worked as an actor at the end of the Caroline era) as proof of Shylock's appearance.[8]

If we assume that all Elizabethans hated Jews, then we can easily assume that it was fine for Antonio to call Shylock a dog, to spit at him and then demand that he become a Christian. But we might also assume that Shakespeare and many others at a London playhouse knew a good deal about Venice, and would therefore know that a 'real' Antonio would have earned little approval. Although Venice segregated Jews into the world's first Ghetto, established in 1516, it guaranteed them the right to go about their business, and to practise their religion, free from interference or molestation,[9] and while Jews were always regarded as candidates for conversion, any attempt to force them to convert was forbidden by law.[10] It is often argued that Shakespeare's audience would have approved of Antonio's version of 'mercy', because baptism would save Shylock's soul, with or without his permission, but Shylock has been placed in a position similar to that of the Jews of Spain one hundred years earlier: convert, or make their living elsewhere. To many, Shylock's forced baptism would have been associated with the Spaniards, who had just tried to murder the Queen, and with the Papacy, which had excommunicated her in 1570.

Even if Shylock's religion, in itself, is not enough to make him a villain to the original audience, there is still the matter of Shylock as usurer to be considered. People making their way to the playhouse to see *The Merchant of Venice* in 1597 could stop at a bookstall and buy Miles Mosse's moral tract condemning the charging of any interest, *The Arraignment and Conviction of Usurie*, but they could also buy a book containing tables of interest rates.[11] No economy can exist without the availability of credit, and except for an extremely conservative faction, it was accepted that usury was the charging of *excessive* interest. In the absence of loan banks, ordinary citizens borrowed money from an acquaintance, or found an acquaintance to act as broker to negotiate the loan with someone else. One prosperous Englishman who

8 Stoll, *Shakespeare Studies*, p. 255.
9 Chambers and Pullan, *Venice*, pp. 338–49. In a 1977 article, Brian Pullan finds little trace of popular resentment against Jews in Renaissance Venice, and where it did exist, it seems to have been amongst Greeks or other minorities, not Italians (Pullan, 'A Ship with Two Rudders', p. 54).
10 Roth, *Venice*, p. 116.
11 Jones, *God and the Moneylenders*, pp. 78, 144 ff.

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loaned large sums at interest, sued when he was not repaid and also acted as a broker, was William Shakespeare of Stratford.[12]

The latter parts of this Introduction will show that it in recent times, few productions of the *Merchant* can take place without public discussion over whether it should be performed at all, or at the very least, without school packs or other material justifying its presentation, explaining that the original audience held different attitudes than we do today. Ironically, this can have an effect opposite to what is intended: the natural response to *The Merchant of Venice*, from those rare persons with no 'knowledge' of it before entering the theatre, is likely to be similar to that of the spectator once observed by Heinrich Heine: 'When I saw this play at Drury Lane, there stood behind me in the box a pale, fair Briton, who at the end of the Fourth Act, fell to weeping passionately, several times exclaiming, "The poor man is wronged."'[13] 'Passionate weeping' is not required, nor are we expected to think of Shylock as a person free of serious faults (obviously, he is not), yet the entire history of our play, everywhere in the world, shows that it has been most successful when Shylock was *not* acted as a villain, or thought to be one. For us to fully understand the history of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* in production, we must replace it with that 'other' Shakespeare play of the same title.

That play was a success: the title page of the 1600 Quarto notes that it was acted 'divers times'; the first recorded performance was at court on 10 February 1605, followed by a second performance two days later. Since Shylock is the largest and best male part, it is likely that Burbage was the first to play him, but no genuine contemporary document confirms this, and any speculation about casting is only that. Whoever the actors may have been, the *Merchant*'s place in the King's Men's repertoire nine or ten years after it was written argues for its popularity, but there is no further record of the play being shown, in any form, until George Granville's adaptation, *The Jew of Venice*, opened in 1701.

