

“Which is the Merchant here? and which the Jew?”: Keeping the Book and Keeping the Books in The Merchant of Venice

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The Merchant of Venice is a puzzle. The ways in which it has been discussed suggest that it is more problematic even than the so-called problem plays of Shakespeare.¹ Indeed, if the lovers Lorenzo and Jessica are the Troilus and Cressida of this play,² then as the action progresses, we see how the subversion of the principle of measure for measure³ leads to an apparently artificial display of the principle that all's well that end's well.⁴ But the fit of all of this together is uncomfortable,⁵ because we are left with too many questions which have been apparently too easily resolved: what is the relationship between love and authority? by what measure are just judgments made? whose wellness and how many's wellness constitute the wellness of all and the well-ending of something? do our measures drive us or do we drive our measures? In broad terms, these questions force us to think through painful issues of self-knowledge, of the individual good as opposed to the societal good, and of justice.

And the focal point or flash point, if you prefer, of the interactions which ignite these considerations is the friction between the wood of Christianity and the flint of Judaism.⁶ If Judaism is the parent religion and Christianity the child religion, then that friction between religions expresses itself as a clash between parent and child. If, on the other hand, Judaism is the religion of law⁷ and Christianity the religion of love, then that friction between religions also expresses itself as a clash between authority and inclination. If, finally, Judaism is the quintessential insular religion and Christianity the quintessential universal religion, then that friction also expresses itself as a clash between absolutely heterogeneous multiculturalism and absolutely homogeneous uniculturalism.

In the broadest possible terms, the issues raised here assimilate to the issue of the tension between our individual or subgroup identity and our common human identity. That money is the touchstone of the tension is appropriate because money is at one and the same time an instrument of [182] private hoarding and a universal medium of exchange, the vehicle alike for the misanthropic miser's isolation and the philanthropic benefactor's communitarianism, equally the root of all evil and the thing that makes the world go 'round. Indeed, we are all greedy in one way or another, greedy for possessions or greedy for fame or greedy for knowledge. And how greedy we are and for what we are greedy characterizes us as what we are. The central question of the play, then, is "What are we?" And the play as a whole provides no easy answer for anyone, no comfortable panacea. What, then, does it provide? It provides a framework for reflection on the issues. And as such, the play itself, or the inner meaning of the play, is like the contents of one of Portia's caskets, and the text of the play is the inscription guiding us to a proper choice. Whether we will choose as Morocco or as Aragon or as Bassanio or as none of them is left to us.

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The play, then, is a guide for the perplexed. But it is a guide for the perplexed which creates in us the very self-conscious perplexity with which it helps us to come to terms. Thus, by making us aware of difficulties of which we had been previously unaware, it forces us to look thinkingly at what we do unthinkingly, all too unthinkingly. And what we do unthinkingly has its most powerful source in our ingrained notions about the important things. And our ingrained notions about the important things have their source in our religious beliefs. For if we are raised in a religious family, we are Jews or Christians *before* we are *anything* else. Yet the brilliance of *The Merchant of Venice* is that it examines that phenomenon from the other end, namely, it examines the way in which we can continue to be Jews or Christians *after* we are *everything* else.

The Merchant of Venice is a puzzle. From its very first performances, audiences have been perplexed by it. The first mention of the play, in the *Stationers' Registers* for 22 July 1598, states, "Entred...a booke of the *Marchaunt of Venyce* or otherwise called the *Iewe of Venyce*."⁸ Thus, from the very beginning, audiences have wondered whose play it is. Is it Antonio's? Or is it Shylock's? Still later, if one considers that the two most famous speeches in the play are Shylock's plea for the common humanity of the Jew⁹ and Portia's "quality of mercy" courtroom speech,¹⁰ then one must ask again, "Whose play is it?" Is it Shylock's? Or is it Portia's? If one quantitatively answers the question of whose play it is, the play would be most Portia's since she has the largest number of lines and appears in nine of the traditionally divided twenty scenes of the play, and it would be least Shylock's since he has just over 360 lines (about 7.5 percent) out of 2731 lines and appears in but five of the twenty scenes.¹¹ If one emotionally answers the question, the play would be most Shylock's and least Antonio's. Finally, if one pedantically answers the question, the play would be Antonio's since he is the presumed nominal title character. Which, then, is it? If we trust Shakespeare, we must use the signposts that he has given us as our guide.

