PART I

INTRODUCTIONS

1

Literary Sources and Theatrical Interpretations of Shylock

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There is a long history of Jewish villainy in late medieval English literature, the most prominent example being Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, a version of the blood libel, in which Jews are accused of murdering a Christian child and using his blood to prepare *matzah* (unleavened bread). The late medieval English religious drama, *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament,* describes the misguided and unsuccessful efforts of Jews to desecrate the Host by stealing and attempting to destroy communion wafers.[1] After the Reformation, religious drama with its negative depictions of post-biblical Jews waned, as English drama developed along more secular lines during the latter half of the sixteenth century. Although the new, secular drama exhibited pronounced xenophobic tendencies, it showed only occasional interest in Jewish characters.[2]

[1] On Chaucer's tale and *The Croxton Play* see Lisa Lampert-Weissig, *Gender and Jewish Difference from Paul to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). See also Stephen Spector, "Anti-Semitism and the English Mystery Plays," *Comparative Drama* 13 (1979–80), 3–16.

[2] Aside from Marlowe's Barabas and Shakespeare's Shylock, Jewish characters are quite rare in early modern English drama. There is evidence of two lost "Jewish" plays: one titled *The Jew* is mentioned in the late 1570s and another, *The Jew of Venice* by Thomas Dekker is of uncertain date (Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources* [London: Methuen, 1961 [1957], vol. 1, 47). An extant play, Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London* (1581), has a Jew named Gerontus, who acts with generosity and kindness toward a Christian. See Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957–75), vol. 1, 445. William Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money* (1598) has a moneylender named Pisaro, who is the comically possessive father of three daughters, each won by a clever English suitor over a foreign rival. Pisaro, like Barabas, is said to have a large bottle-shaped snout, and he is labeled as "Portuguese," a term often used to refer to exiled Iberian Jews. See A. J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His*

The great exception is Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1592), which preceded *The Merchant of Venice* (1594–96). Most scholars now believe that the Lord Admiral's Men revived *The Jew of Malta* in 1594 to exploit the trial and execution of Roderigo Lopez, a Marrano (new Christian) and Queen Elizabeth's physician, who was accused and convicted of involvement in a Spanish plot to poison the monarch.[3] Most scholars also believe that Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, wishing to emulate their rivals and exploit the anti-Jewish sentiment unleashed by the Lopez case, commissioned and staged their own play with a Jewish villain.[4]

Marlowe's play has baffled many readers. Barabas, the leading character – named after the criminal whom "the Jews" asked the Romans to release in preference to Jesus – was evidently presented as a caricature, complete with "bottle-nose."[5] Yet this manipulator and murderer is in fact the least hypocritical character in the play. Because Barabas evokes ambivalent or inconsistent responses, the tone and attitude of the work have seemed so unstable as to defy its classification by genre, and it has been labeled as farce, melodrama, and satire. Most recently, the English

Contemporaries (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), 55; Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 13.

[3] On Lopez, see David Katz, *Jews in the History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 76–106. On Shakespeare's possible use of Lopez as a model for Shylock, see James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 73–74; and Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004), 270–80.

[4] The Lopez case may have significant bearing on the precise dating of *The Merchant of Venice*. The first performances, by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, are dated sometime between 1594 and 1597. The earlier date makes sense to those who want to connect it to Lopez's trial and execution. Scholarly consensus now seems to favor a slightly later date. The early printing history of the play is well-known. The copy for the text of *The Merchant of Venice* was entered into the Stationer's Register on July 22, 1598, when the printer, James Roberts, recorded his rights to "a booke of the Marchaunt of Venyce or otherwise called the Jewe of Venyce" (Jay Halio, ed. "General Introduction," *The Merchant of Venice* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], 85), and later that year printed the play in quarto format. Three years after Shakespeare's death, in 1619, a second quarto appeared under a false title page with the date of 1600. In 1623, the play appeared in the First Folio (1623) in a text which closely followed the First Quarto.