GRANVILLE'S *JEW OF VENICE*

Jewish presence in England increased markedly during the 1600s: as W. D. Rubinstein notes, the Commonwealth had an underlying culture of philo-Semitism, the Puritans seeing themselves in many respects as the

12 Honigmann, 'World Elsewhere', pp. 41–5; Honigmann, *Shakespeare's Impact*, pp. 8–14.
13 Furness, *A New Variorum Edition*, p. 449.

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re-embodiment of Old Testament Judaism.[14] In 1656, Cromwell gave the Jews permission to remain in England and to open their first synagogue in Creechurch Lane.

During the Restoration, Jewish economic power and status rose further. It was still a tiny community, and nearly all Portuguese or Spanish *Sephardim*: in 1677 a London directory had forty-eight Portuguese, and two German (in Hebrew, *Ashkenazi*) names.[15] As the Glorious Revolution approached, Anglo-Jews were officially residents – politically, they were essentially the English branch of Holland's Jewish community, something much to their advantage, for the Revolution could not have succeeded without the financial support of the Dutch-Jewish company of Machado and Pereira.[16] Although this point is disputed by historians, Rubinstein and David S. Katz argue persuasively that from the Glorious Revolution until late Victorian times, the status of England's Jews was little different from that of the Quakers or other dissenters, and in many respects was better than that of English Catholics.[17] On 23 June 1700, William III knighted Solomon de Medina, a rich London Jew who was in partnership with Machado and Pereira; six months later *The Jew of Venice* opened at Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Granville retains much of Shakespeare's text, but many passages are shortened, altered or transposed,[18] and Morocco, Arragon, the Gobbos, Solanio, Salarino and Salerio (the 'Salads') are omitted. Taking the place of the missing scenes is a banquet at the end of Act II, when Shylock, Bassanio and Antonio celebrate the 'merry bond' by offering toasts to wealth, and then witness an elaborate masque, 'Peleus and Thetis'.

The prologue, spoken by the ghosts of Shakespeare and Dryden, is perhaps of greater interest than anything in the play proper. 'Shakespeare' announces,

> To day we punish a Stock-jobbing Jew.
> A piece of Justice, terrible and strange;
> Which, if persu'd, would make a thin Exchange.

14 Rubinstein, *History of the Jews*, pp. 44–5.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 62.
16 D. Katz, *Jews*, p. 157.
17 In the 1680s *Ashkenazi* immigration to England increased, and by 1690 enough German Jews lived in London for them to form their own independent community. The first *Ashkenazi* synagogue, later known as the Great Synagogue, was founded in Duke's Place in 1690. In 1695 the London census showed 853 Jewish names, 255 (30 per cent) of them *Ashkenazi* (Rubinstein, *History of the Jews*, p. 61).
18 See Halio, *Merchant*, pp. 61–2.

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The late 1690s and early 1700s saw a major shift in economic power 'from countryside to town, and from landowner to businessman, profoundly unsettling the traditional order'.[19] Particularly notorious were the 'stock-jobbers', busily amassing wealth through speculative dealings in joint-stock ventures: their excesses led to an Act of 1697, restricting their number in London to one hundred, with twelve places reserved for Jews and twelve for other 'aliens'. So Shylock, once a Venetian moneylender, has become a London dealer in investment schemes, despised by arch-Tories such as Granville.

Thomas Betterton was a sixty-six-year-old Bassanio, and Anne Bracegirdle played Portia. Thomas Doggett, who played Shylock, was one of the most popular comic actors of his day: according to Colley Cibber, who admired Doggett greatly, Congreve wrote the characters of Ben in *Love for Love* and Fondlewife in *The Old Bachelor* expressly for him.[20] Records of London's 1700–1 theatre season are scanty, and we do not know how often *The Jew of Venice* was performed, but in any event it is difficult to agree with Gross's view that *The Jew of Venice* 'held the stage for forty years',[21] for it was hardly ever seen after 1701. There is record of one performance in May 1703, three in the 1721–2 season and two in 1722–3, but none at all for the ensuing three years, and less than one a year after that – with just one recorded performance between 1736 and 1741. Given these circumstances, it is fair to say that Granville's adaptation, while interesting in and of itself, plays little part in the performance history of *The Merchant of Venice*. No tradition existed in the interpretation of Shylock, or of any other role, when Charles Macklin took the stage on 12 February 1741, and no expectation on the part of the Drury Lane audience had to be confirmed or denied. *The Merchant of Venice* was a new play.