[183] For either Shakespeare knew what he was doing or he did not know what he was doing. If he did not know what he was doing, if—that is—he merely provided a kaleidoscopic patchwork prompt for our private fantasies, then it is hard to justify our continued reverence and admiration for his work and the perennially compelling character of the plays which he wrote. If, on the other hand, he knew what he was doing, then we must bend our minds and wills to the simple yet difficult task of finding out what he knew and what he did as closely as possible to the way in which he himself understood what he knew and what he did.

In accomplishing this task, we must begin with the title.

The title, *The Merchant of Venice*, is a puzzle. As a Shakespearean title, it is unique. It is the only Shakespearean play whose title is an occupation and a place. As such, the two plays whose titles most closely resemble its title are *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, both of which are titled with a group and a place. *Two Gentlemen* focuses on the appropriately named Valentine and Proteus, the latter of whom has a father named Antonio and a servant named Launce (who is in turn the master of an unmannerly dog named Crab). In the course of the play, the Romanic named Julia disguises herself as a man in order to effect a reconciliation involving a ring exchange between the two gentlemen whose homoerotic friendship has been sabotaged by Proteus' heteroerotic treacheries. *Merry Wives* focuses on the humiliation and degradation of the pariah-like Falstaff, who represents the dark and lawless, yet attractively vital, underbelly of society.

The Merchant of Venice too focuses on the homoerotic (clearly latently homosexual) Christian Antonio,¹² who coldly uses Shylock to defend his relationship with Bassanio against the intrusion of Portia, whose presence in Bassanio's life has plunged Antonio into a profound state of melancholic depression which spreads to the society as a whole, a society whose only redeemers are the crude yet incisive servant Launcelot Gobbo and the elegant yet manipulative aristocrat Portia. Furthermore, *The Merchant of Venice* too focuses on the humiliation and degradation of the societally necessary pariah Shylock, who represents the Mosaic origins which the Christian society tries either to hide but use or to Christianize and absorb.

This much the title reveals at first glance.

What else does it reveal?

It reveals that mercantilism is central to an understanding of intercultural and intersocietal relationships. And although Antonio is the presumed merchant of the title, the title may suggest that merchanthood is paradigmatic for personhood, in which case everyone in the play is a merchant, and the absence of a name in the title points to all of us and not to any one in [184] particular. This suggestion is strengthened if one considers that etymologically the words "merchant" and "merchandise"¹³ belong to the same family of Latin words that "mercenary" and "mercy"¹⁴ do, the family of Latin words that cluster around the word *merces* (fee, wages, reward).¹⁵ Perhaps, then, the coin of the realm and the coin of the soul are more analogous than we like to think.

This the title reveals at second glance.

What else does it reveal?

It reveals that the play is set in Venice, the glittering and cosmopolitan port in which, if anywhere, disparate cultures should be able to meet and coexist peacefully and without contention. The only other Shakespearean play which is set in Venice is *Othello the Moor of Venice*, the only Shakespearean play whose title contains a racial designation. In that play, a culture clash takes place in which the love of an expatriate black infidel mercenary who has converted to Christianity for a white Christian aristocrat shakes the very foundations of society. In that play, to borrow terminology from Hannah Arendt,¹⁶ a pariah turned *parvenu* discovers to his doom that culture is more than skin deep. He makes manifest that to wear one's heart, or culture, on one's sleeve, or skin, is to invite destruction at the hands of those whose practical need for an alien person serves only to exacerbate their psychic need to scapegoat that person. They transform him into a demon on whose exorcism their mental and societal health comes to seem to depend. *The Merchant of Venice* too shows us a pariah, but this time a "conscious pariah,"¹⁷ one whose pariahhood is most clearly illustrated in his refusal to eat with his Christian co-citizens, a refusal which is the external sign of his inability to pray with them. As Shylock himself says, in what must be considered an aside, even if it is not so marked in modern editions, when he is invited to dine with Bassanio and Antonio:

Yes, to smell porke, to eate of the habitation which your Prophet the Nazarite conjured the divell into: I will buy with you, sell with you, talke with you, walke with you, and so following: but I will not eate with you, drinke with you, nor pray with you.¹⁸

Can one trust anyone with whom one cannot break bread? For premodern Christians, especially if one considers the iconographic significance of the Last Supper (even if they forget that it was a Passover dinner) and of the eating of the wafer at Mass, whoever

would not eat with them could not be considered fully human. Shylock feels the pain of this dehumanization and the unrepentant attitude of the Christians who practice it.¹⁹ When that pain drives Shylock finally to agree to dine with Christians, the result is that his daughter and his fortune have eloped with a Christian.²⁰ Given the circumstances, if he did not feel conspired against and paranoid, we would be astonished. Shylock is no Tevye fiddling on the roof while his children [185] and goods are absorbed into the Christian and secular society which surrounds them.

This much the title reveals.

The tone of *The Merchant of Venice* is a puzzle. It is classified as a comedy. But “what kind of comedy is this, we might well inquire.”²¹ This is a just question.

If Shylock were simply the protagonist, as Othello is in his play, then this would be a tragedy indeed. Of course, then, what is now designated as the fifth act of the play would be out of place, as it seems to be even to some now. The reunion of all but Shylock and the Duke at Portia’s home at Belmont, the beautiful mountain, which—given the pervasive Biblical references in the play²²— could ironically allude to Ararat after the flood or Sinai or the Sermon’s Mount or Calvary at the Crucifixion,²³ perhaps even a kind of cosmetized Dantean Mount Purgatorio,—such a reunion, which neither integrates the offending element²⁴ nor embodies the health of the secular authority in someone such as the Duke, cannot be regarded as the full reconciliation which comedy classically requires to achieve its closure.

The only other person than Shylock in Shakespeare’s nontragedies to be broken and ground under in this way, without integration or redemption, is the Falstaff of the history plays and *Merry Wives*. Apparently, then, neither Falstaff nor Shylock can be integrated easily into Western Christendom. Both are outside society in some decisive sense. Aristotle suggests that the only beings which can live outside society are the beast and the god.²⁵ Falstaff is clearly the avatar of the beast, the natural animal vitality which Christian governance (incarnated in Prince Hal/Henry V, whose true staff or scepter of noble and borderline-divine kingship must be forged in the smithy of Sir John’s false staff or scepter of base and borderline-bestial appetite) must constrain. Is Shylock, then, somehow the adumbration of a god? He is, and he is not, and this is part of the paradox of Judaism. Insofar as he is, he incarnates the invisible wrathful legalistic god of the Jewish Bible. But such a god without a cohesive people in a defined homeland is a fish out of water, because the fierce love of one’s own by which such a god is activated and which such a god activates in its worshippers can become foundationless in an alien society. In other words, the problem which Diaspora Judaism makes manifest is the problem of whether an uprooted Jew must inevitably become a rootless Jew, a corrupted Jew. The only true incarnation, as it were, of the invisible god of the Jewish Bible is the people in its purity as a people and in the purity of its observances. Shakespeare seems to know this, to such an extent that the harshness of the sentence which Shylock receives in being driven to convert to Christianity is at least a triple-edged sword.²⁶