[5] Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, ed. Roma Gill, in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), vol. 4, 3.3.9. Theatrical legends have also maintained that Shylock too was originally played with a false nose as well as a red wig or beard, the supposed color of Judas Iscariot's, as he generally was in productions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See Toby Lelyveld, *Shylock on the Stage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 7–8; John Gross, *Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 128.

barrister and literary critic Anthony Julius has described *The Jew of Malta* as "a parodic dictionary of received ideas about Jews," and has suggested that the beneficent influence of this "anti-anti-Semitic" work, was subverted by *The Merchant of Venice*: "Had Shakespeare not responded to Marlowe, English literary anti-Semitism might well have been laughed into extinction."[6]

Marlowe's Barabas and Shakespeare's Shylock fulfill radically different functions. Barabas is the satiric agent in a play about the fierce competition for power and wealth between Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the eastern Mediterranean, and, like Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, he is an international trader. By contrast, Shylock is a usurer, functioning in an economic niche open to Jews because of the Church's prohibition of lending money for interest.[7] Barabas dominates the play until he is killed off at the end. Shylock, as the comic villain in a romantic comedy, appears in only five of the play's nineteen scenes, and his dramatic function is to prevent the union of the lovers. At the play's end, such "blocking" characters are usually either absorbed into or ejected from the new society that forms around the romantic couple(s). At the end of *The Merchant*, Shakespeare has it both ways: Shylock claims to be sick when he begs permission to leave the courtroom but he has just been forcibly re-integrated into the world of the play, on pain of death, if he meets the conditions of his pardon set by the Duke: that he sign a legal document, "the deed of gift" that legitimizes the confiscation and redistribution of his wealth, and that he convert to Christianity.

Despite its traces of the medieval "diabolized Jew,"[8] *The Merchant* suggests that Shakespeare was also alert to newer, more secularized ideas about the status of Jews which arose in the early modern period, such as whether, as James Shapiro puts it, "Jewish identity was understood in terms of nationality and race, as well as religion."[9] *The Merchant*

[6] Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 177–78.

[7] By the early modern period, in most European countries the absolute prohibition of charging interest had become obsolete. In Elizabeth's reign, England had legalized the charging of 10 percent interest on loans. See Norman Jones, *God and the Moneylenders: Usury and Law in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 79.

[8] Several passages in *The Merchant of Venice* refer to Jews as devils: 1.3.94; 2.2.18–19; 2.2.21–22; 3.1.17–19; 3.1.65–66; 4.1.212; 4.1.281–82. The term "diabolized Jew" is borrowed from Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora*, 179, describes *The Merchant* as "a blood-libel narrative subject to considerable elaboration."

[9] J. Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 6. See also Aaron Kitch, "Shylock's Sacred Nation," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59 (2008), 131–55.

of Venice thus draws on several conceptions of Jewish identity, so that Shylock's Jewishness may best be described as a superimposition upon medieval stereotypes of various contemporary ideas about Jews – cultural, biological, and theological. Certainly, Shylock's Jewish identity is far more complex than that of the Jew Shakespeare found in his primary narrative source, a tale in *Il Pecorone*, Ser Giovanni Fiorentino's fourteenth-century collection of stories published in Italian in 1558.[10] Whereas Fiorentino's Jewish moneylender is a nameless, isolated, weakly motivated figure, who simply bears the label of "Jew," Shakespeare placed Shylock in a crude but functioning Jewish social matrix, endowed him with a distinctive voice and granted him a smattering of knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish dietary laws. Drawing on centuries of Christian teaching, he also made Shylock "theologically" Jewish by depicting him as excessively literal-minded. The association of Judaism with such rigid legalism derived from Paul the Apostle's contrast of normative Judaism of the first century with the emerging cult of the resurrected Jesus. In short, Shakespeare transformed the sketchy Jew of his source into a palimpsest – overlaying medieval anti-Judaic notions of Jews with more current ideas of Jews as a nation or people.

Fiorentino's tale shows little interest in any idea of the Jew, whether as diabolized "Other," sinful usurer, or alien presence. What Shakespeare did find in Fiorentino were the basic narrative components of his play: (1) the story of the loan with its collateral of a pound of flesh; (2) the courtship of the lady of Belmont; (3) the tension between male friendship and heterosexual love; (4) the forfeiture of the loan and the trial scene; (5) the heroine in male disguise who saves her husband's friend from the knife of the Jewish moneylender; and (6) the return to Belmont where the hero discovers that his wife was the lawyer who saved his friend's life and to whom he gave the ring he had sworn to keep forever. To these narrative elements, Shakespeare made a number of deft changes, many of which deepen the conflict between heterosexual love and male friendship. He also added Jewish traits to Fiorentino's generic Jewish moneylender. As Kenneth Muir observed, "Shakespeare alone stresses the faith and race of the usurer."[11]

Deepening and enriching source material is a hallmark of Shakespeare's genius as a writer. In his other "Venetian" play, for example, he transformed the nameless Moor of Cinthio's novella into the eponymous

[10] Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, vol. 1, 449; Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, vol. 1.
[11] Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, vol. 1, 51.

