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**Literary Machiavellianism, the Vice Figure, and the Jewish
Character : Anti-Semitic Perceptions in The Jew of Malta and The
Merchant Venice**

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on Anti-Semitism in Renaissance drama through the lens of attempting to weave an older literary idea into a newer one. By the Renaissance, the Vice figure, a literary tool to draw one-dimensional evil characters, began to raise questions about the rationale behind their villainy. Machiavellianism served to reclassify characters that were originally meant to be perceived by audiences as inherently evil, allowing them potentially to sympathize with them in the plight that led them to such deplorable acts.

Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare created Jewish characters who seek to remain in control of their families and wealth, often equating the two, usually to their own detriment. Marlowe's Barabas, already clouded by his hatred for the Christian population for their own Anti-Semitic tendencies, aims to retaliate against his Christian antagonists. While his words and actions embody the Vice figure trope, his desire to control elements of his life for his own benefit exhibit a layer of justification for the choices that he makes. Shakespeare's Shylock is adamant about receiving his pound of flesh from Antonio, a character who represents Christian characters who seek to dehumanize Shylock for being a Jew. Like Barabas, Shylock's plans to undermine the Christian characters in the play ultimately lead to his downfall, again raising questions about how justified his actions are throughout the drama.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Literary Machiavellianism, the Vice Figure, and the Jewish Character: Anti-Semitic

Perceptions in *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant Venice*

by

Allison Schaechter

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

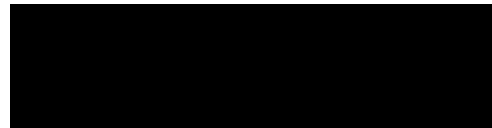
For the Degree of Master of Arts

May 2022

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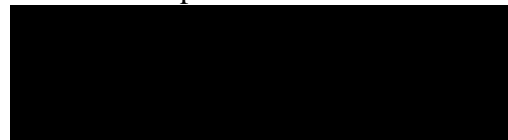
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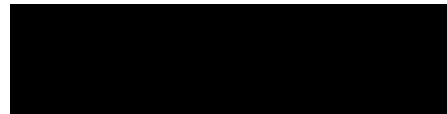
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LITERARY MACHIAVELLIANISM, THE VICE FIGURE, AND THE JEWISH
CHARACTER: ANTI-SEMITIC PERCEPTIONS IN *THE JEW OF MALTA* AND *THE*
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Montclair, NJ

2022

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According to James Shapiro's *Shakespeare and the Jews*, the three ways Jewish identity have been historically understood "(1) consisted of those who believe themselves to be Jews, (2) included those whom other Jews accept as Jews, either by descent or through conversion, and (3) comprised those whom non-Jews have thought of as Jews" (Shapiro 5). However, from the perspective of anti-Semites in the general population, Jewish identity is associated with ritual murder, economic crimes, and other forms of exploitation. Stereotype, rumor, and groundless speculation have been conceptual enemies to the Jewish population, highlighted in global propaganda that has spanned thousands of years, inspiring various authors and playwrights to incorporate these ideas into their work.

Distorted images of Jews have thus appeared in literary and dramatic settings across a wide span of territory over the centuries. One can argue in this context that the essential Jewish tradition of storytelling has been exploited by a global tendency to literary violence. Medieval playwrights would often use the Vice figure, in which evil characters are marked as such before even participating in the events of the drama. However, as drama has evolved since the Renaissance, villains are less one-dimensional; they are now humanized rather than ostracized, which still aligns with the initial purpose of the Vice figure. Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare present Jewish characters in their plays as villains, but give them purpose behind their villainy, leading audiences to question who is truly evil in the play despite some behavior that at first appears to be obviously evil.

Barabas from Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare's Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* address these contradictions as they develop their distinctive Jewish

characters. Both Barabas and Shylock are drawn as villainous individuals through a Machiavellian lens while periodically demonstrating irredeemable qualities that could classify them as a Vice figure. While the Vice figure is arguably an outdated literary and dramatic tool, it is clear that some of these elements are meant to question whether or not particularly Jewish characters are meant to be perceived as either unequivocally evil or just cunning, but in a villainous way, providing an opportunity to humanize them.