First, the treatment of Shylock is so far from the Christian Scriptural exhortation to love even one’s enemies²⁷ that it constitutes an indictment of the hypocrisy of Christian society. The repeated puns throughout the play [186] on “gentle” and “gentile,” whose Elizabethan pronunciation would have been virtually identical and which are etymologically the same word, underscore how far these gentiles are from being gentle.²⁸ And if the beatitude is correct that the meek or gentle shall inherit the earth,²⁹ which means the true earth, then these gentiles shall inherit nothing more than a false

earth. For if Bassanio has chosen the right casket, he has done so only with Portia's help by means of the clues contained in her remarks to him and in the song which she has sung to him as he ponders his choice.³⁰ In actuality, these gentiles—and Portia is no exception—have chosen both the gold casket which contains nothing more than the death's head which lurks beneath the surface of those who immerse themselves in the lifestyles of the rich and famous, and the silver casket, which contains the idiot's head of merely secular justice.³¹ Instead of hearing the music of the spheres, all that they are hearing is the music of the dance band on the *Titanic*.³²

Second, the presentation of Shylock, from his initial attempt apparently to befriend the Christians despite their bestial persecution of him to his final apparently craven acquiescence in his conversion to Christianity, constitutes an indictment of Jews whose practice so belies their principles that conversion seems only right and proper. Indeed, Shakespeare seems to be saying of assimilationist Jews what Hannah Arendt says of the Jewish poet Heinrich Heine:

For Heine's attitude, if only as a poet, was that by achieving emancipation, the Jewish people had achieved a genuine freedom. He simply ignored the condition which had characterized emancipation everywhere in Europe—namely, that the Jew might only become a [human being] when [the Jew] ceased to be a Jew.³³

And if Shylock is less to blame for his fall than are his Christian co-citizens, that does not mean that he is not to blame. And the intermarriage of Jessica to a Christian is, Shakespeare seems to say, the inevitable fate of the Diaspora Jew.

Third, our reaction to Shylock's portrayal is a gauge of our understanding of the issues involved. If we consider his punishment deserved, we brand ourselves as anti-Semitic and xenophobic. If we consider it undeserved, we brand ourselves as socially, religiously, and politically naive. We seem, then, to be caught on the horns of a dilemma through which we cannot go. If our hearts do not go out to Shylock, we are damned as spiritually profligate and deformed, and if our hearts do go out to Shylock, we are damned as spiritually bankrupt and unformed.

Is there, then, no hope for us? Is intercultural and interreligious harmony neither possible nor desirable?

We humans are a puzzle. But what kind of puzzle are we? Are we a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces are miscut just imperceptibly enough to produce in us [187] an ineradicable desire to put the puzzle together, however impossible the task continually seems to us and however much the frustration which the attempt evokes merely causes us to abuse the apparently intractable pieces?

Perhaps not, even though when Portia as Balthasar cannot tell merchant from Jew, she suggests that it is. Perhaps, then, the pieces are not miscut at all, but the picture is so complex that the fit eludes us. Are there any things in the play to suggest that this is the case? There are.

First, there is the implicit lesson suggested by those who are conspicuously absent from Belmont in the final scene. They are Old Gobbo (Launcelot's father), Shylock, and the Duke of Venice. In other words, the only persons in the play who are described as, or can be assumed to be, old are banished from Belmont. Left are the young sophisticates, Christian and Jewish. And their inability to hear the music of the spheres is rooted in their inability to cultivate the tradition which could make them better than

they are. Christian and Jew alike have severed their ties with their Scriptural spiritual origins, and in doing so, they have lost their souls. From the Jewish point of view, if we are away from our spiritual roots, even if we are politically free, we may feel that "our soul is dried away" and that "there is nothing at all, besides...manna, before our eyes,"³⁴ and the bdellium colored coriander seed will be hidden from us, unless each of us shares our spiritual responsibility with seventy others, and each of those with seventy more, and so forth.³⁵ From the Christian point of view, if we are away from our spiritual roots, if we have gained the whole world at the cost of our soul, what are we profited?³⁶ On this, then, both Christian and Jew spiritually agree, that if we lose our spiritual nourishment, we are blind and empty. Whether that spiritual agreement can ever be politically implemented remains, of course, an open question, as Shakespeare well knew.³⁷

Second, the Duke of Venice, by whose rule, after all, Jews are permitted to live in Venice, treats Shylock as evenhandedly as he can. He may not praise Shylock, but he does not condemn him either.