'THE JEW THAT SHAKESPEARE DREW'

Born in Ireland in 1699, Charles Macklin was a popular favourite in a variety of roles amongst provincial audiences of the early 1730s. John Fleetwood, the patent holder of Drury Lane, engaged him to play small parts for the 1733–4 season, but that season fell into disarray when a dispute between Fleetwood and the actors, led by Theophilus Cibber, led to the defection of Cibber's group to the Haymarket. Macklin remained loyal to Fleetwood, though, and his importance at Drury Lane grew.

Several factors contributed to Drury Lane's decision to mount *The Merchant of Venice* in 1741: the renewal and strengthening of the Stage Licensing

19 Hoppit, *Land of Liberty*, p. 4. 20 *Biographical Dictionary*.
21 Gross, *Shylock*, pp. 91–2.

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Act in 1737 placed the Lord Chamberlain in charge of theatrical censorship, establishing 'a much more rigorous system of state surveillance, which would endure until 1968', over the theatre.[22] The inherent difficulties in getting a play approved encouraged managements to rely on Shakespeare and others whose plays were already part of the repertoire, and not subject to new scrutiny. Furthermore, there was no need to set the takings of the third performance aside, as was customary, for an 'author's benefit'.[23] Since the *Merchant*, in its original text, had not been performed within living memory, it would have brought with it the excitement of a famous play being seen for the first time by everyone present, the perfect vehicle for a popular actor in his first starring role.

Descriptions of Macklin's Shylock are consistent in giving us a fierce and malevolent figure, driven by his hatred of Antonio. Francis Gentleman was only thirteen in 1741, and his *Dramatic Censor* was published in 1770, so he presumably saw Macklin in the 1760s:

> in the level scenes his voice is most happily suited to that sententious gloominess of expression the author intended; which, with a sullen solemnity of deportment, marks the character strongly; in his malevolence, there is 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; and through the whole displays such unequalled merit, as justly entitles him to that very comprehensive, though concise compliment paid him many years ago, 'This is the Jew that Shakespeare drew.'[24]

The famous 'concise compliment' is attributed to Alexander Pope, supposedly paid when he and Macklin met after a performance.

Portia was played by Kitty Clive, a delightful comedienne who received more unfavourable criticism for this performance than for any in her long career.[25] Gentleman calls it 'a ludicrous burlesque on the character . . . in the spirited scene she was clumsy . . . in the grave part – sure never was such a female put into breeches before! – she was awkwardly dissonant'. In the trial, 'as if conscious she could not get through without the aid of trick, [she] flew to the pitiful resource of taking off the peculiarity of some judge, or noted lawyer; from which wise stroke, she created laughter in a scene where the deepest attention should be preserved'.[26]

22 Dobson, 'Improving on the Original', p. 64. 23 *London Stage*, pt. 3, p. cx.
24 Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, p. 292. 25 *Biographical Dictionary*.
26 Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, p. 297.

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Macklin's text for the 1740–1 season, although probably abbreviated, would have been very close to the Quarto text of 1600. There is no record of any interpolation, and all characters, including Morocco and Arragon, were present – Arragon fell out of the play during the first season, and was not seen again until Charles Kean's revival of 1858, but 'Morochius' appeared in some, although not all, London performances of the *Merchant* until 1757: the 1773 Bell edition, without either of Portia's unsuccessful suitors, is probably close to the play that Macklin performed later in his career.[27]

On 7 May 1789, Macklin, at the age of ninety, began a performance, but found himself unable to continue past the first scene, and retired from the stage. For nearly fifty years, he had defined the role of Shylock.