Furthermore, the Machiavellian qualities that these characters possess do not always mimic Machiavelli's beliefs in their entirety, but rather play the role of juxtaposition to the one dimensional Vice figure. The Vice figure is meant to introduce villains without a sense of vindication, while the Machiavellian layer serves to provide some measure of absolution. I will argue that Shakespeare and Marlowe have created characters that are meant to fit a newer mold while revealing elements of an old one. While Jewish characters Barabas and Shylock are intended to be viewed as the villains of their stories, it is apparent that there are opportunities for audiences to justify their treachery, despite any pre-existing bias, providing a more complex role for the Vice figure to play.

The anti-Semitism the Jewish population faced during in the Renaissance was intense and uninterrupted, often provoked by false stories about Jewish acts such as ritual murder. These stories ultimately drove playwrights to draw their Jewish characters as villains. Shylock, for example, is expelled from Venice, which is reflective of the multiple instances of Jewish Expulsion. James Shapiro notes that the Medieval Era Expulsion in which Jews were extracted from their home countries became a viable resource for sixteenth century England. Many Christians were particularly interested in the "versions of Expulsion that emphasized that the Jews were banished because they had

committed economic and physical crimes against their Christian hosts” (51). Of course, while it is difficult to identify the catalyst that caused individual expulsions, the alleged ritual murders, circumcisions, coin dippings, and various other crimes served as evidence to support the needs of those who perpetuated such expulsions to document their rationale behind this event.

These reports and anecdotes inevitably drove Renaissance dramatists such as Shakespeare and Marlowe to create characters reflective of an anti-Semitic perspective. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that the characters Shakespeare and Marlowe created were drawn as selfish, vindictive, and power-hungry, which are arguably Machiavellian traits. According to Frances Ringwood, although there is no tangible proof that playwrights such as Shakespeare even read Machiavelli’s work, his ideas and his persona were often cited. She states, “Shakespeare was so immersed in a culture informed by the ideas of Machiavelli that it would make little difference whether he did or not” (Ringwood 39). The “Jewish crime,” a classification that was spread through society during Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s time, was an amalgamation of individuals’ own fears and the ability to turn irreversible identity markers such as family, religion, sexuality, and physicality against them (Shapiro 91). Arguably, since plays are meant to hold a mirror to their audiences, characters such as Barabas and Shylock became famous Jewish scapegoats.

In Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, he states that it is better for a prince to be feared by his people than to be loved, in order to shape his empire into a functional one:

None the less, a prince must be slow to believe allegations and to take action, and must watch that he does not come to be afraid of his own shadow; his behavior must be tempered by humanity and prudence so that over-confidence does not make him rash or excessive distrust make him unbearable.

(Machiavelli 54)

When posing the question of whether it is better to be feared than loved, he answers, “one would like to be both the one and the other; but because it is difficult to combine them, it is far better¹ to be feared than loved if you cannot be both” (54). The obvious reasons for this are to ensure that there is no one that a ruler needs to fear themselves. The amount of distrust that a prince already has would be insurmountable considering the fragility of one’s control over an already delicate empire. Literary characters that are meant to be created in this image, while not always in positions of power, instill fear in their followers as a reflection of the fear they themselves have over losing what level of control they have. Because of this, they seek different ways to keep this control, which usually leads to a determination that can be construed as evil. As Machiavelli makes clear in this chapter, there is usually a reason that these characters interact the way they do with others, such as retaliating against those who attempt to usurp them.

Part of this idea of being feared rather than loved contributes to how a leader may seek to be perceived by those under his rule. Machiavelli declares himself a strong advocate for the importance of what are now called optics, so long as they are beneficial to the individual. He asserts that a ruler does not necessarily have to exhibit good qualities such as “compassion, being faithful to his word, kindness, guilelessness and devoutness” (57), but must only appear to have them. He takes this further when he adds,

¹ While a more accurate translation to this is “safer,” this particular translation that I happen to own recorded the term “better.” For the purposes of this thesis, I will keep the quote as it reflects the citation, but will be making the argument based on the more accurate translation.