In order to form an opinion of the law-suit, it is important to emphasize the different social positions of the parties. A new citizen and half-citizen with restricted privileges faces a patrician and member of the ruling class. That is to say, a half-free subject files his suit against a gentleman whose liberty is boundless. In order to dispense justice in such a case, the court must be of unusual impartiality.³⁸

The Duke does the best that he can, and perhaps in more spiritually enlightened times, he could do even better. The world of the Duke, then, is what is best in the world of the ducat.

Third, as much as we may condemn Jessica for her abandonment of her father Shylock, we must not be insensitive to the role that Shylock has played in alienating his daughter from himself. Portia can sidestep her [188] father because he is dead, but Jessica cannot do the same. Jessica's name alone tells us that she is indeed Shylock's daughter. After all, Shylock compares himself to Jacob in his business practices, an apt comparison, and both Shylock and Jacob married women named Leah.³⁹ Jacob's wife Leah bore a son called Yissachar,⁴⁰ whose name is a form of the Hebrew verb which means "to pay wages." It is not too fanciful, then, to conclude that Shylock's wife Leah bore a daughter whose name Jessica is a pun on the name Yissachar, a pun designed to show what indeed are the wages of assimilation, wages which Shylock too, in his own way, has paid. Indeed Shylock, particularly since the death of his wife Leah, seems to have lacked warmth and compassion. And that he has not remarried shows him to be isolated even from his own community.

Perhaps if he had remarried and provided a proper home for her, Jessica would not have abandoned him and his tradition. Indeed, as a person, she is presented as at least potentially noble. She is the only person in the play who tips someone,⁴¹ and she tips well. And perhaps the only external invariable in Shakespeare's plays is that those who tip well are noble and generous in their character. In addition, when she says, "I am never merry when I heare sweet musique,"⁴² she shows that she is unmoved by the secular and pagan music which buoys up her companions. Her presence in this shallow Christian world, then, does not sit easily on her. And yet it is a world to which she is inexorably drawn, for although the "Jesse" which her name covertly contains points far back to Jesse's ancestor Jacob and near ahead to his son David, it also points (from a

Christian point of view) to Jesus, the descendant of the line of Jesse (and hence ultimately of Jacob). Such tangled genealogical wordplay represents linguistic clowning of a very high order.

Finally, the clownish servant Launcelot Gobbo, the one whom Jessica tips, suggests in his own crude way that the worlds of Christian and Jew can meet.⁴³ Of course, some will say that his presence in the play is mere comic relief, but one Shakespearean rule of thumb that I have formulated and used fruitfully over the years is that when anything in a Shakespearean play is dismissed by others as comic relief,⁴⁴ it contains essential clues to the inner meaning of the play which contains it. This is no exception. The servant's name is the first indication that he caricaturishly represents a possible coexistence of the two traditions. His given name is the name of the preeminent Christian knight of the Round Table, and his family name is an Italianized version of the name "Job."⁴⁵ He moves from Jewish to Christian household with ease, he interacts with his blind father⁴⁶ in a way which is reminiscent of Jacob interacting with the blind Isaac, he is the only one to use the words "Pagan" and "Jew" and "Christian" in the same breath,⁴⁷ he acts as intermediary in Shylock's invitation to a Christian home,⁴⁸ he keeps Jessica's counsel,⁴⁹ he quotes Mosaic law,⁵⁰ and he bemoans the increase in the numbers of [189] Christians.⁵¹ In addition, he is the only one who is not present at Shylock's court case who could have been safely present, which suggests that he has no desire to see either party humiliated.

Therefore, Launcelot Gobbo represents the possibility of peaceful coexistence between Christian and Jew. But it is only a possibility, as the names of the Jews in the play indicate. The names are Shalach, Tubal, Chush, and Jessica,⁵² all taken from *Genesis* 10 and 11, in which the postdiluvian generations are enumerated and the Tower of Babel is discussed.