GERMANY: SCHRÖDER, IFFLAND, FLECK

As the Macklin era was drawing to a close, the history of *The Merchant of Venice* in modern Germany began. Friedrich Ludwig Schröder was chiefly responsible for introducing Shakespeare to the German theatre; in 1771 he took over the management of the Hamburg National Theatre from his stepfather Konrad Ackermann, and brought *Hamlet* to the stage in 1776, followed by *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* in 1777.

Using the translation of Christoph Martin Wieland, Schröder cut nearly all of the fifth act. Not much has been written about his Shylock – he is thought to have played him much as Macklin did, harsh and vindictive, while retaining some of the audience's sympathy.[28] More important, perhaps, than Schröder's own performances is the influence he had as guest director in Vienna, Mannheim and elsewhere – one of his associates in Mannheim was the playwright-actor August Wilhelm Iffland.[29]

Schiller admired Iffland as an actor but did not think much of his plays,[30] perhaps because at the time they were more popular than Schiller's. During the 1780s the Mannheim National Theatre developed strongly under Iffland's leadership, and upon transferring to the National Theatre of Berlin, Iffland mounted several visually spectacular productions of Shakespeare.[31] As the Jew, he presented a comical figure – indeed he may have been the first actor to play Shylock this way – speaking with a foreign accent, and regarded as 'irksome' and 'impish' rather than seriously threatening.[32] He wore a 'blue

27 *Shak.II*, p. 15.
28 Williams, *Shakespeare on the German Stage*, p. 133. I am very much indebted to Williams's magisterial study.
29 Bruford, *Theatre Drama*, p. 34. 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 255, 302.
31 Banham, *Cambridge Guide*, p. 470. 32 Häublein, 'Ein Stück', p. 37.

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coat with fur trimming, a caftan and red stockings. His performance was an aggregation of small mannerisms, commonly accepted as typical of the Jews. He pattered across the stage with mincing footsteps, he walked in circles when worried, he crumpled his cap in distress during the trial scene.'[33]

Ferdinand Fleck had his first success as Gloucester, opposite Schröder's Lear; he played Shylock in 1797, only four years before his death at the age of forty-one. His was a different Jew than Iffland presented: the poet, critic and Shakespeare translator Ludwig Tieck thought Fleck 'horrible and ghostlike, but . . . always noble'.[34]

ENTER KEMBLE

The 1788–9 season that saw Macklin's final exit from the English stage was also John Philip Kemble's first as manager of Drury Lane – the *Merchant* was performed once, on 17 January 1789, with Kemble as Shylock and his sister, Sarah Siddons, as Portia.[35] The handsome and dignified Kemble never considered himself suited to the role, however, and when he later staged the *Merchant*, it was usually with Tom King, the original Sir Peter Teazle and a much-loved actor, but no Shylock: the best that Gentleman could say about him was that his performance 'is by no means so deficient as many principal parts' then being acted in London.[36]

Kemble published his own edition of the *Merchant* 'as first acted at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden', in 1810. Taken together with Elizabeth Inchbald's 1808 edition, also 'as Performed at the Theatre Royal', these versions give us a reliable record of the play as it was presented at this time. As in the Bell edition, both Morocco and Arragon are missing, but the Kemble and Inchbald texts make some sense of the casket theme by rewriting Bassanio's choosing speech in 3.2.[37] Songs for Lorenzo and Jessica are interpolated, and except for the Shylock scenes, huge chunks of the play are deleted. Overall, though, Kemble retained more of the Quarto text than did Macklin, and the order of the scenes is not altered – that 'improvement' was yet to come.

While Kemble's work in preparing a relatively coherent text is to be admired, we should remember that his production was rarely seen – in the 1790s, aside from a few summer performances at the Haymarket, Londoners had the opportunity to see the *Merchant* only once every two years. But this

33 Williams, *Shakespeare on the German Stage*, p. 135.
34 Devrient, *Geschichte*, vol. I, p. 525.
35 This was not Kemble's first attempt at the part – he did it at Smock Alley, Dublin, and for his London debut in January, 1784.
36 Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, p. 293. 37 See Appendix 1.

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