“if he has these qualities and always behaves accordingly he will find them harmful; if he only appears to have them they will render him service” (57). He later supports this idea by mentioning metaphorical wolves and lions that are meant to explain the notion of ruling for the benefit of the ruler and not for the people, claiming that “a prudent ruler cannot, and must not, honor his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist” (57). Literary Machiavellian characters are often driven by the desire for revenge against those they believe to have wronged them. This to at least some extent reflects Machiavelli’s perspective on revenge, though Machiavelli advises his prince to foreclose the possibility of others revenging themselves on him: “any injury a prince does a man should be of such a kind that there is no fear of revenge” (11). While there is absolutely intent for revenge such as this in the eyes of characters like Barabas and Shylock, what makes them different in their literary contexts is that this revenge does indeed result in retaliation against them. They are not, then, successful prince-figures. While attempting to hold their wrongdoers accountable in cunning and devious ways, in the end, they are ultimately punished themselves by their targets of revenge. Therefore, while characters such as these may possess Machiavellian qualities, in the end they fail to meet the expectations that Machiavelli expresses about princely vengeance, thereby making room for a more complex Vice figure, and interactions that present these characters as three dimensional rather than one.

Machiavelli’s opinion discouraging an individual from incurring contempt and hatred from others offers an almost juxtaposed view of the way characters such as Barabas and Shylock are represented. He states that an individual in power “will be despised if he has a reputation for being fickle, frivolous, effeminate, cowardly,

irresolute; a prince should avoid this like the plague and strive to demonstrate in his actions grandeur, courage, sobriety, and strength” (59). Ironically, the former qualities encapsulate these literary characters, while the latter are potentially subverted into further reflecting such controversial behaviors.

Usually, characters who display these attributes are considered to be villainous because of their cunning nature and tendency to view power as the sole means of fulfillment. To achieve this power, these individuals do what they feel is necessary for their survival in power, even if it entails maintaining a façade that leads others into a false sense of security. Thus, their actions are deemed evil and their eradication makes for a positive resolution. While Machiavellianism as a political concept and anti-Semitism may not be directly linked, the traits that various literary characters exhibit, especially when they are written as Jewish, tend to be portrayed as more of an evil and cunning character, especially when they attempt to instill fear into the Christian characters.

With this in mind, the inclusion of the Machiavel character in Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* and his juxtaposition early on with Barabas suggests that Barabas himself is an irredeemable villain, while the Machiavel’s speech simultaneously hints to audiences that they may reserve some pity for the character. The role of Machiavel appears in the Prologue with a disclaimer, describing Barabas’s story as a tragedy, then ends by requesting, “grace him as he deserves, / And let him not be entertained the worse / Because he favors me” (Prologue.34-6). While one may offer a more sympathetic interpretation of these lines, Machiavel’s Prologue mentions that he “counts religion but a childish toy / And hold there I not sin but ignorance” (Prologue. 14-5) while proceeding to rhetorically ask if Caesar was entitled to his empire, which is aligned with claims

Machiavelli makes in *The Prince*. James Harmer argues that this Machiavel is not meant to be a reflection of Machiavelli himself, as he states that if one attempts to theorize that Machiavel's Prologue reads with a more intellectual tone, "then the basic picture of Machiavel as a cartoon character, an atheist 'straw man,' is complicated in such a way as to illuminate the relationship between the Prologue and the play, and furthermore, between *The Jew of Malta* and the intellectual atmosphere of other of Marlowe's plays" (Harmer 353). Essentially, by attempting to distance himself from religion as contradicted by Machiavelli himself, the play is meant to set the farcical tone that, despite its dramatic elements, presents characters like Barabas satirically. These sardonic representations in alignment with Machiavel's words are meant to speculate whether any character in this play can be trusted. By creating a Machiavel-like character, Marlowe seeks to raise questions by establishing an opportunity to somewhat humanize a character that is meant to be representative of a Vice figure.

Another analysis of this Prologue could be that Machiavel simply mimics Machiavelli's teachings, specifically attempting to build a rapport with the audience to prevent any contempt and association with the main character of this play. His clear rejection of religion and superstition, in addition to his plea to detach himself from the actions of the protagonist, is a reflection of what a ruler would potentially do to win the approval of his constituents. Moreover, the idea of ensuring that a ruler's societal perception works to their own benefit further exemplifies Machiavelli and what he stood for when writing his works. Barabas's subsequent soliloquy, in which he is seen counting his abundance of money, serves as a contradictory image to what the Machiavel Prologue is attempting to convey, yet ties with stereotypes that are seen by society as villainous

and selfish. One can argue that this practice should be considered Machiavellian, since he is counting his money to fill his own coffers, foreshadowing the events that will unfold throughout the play.