Othello, an eloquent and exotic warrior with a colorful past. In writing *The Merchant*, the playwright's imagination may also have been stimulated by curiosity, or what James Shapiro refers to as the "obsession" with Jews he shared with other Englishmen of his day.[12] What were they to make of this group of people whose biblical forebears were revered, yet who played so lurid a role in the medieval Christian imagination and who now lived scattered and shadowy in many cities and towns in Europe, including Elizabethan London, where, despite the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290, a small colony of Iberian Jews came to reside after the expulsions from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497.[13]

Whatever his reasons, Shakespeare found many ways to enrich the Jewishness of Fiorentino's nameless Jewish moneylender. He introduced the name, which sounds foreign to our ears but which may have been a family name in Tudor England.[14] In the play's Venetian setting, the name "Shylock" certainly does not sound Italian, and in any case he is more often addressed as "Jew" or referred to as "the Jew."[15] Whereas Fiorentino's creation is an isolated Jew, Shylock is embedded in family and community. He has friends – Tubal, who appears in one scene, and Chus, whom we never see[16] – and he refers at various times to "our sacred nation" (1.3.49), "our tribe" (1.3.106), and "our synagogue" (3.1.107–8).

[12] J. Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 88.

[13] Ibid., 68–77. The best known Jew in England, after Lopez, was Emilia Bassano, the daughter of an Italian-Jewish musician and an English Christian mother. She was married to a court musician and published a book of poems, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. A.L. Rowse, a historian, believed she was the model for the "dark lady" of Shakespeare's sonnets; see *Shakespeare's Sonnets: The Problem Solved*, 2nd edn. (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 97–117. Rowse's theory has been challenged by, among others, J. Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 249 n.118; and Roger Prior, "Was Emilia Bassano the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets," in *The Bassanos: Venetian Musicians and Instrument Makers in England, 1531–1665*, by David Lasocki (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 114–39.

[14] "Shylock" turns up as a surname in modern England. A British genealogical website, *Ancestry.com*, names twenty-three English men or women listed in censuses of the latter half of the nineteenth century. An American genealogical web site, *archives.com*, lists official records of 214 Americans with the surname of Shylock.

[15] Derek Cohen, "The Jews and Shylock," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31 (1980), 54.

[16] The names of Shylock's two friends are those of Noah's grandsons. Tubal is a son of Japeth, and Chus (or Cush, an emendation introduced by the *Oxford Shakespeare*, is a son of Ham, who settled in Africa after the Flood (Genesis 10:2–6). See Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (New York: Norton, 1997), 326. "Cush"(which came to mean "African" in Hebrew), is the form of the name used in the Hebrew Bible and in the Geneva Bible, but the Bishops' Bible, which Shakespeare seems to have cited with greater frequency in *The Merchant*, reads "Chus," as do the early printed texts of the play (M.M. Mahood, ed. *The Merchant of Venice* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987]), 136n. and 197.

He once had a wife, Leah, who gave him a turquoise ring "when I was a bachelor" (3.1.101). His recollection of this gift, prompted by Tubal's news that Jessica has traded it for a monkey, provides the fleeting insight that Shylock was once a young man who loved and was loved in return.

In Shakespeare's hands, Fiorentino's solitary, childless Jew becomes the father of a daughter, Jessica, who, like Barabas's daughter, Abigail, betrays her father by falling in love with a Christian, but Shakespeare may also have found this subplot in Anthony Munday's *Zelauto*, and in a story by Massuccio in *Il Novellini*.[17] By reporting and later dramatizing Shylock's rage over Jessica's elopement, Shakespeare provides him with another motive for collecting the pound of Antonio's flesh that served as collateral for the loan. Indeed, some Shylocks, such as Laurence Olivier's (stage 1970, television 1973), have even dropped the aside in Act 1, Scene 3 where Shylock expresses his hatred of Antonio, preferring to use Shylock's fury over Jessica's elopement to spark the realization that he can now take a Christian's life to avenge the loss of his daughter.