The Tower of Babel story suggests that a universal, unicultural, unilingual society is undesirable for humans. Whether a universal, multicultural, multilingual society is either desirable or possible for humans is left as an open question by the Bible, as it is also by Shakespeare. To be more precise, Shakespeare seems to assert its desirability but to doubt its feasibility. The test cases are *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello the Moor of Venice*, in both of which the attempt fails. To see Shakespeare's resolution of his doubts, we would have to look to *The Tempest*. To determine its feasibility for ourselves, we would have to look inside our own souls.

If we find that we have thematized Portia, whose name in Latin would mean something like gateness (i.e., instrumentality of access) and in English would jingle with both the Latin word for mouth (*os, oris*) and the rural ancient Latin and modern English pronunciation of the Latin word for gold (*aurum*), and whose namesake⁵³ is the wife of Brutus (whose self-conscious republicanism was teased into self-loving narcissism), then we have chosen the golden casket which on closer inspection proves to be a gilt, not to mention a guilt, casket. And if we find that we have thematized Shylock, whose name indicates that he has fallen even from his own orthodoxy and from his ability to preserve his own to the extent that he is "shy a lock" (i.e., wary of or lacking in the securing device which would have kept his daughter and goods at home, however much he possesses the superficial and easily picked locks on his treasure chests), then we have chosen the silver casket of a life guided by a narrow conception of quid pro quo in which one hand washes the other. But if we find that we have thematized Launcelot Gobbo, then we have chosen the lead casket, not the false lead casket which Bassanio chooses as a steppingstone to the golden casket of the world of Belmont, but the true lead casket of spiritual peace and enlightenment.

NOTES

¹ An early version of this paper was read to the Temple Beth Hillel/Beth El (Wynnewood, PA) Seventh Annual Torathon, 9 January 1993, and a revised version to the Keshet Israel Congregation (West Chester, PA) on 5 June 1994. I thank both congregations for their enthusiasm and intelligence: their comments and questions helped me to formulate my views more precisely and more clearly.

[190] The following critics—in order of their importance to me and my indebtedness to them—have wrestled impressively and seriously with the issues of the play as a whole: Allan Bloom, “On Christian and Jew: *The Merchant of Venice*,” in his *Shakespeare’s Politics* (NY, Basic, 1964), 13-34; Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare* (Chicago, Phoenix, 1960), vol. I, ch. xii, 81-116; John Gross, *Shylock: a legend and its legacy* (NY, Touchstone, 1992); Paul A. Cantor, “Religion and the Limits of Community in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Soundings*, 70 (1-2), Spring/Summer 1987, 239-258; Richard A. Posner, *Law and Literature* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard U., 1988), 90-99; John Lyon, *The Merchant of Venice* (Boston, Twayne, 1988). In addition, those who wish to study Shylock’s dramatic ancestry should read Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, and the discussions of the Pantaloon figure of the commedia dell’arte in Pierre Louis Duchartre, *The Italian Comedy*, tr. Randolph T. Weaver (NY, Dover, 1966, © 1929), 179-191 *et passim*.

² Cf. V. i. 4-7/3-6. The primary text to which I have referred is *The Merchant of Venice*, a new variorum edition, ed. Horace Howard Furness (NY, Dover, 1964, © 1888), hereafter designated “Variorum.” But since there is no standardized lineation of Shakespeare’s plays, I have given a second reference (to the right of a slash) to the Arden edition, ed. John Russell Brown (London, Methuen, 1964).

³ Consider Shylock’s comparison of Portia-Balthasar to Daniel and his praise of such a judge (IV. i. 233-234/219-220, 236/222, 258/242, 262-263/246-247, 315/297, 318/300) to Gratiano’s identical comparison and praise of the same judge (IV. i. 327-328/308-309, 333/313, 339/319, 349/329, 356/336).

⁴ Cf. V. i. 290 ff./266 ff.

⁵ Some critics try to remove the discomfort by mislabeling the play a “fairy tale.” Typical of such an approach is John Middleton Murry, “Shakespeare’s Method: *The Merchant of Venice*,” in *Shakespeare, The Comedies: a collection of critical essays*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1965), 32-46.