Barabas's similarity to the Vice figure reveals itself mostly in conversations in which he does not conceal his disdain for Christians. Whether these declarations are made in conversations, asides, soliloquies, or monologues, Barabas ensures that his hatred for the Christian population is known to other characters in the scene and the audience. While historically Christians are not the sole incriminators when it comes to anti-Semitism, playwrights who create these characters, especially Marlowe, make certain that they are the targets for their Jewish villains' revenge plots. As scholar Shawn Smith claims, "The Jew's antipathy to Christianity, his avarice, and his gross physical features announce his fundamental opposition to England's moral, racial, and social well-being" (Smith 422). Barabas's moments of self-preservation early in Act I, when he tells the audience, "Nay, let 'em combat, conquer, and kill all, / So they spare me, my daughter, and my wealth" and "Why let 'em enter, let 'em take the town" (1.1.190) convey Machiavelli's idea of working for one's own advantage, and confirm Christians' stereotypical history about the Jewish population and their alleged penchant for money laundering. Barabas's obsession with money is the prime motivator for plot of revenge against Ferenze by tricking his son into dueling with Abigail's Christian suitor, Mathias, resulting in the demise of both suitors. Although Barabas's anger may be warranted, his deplorable acts are intended to make audiences forget the reasons why Barabas was driven to commit them in the first place. These moments are meant to imply the

conflicting perceptions readers and audiences are meant to have about Barabas, with his allegedly evil intent interwoven with a rationale to act for one's own benefit.

Barabas's hatred for Christians in this speech far surpasses his obsessive lust for money. Following the revelation of Barabas's cruel plan, he encourages Ithamore to not feel sympathy for these fallen men when he advises, "Be moved at nothing, see thou pity none, / But to thyself smile when the Christians moan" (2.3.174-5). He further elaborates on his hatred for Christians by listing the ways he has eliminated them through the play's infamous speech that is meant to encompass both his Machiavellian character and common anti-Semitic stereotypes:

Sometimes I go about and poison wells,
And now and then, to cherish Christian thieves,
I am content to lose some of my crowns
That I may, walking in my gallery
See 'em go so pinioned along by my door.
(2.3.178-82)

The very fact that he would willingly "lose some of his golden crowns" to see several Christians bound and under arrest after he just executed a revenge plot against the governor over the dissolution of his wealth reflects the societal perception that Jews hate Christians enough to see them murdered. Barabas's gloating admission to "poisoning wells," represents the ritual murders that the Jewish population were often accused of (Shapiro 91). Ithamore, who is just as devious and murderous as Barabas, is given a brief moment of reflection and humanity to directly contrast his master's ruthlessness. This moment is meant to further epitomize unwarranted fears this anti-Semitic members of society had for the Jewish population.

Later in Barabas's speech is a list of monetary crimes that were said to be committed by the Jewish population:

Then, after that, was I an usurer,
 And with extorting, cozening, forfeiting,
 And tricks belonging unto brokery,
 I filled the jails with bankrouths in a year...

(2.3.192-5)

While most of the heinous crimes listed in Barabas's speech are fictitious and solely based on stereotype, some aspects of them are in a limited sense true, specifically when it comes to economic crime. In fact, "there can be no doubt that Jews were commonly identified usurers and financial brokers in in early modern England, as indeed they were throughout Europe" (Shapiro 98). Presumably for literary purposes, "English writers rarely bothered to distinguish between legitimate Jewish merchants and those they found or imagined to be unscrupulous or exploitative" (98). These stereotypes evolved from the position of the Jewish population and societal association with money. John Drakakis notes that "the figure of the Jew was associated throughout Europe during the Renaissance as someone whose religion allowed him to practice the lending of money at interest" (17). Christians believed usury to be a sin, yet they benefitted from the act. In order to rectify the situation, they passed it off to the Jewish population since Jews did not deem it a sin. Because of this, and the Expulsion, the only career opportunities they had were in trade and monetary exchange.