Modern productions, such as Olivier's, often follow Shakespeare's lead and develop Shylock's familial and communal affiliations even further. Whereas Shakespeare provides two "countrymen" for Shylock, Henry Irving (1838–1905), among others, introduced a number of Jews among the spectators in the trial scene.[18] Yet, Shakespeare's enrichment of Shylock's Jewishness has also permitted modern directors to distance Shylock from his Jewish milieu. For example, Tubal, who shares the risk of the loan to Antonio, can be either supportive of his friend, as is the red-cheeked, fur-hatted Hasidic Tubal of the 1980 BBC production (Arnold Diamond), or critical, like the elegant top-hatted Tubal of John Barton's 1979 Royal Shakespeare Company production (Raymond Westwell), who disapproved of Patrick Stewart's grubby, unshaven proletarian Shylock. Similarly, Shylock can be a doting, affectionate father, like Dustin Hoffman, who in Act 2, Scene 5 tenderly caressed Jessica's (Francesca Bulle's) cheek in Peter Hall's 1989–90 London/New York production; or a cruel one, like Stewart, who in the same scene gratuitously slapped Jessica (Avril Carson) across the face. Jessica, in turn, may mock the father from whom she is escaping, as Leslie Udwin did in the 1980 BBC production, or she may display regret, say, by kissing a photograph of her mother, as Gabrielle Jourdan did in Trevor Nunn's 1999 production

[17] Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, vol. 1, 454–57; Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources*, vol. 1, 50–51.

[18] Lelyveld, *Shylock on the Stage*, 90; James Bulman, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 45.

at the National Theatre.[19] In similar fashion, when she receives the "deed of gift" at the end of the play, she can either rejoice at her good fortune, or she can seem rueful, like Heather Lind, who, in Daniel Sullivan's 2011 production, sat beside the same pool where her father had been baptized in the previous scene.

Just as Shakespeare augmented Fiorentino by situating his Jewish moneylender within familial and communal networks, so did he link Shylock to selected practices of normative Judaism. For example, he has Shylock initially reject Bassanio's dinner invitation in Act 1, Scene 3, lest he violate the proscription against eating pork, though, having been "bid forth to supper" (2.5.31), he leaves home to attend Bassanio's farewell feast. Shakespeare even made Launcelot Gobbo aware of the Jewish dietary laws, as when he complains to Jessica that "this making of Christians will raise the price of hogs" (3.5.19). Shakespeare also has Shylock swear to take the pound of flesh "by our Holy Sabbath" (4.1.35–36). In short, Shakespeare found opportunities to overlay the bare narrative elements of Fiorentino's tale with textual allusions to details of Jewish familial, communal, and religious life; details which later productions could reshape and amplify. Such was the intention of Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1852–1917), who went to great lengths to present an authentic Jewish ghetto in his 1908 London production. As he wrote in his program notes, he sought the help of "high Jewish authorities" to assist him in presenting "the life of the Jews and the customs and manners of the day."[20]

In other additions to his source, Shakespeare underscored Shylock's Jewishness by showing his familiarity with Hebrew Scripture. He refers to Launcelot Gobbo (inaccurately) as "that fool of Hagar's offspring" (2.5.42), rhetorically addresses "Father Abram" (1.3.156), swears "by Jacob's staff" (2.5.35), and several times in the trial scene (4.1) invokes Daniel the Judge, only to have Gratiano throw the allusion back at him when the tables are turned. His favorite biblical character, however, is Jacob, the third of the Patriarchs, whom he calls "the third possessor" (1.3.70). He seems to admire Jacob as a fellow trickster, as when he retells the story from Genesis (30:25–43) of how Jacob outwitted his uncle Laban in the division of their flocks (1.3.67–86). In Act 2, Scene 2, there is also a subtle reference to Jacob's deception of his blind father, Isaac, where Launcelot Gobbo first denies his real identity to his "sand-blind"

[19] Charles Edelman, ed. *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare in Production (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 147.