⁶ Cf. IV. i. 35/31.

⁷ Cf. IV. i. 150/142, 216/202, 248-249/233-234, 329/310.

⁸ Cited in Variorum, “Appendix,” 271.

⁹ III. i. 53 ff./52 ff. This speech and Shylock’s rating of Antonio’s behavior at I. iii. 110-132/101-124 should be compared to Launce’s diatribe about his dog at the beginning of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* II. iii.

¹⁰ IV. i. 194 ff./180 ff.

¹¹ Cf. Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago, U. Press, 1981), 13.

¹² Cf. John P. Sisk, “Bondage and Release in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 20 (2), Spring 1969, 218; Lars Engle, “‘Thrift is Blessing’: exchange and explanation in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37 (1), Spring 1986, 26 and context.

¹³ See I. i. 45/40, 50/45, iii. 49/44, III. i. 21/21, 121/118, ii. 252/238, 287/270, IV. i. 27/23, 33/29, 164/154-155, 181/170, 215/201, 244/229, 277/259, 313/295.

¹⁴ See III. iii. 3/1, IV. i. 8/6, 24/20, 93/88, 192/178, 194/180, 203/189, 207/193, 210/196, 212/198, 244/229, 380/359, 395/374, 438/414.

¹⁵ See A. D. Moody, “An Ironic Comedy,” in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall/Spectrum, 1970), 103. [Hereafter this volume will be designated “TCI.”]

¹⁶ Hannah Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah: a hidden tradition,” in *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish identity and politics in the modern age*, ed. Ron H. Feldman (NY, Grove Press, 1978), 67-90.

¹⁷ Arendt, 76-79. Cf. Arendt, “We Refugees,” *op. cit.*, 65-66.

¹⁸ I. iii. 33-37/29-33.

¹⁹ Cf. I. iii. 110-134/101-126.

²⁰ II. v. and viii.

²¹ Morris Carnovsky, “On Playing the Role of Shylock,” in *The Merchant of Venice* (NY, Dell Laurel, 1958), 22.

²² See Barbara K. Lewalski, “Biblical Allusion and Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*,” in *TCI*, 33-54. Also see Sylvan Barnet, “Introduction,” in *TCI*, 5-6.

²³ Cf. III. ii. 279-282/262-265.

²⁴ Cf. C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy* (NY, Meridian, 1963); John Picker, “Shylock and the Struggle for Closure,” *Judaism*, 43 (2), Spring 1994, 173-189.

[191]²⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, A. 2. 1253a27-29.

²⁶ Cf. Larry S. Champion, *The Evolution of Shakespeare's Comedy* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard U., 1970): "The insistence that Shylock become a Christian need not disturb us, because to most Elizabethans this would be an act of mercy." Such a view seems naive at best, morally obtuse at worst. Neither the sensibilities of the Elizabethans (or of ourselves) nor the dramatic context can make the conversion seem to be anything but cruel and unusual punishment (cf. Barnet, "Introduction," 7). The only question is how to gauge Shylock's attitude toward the punishment, whether his "I am content" (IV. i. 411/390) means "I am satisfied" or "Contentus sum" ("I have been contained").

²⁷ See *Matthew* 5: 44 and *Luke* 6: 27, 35.

²⁸ The defining occurrence is at II. vi. 58/51 (for which "gentle" and "gentile" are variant readings in the earliest printed texts). Cf. esp. IV. i. 38/34, but also II. iv. 21/19, 37/34, III. ii. 268/251, 271/254, IV. i. 195/181, and V. i. 284/260. See also Frank Kermode, "Some Themes in *The Merchant of Venice*," in *TCl*, 97.

²⁹ See *Matthew* 5: 5. Cf. *Matthew* 11: 29 and 21: 5; 1 *Peter* 3: 4.

³⁰ III. ii. Cf. Lynda E. Boose, "The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare," *PMLA*, 97 (3), May 1982, 337; Bloom, 26-27.