[20] Cary Mazer, *Shakespeare Refashioned: Elizabethan Plays on Edwardian Stages* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 17.

father (2.2.29) and then tries to persuade the old man who he really is so he can ask him to "give me your blessing" (2.2.68). As John Scott Colley has argued, Old Gobbo's feeling the hairiness of son Launcelot's beard echoes Jacob's and Rebecca's scheme to have Jacob cover his arms with animal fur in order to steal the paternal blessing intended for the first born Esau.[21]

Shakespeare also introduced theological differences between Judaism and Christianity, such as the debate over the relative merits of mercy and justice which runs through the trial scene. This debate begins when the Duke's question, "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rend'ring none?" evokes Shylock's answer, "What judgment shall I dread doing no wrong?" (4.1.187–88). It continues when Portia repeats the Duke's request that Shylock show mercy to Antonio and amplifies it with "the quality of mercy" speech (4.1.179–200) and with the suggestion that Shylock "have by some surgeon … / To stop his wounds lest he do bleed to death" (4.1.252–53). Shakespeare gives Portia the Christian argument that humans are flawed by Original Sin and would all be damned if not for Christ's redemptive power. Shylock scoffs at the idea of any universal need for mercy, confident that if he does no wrong he need not fear Divine Judgment at his death. To Portia's assertion that "in the course of justice none of us / Should see Salvation" (4.1.194–95), Shylock replies, as he did earlier to the Duke: "My deeds upon my head! I crave the law" (4.1.201). He thus denies Original Sin and the need for redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus. Nowhere in Fiorentino's tale does one find so much as a hint of Paul's supercessionist claim that Judaism, caricatured as the religion of judgment and rigidly legalistic literalism, is inferior to Christianity, the religion of forgiveness, mercy, and compassionate responsiveness to spirit of the Law.

Shakespeare also embodies this theological conflict in the action of the play. Later in the scene, Shakespeare has Portia invoke a second statute,

[21] John Scott Colley, "Launcelot, Jacob and Esau: Old and New Law in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Yearbook of English Studies* 10 (1980), 182–83, reads Jacob's supplanting of Esau in terms of Christian figuration as a foreshadowing of Christianity's superceding of Judaism. Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in "The Merchant of Venice"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 133, cites this reading as one of many moments where the play struggles to reassert the supremacy and superiority of Christianity over Judaism and finds "*The Merchant* haunted by its own … fears and guilt about Christianity's relation to the Jews." Susannah Heschel, "From Jesus to Shylock: Christian Supersessionism and *The Merchant of Venice*," *Harvard Theological Review* 99 (2006), 404, sees such moments as parodic or intentionally subversive, "underm[ing] a theology of Christian anti Judaism."

evidently intending to place Shylock himself in the position of needing mercy. In the terms of the law as Portia reads it, Shylock learns that he, as an alien, has committed a crime by threatening the life of a Venetian, and he discovers that his punishment is to have his wealth confiscated and divided between the intended victim and the state, while "his life lie[s] … in the mercy / Of the Duke only" (4.1.350–51). Portia then orders him to kneel and supplicate: "Down therefore, and beg mercy of the Duke" (4.1.368). The Duke, in turn, responds without being asked, precisely to show Shylock how Christian mercy differs from Jewish judgment: "That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit, I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it" (4.1.364). He also reduces his part of the monetary penalty to an unspecified fine, rather than taking half of the Jew's wealth to which the statute entitles him.

When Portia then asks, "What mercy can *thou* render him, Antonio?" (4.l.373; emphasis added), the result is quite different. Antonio accepts the Duke's right to forgo his half of Shylock's wealth, so long as he himself can keep the other half "in use to render it / Upon his death unto the gentleman that lately stole his daughter" (4.1.378–80). In Fiorentino's tale, there is no second statute and hence no opportunity for Shylock to beg for mercy, no challenge by Portia to the Duke and Antonio to show mercy, and of course no mention of Shylock's agreeing to convert to Christianity, which focuses attention on Shylock's Jewishness by its very attempt to erase it. Many modern productions find ways to indicate Shylock's resistance to conversion, thereby underscoring his commitment to Judaism.

For modern audiences, and perhaps for Elizabethans critical of the Spanish for forcing their colonial subjects in South America to convert to Roman Catholicism, forced conversion is a violation of individual conscience, as well as a forced betrayal of identity and a violation of personal agency. In the light of Jewish historical experience, the threat, let alone the enactment, of conversion can be especially threatening for Jewish spectators. The text calls for Shylock to agree to conversion in principle or at some future date, and actors have often done so with a curt nod. Some directors have amplified the moment by staging a kind of symbolic conversion. In 1972, director Yossi Yzraely startled his Israeli audience by using puppets to create the baptismal scene on stage. In the 1980 BBC production Gratiano (Kenneth Cranham) hung a cross around Shylock's (Warren Mitchell's) neck and forced him to kiss it. Daniel Sullivan inserted a full-scale conversion ceremony in his 2011 New York modern dress production: after the trial scene, two Venetians