³¹ On the choice of the caskets, see Sigmund Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets" (1913), tr. C. J. M. Hubback, in Sigmund Freud, *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, ed. Benjamin Nelson (NY, Harper TB, 1958), 63-69. Freud's analysis would lead one to infer that the three suitors are psychological aspects of one and the same man and that the three caskets are analogously psychological aspects of one and the same woman. This would suggest that to understand Bassanio, one must understand his hidden Morocco and Aragon characteristics, just as to understand Portia-lead, one must understand her hidden Portia-gold and Portia-silver characteristics. For an incisive nonpsychoanalytic reading of the caskets and the play through them, especially the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio, see Barbara Tovey, "The Golden Casket: an interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*," in *Shakespeare as Political Thinker*, eds. John Alvis and Thomas G. West (Durham, Carolina Academic, 1981), 215-237. In addition, for a subtle plumbing of the depths and intricacies of the psychological undertones of the conversation between Portia and Bassanio at the time of the choice, its analogical antecedent in the elopement conversation between Jessica and Lorenzo, and its implications for understanding the final judgment of Bassanio (and ultimately of Antonio), see Harry Berger, Jr., "Marriage and Mercifixion in *The Merchant of Venice*: The Casket Scene Revisited," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 32, 155-162. Although Tovey's and Berger's articles both appeared in the same year and independently of each other, it is as if Tovey has written a prologue which Berger deepens by seeing that what Tovey calls the "theme of appearance and reality" (215) is *au fond* an examination of issues of epistemology in interpersonal relationships and of power in gender politics. And Berger's notion that mercy can be a tool for economic and psychological crucifixion is a hermeneutically rich lever for prying open many of the play's subtexts.

³² For the importance of music imagery in the play, see Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery* (Cambridge, MA, U. Press, 1966), 269-271. Also cf. Francis Fergusson, *Shakespeare: the pattern in his carpet* (NY, Dell Delta, 1971), 118.

³³ Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah," 75.

³⁴ *Numbers* 11:6; cf. V. i. 320/294.

³⁵ Cf. *Numbers* 11: 16; *Exodus* 24: 1.

³⁶ Cf. *Matthew* 16: 26; *Mark* 8: 36.

³⁷ See W. H. Auden, "Belmont and Venice," in *TCl*, 115.

³⁸ Hermann Sinsheimer, *Shylock: the history of a character* (NY, Citadel, 1964), 94.

³⁹ Cf. III. i. 115/111.

⁴⁰ *Genesis* 30: 18.

⁴¹ II. iii. 5/4.

⁴² V. i. 78/69.

⁴³ Cf. Bloom, 20, whose sense of the role of the clown is analogous to mine but whose interpretation of the significance of that role is opposed to mine.

⁴⁴ Typical of such critics is Harley Granville-Barker, "The Merchant of Venice," in *TCl*, 55-80. Not only does Granville-Barker describe Launcelot's clowning as "incongruously superfluous," but he also reduces the role of the "minor characters [e.g.,] the Duke,...Morocco, Aragon, Tubal, Lorenzo, Jessica,...the Gobbos,...Nerissa" (65) to that of minimally lively illustrations.

⁴⁵ The variant readings for the name "Gobbo" in the earliest printed texts are "Iobbe" and "Iob." The "I" in the variants is equivalent to our "J," which tells us that the "G" in "Gobbo" should be pronounced like those in "ginger" and not like those in "gorgon."

⁴⁶ II. ii. 31 ff./32 ff.

⁴⁷ II. iii. 12/11.

⁴⁸ II. iv.

⁴⁹ II. v.

⁵⁰ III. v. 2 ff./1 ff.; cf. *Exodus* 20: 5.

⁵¹ III. v. 20 ff./19 ff.

⁵² Although I discussed above a punning use of the name "Jessica," the actual origin of the name *simpliciter* is "Israh," the name of Milcah's sister (*Genesis* 11: 29). See also Lewalski, 41, n. 17.

⁵³ See I. i. 174-175/165-166.