Of course, this is not the first time Barabas is associated with greed and monetary crime. Barabas's first speech in Act I of the play finds him in his "counting house" reveling in his wealth as an exaggerated satirical version of the perception that English society had of the Jews. Shawn Smith claims, "Marlowe most explicitly sketches the

Jew's 'villainy' through the recurring motif of frustrated exchange. This villainy is seemingly inseparable from the role greed plays in anti-Semitic definitions of Jewish character" (Smith 419). He goes on to cite Stephen Greenblatt, who "contends that Marlowe's play charges Barabas 'not with racial deviance or religious impiety but with economic and social crime, crime that is committed not only *against* the dominant Christian society but, in less 'pure' form, by that society'" (419). It is clear that economic and social crimes are committed by both Barabas and Ferenze in some form, what with the government confiscating Barabas's wealth followed by Barabas's unmitigated goal to retrieve it at the expense of others. What Smith and Greenblatt suggest here is that, while Barabas's crimes are economic and not religious, society has always deemed the two to be inextricable .

Martin Luther's 1543 attack on the Jews² draws a connection between Jews and usury, and in doing so he expresses resentment at the Jews claiming to be God's chosen people:

The Jews boast in their synagogues, praising and thanking God for sanctifying them through his law and setting them apart as a peculiar people, although they know full well that they are not at all observing this law, that they are full of conceit, envy, usury, greed, and all sorts of malice. The worst offenders are those who pretend to be very devout and holy in their prayers. They are so blind that not only practice usury—not to mention other vices—but they teach that it is a right which God conferred on them through Moses. Thereby, as in all the other matters, they slander God most infamously. (Luther 168-9)³

Luther's diatribe alleges what had been continuously repeated throughout much of Western Europe. Images of Jews poisoning wells, such as Pierre Boaistuau's 1569 image

² Martin Luther wrote *The Jews and their Lies* to specifically connect Jews and usury (Drakakis 17)

³ Cited in Drakakis, 18.

entitled *Certaine secrete wonders of nature* (19), were created for the purpose of reinforcing these stereotypes.

Barabas's plan to poison Abigail in Act III after she officially converts is a representation of the ritual murders and the mangling and abduction of children that spread through the community. In fact, issues such as child abandonment were often linked to stories of Jews who abducted children (Shapiro 108). In Barabas's eyes, Abigail extricating herself from beliefs that she formerly shared with her father is equivalent to death, so he disinherits her and decides to make her metaphorical death more literal. Chloe Preedy draws a connection between a passage in Deuteronomy 13 and the tumultuous household in which Barabas finds himself. In summary, it states that if a spouse, parent, or other close relation attempt to convince one to observe "other gods," one must not only deny them, but even kill them. In what can be potentially classified as a violation of this law, Barabas sends Abigail to a nunnery to feign conversion in order to retrieve the wealth that was stolen; later on, in response to Barabas's revenge plans, Abigail leaves on her own, which leads to Barabas's desire to react in this manner. His thirst for revenge throughout the entirety of this play embodies a kind of Machiavellianism, in which he feels he must protect his realm; however, in this case his "realm" includes his wealth, house, and faith, which causes him to harm others without a second thought.

Preedy mentions various motives for familial divisions, citing sources that indicate a somewhat obvious gender-specific reason, then continues with others that are more related to divine authority. She states, "patriarchal concerns do not tell the whole story; when Marlowe's characters seek to justify actions that shatter household bonds,

they do not rely on gender difference or social status to vindicate their behavior, but refer matters to a higher authority” (Preedy 165). In the context of Marlowe’s play, it is very clear that Abigail’s femininity is not a contributing factor to Barabas’s devious decision to retaliate against her, but rather her denial of their faith and his authority.

Barabas’s demise at the end of the play marks the extermination of the “villain” of the story. He becomes the victim of yet another revenge plot - his own - and even yells, “Help, Christians, help!” as a last resort despite his often cited hatred for Christians. This further highlights his villainy since he is now the defeated character, his death solving the Christian characters’ problems. Right before he dies, Barabas confesses to all of his crimes:

Know, governor, ‘twas I that slew thy son:
I framed the challenge that did make them meet;
Know, Calymath, I aimed thy overthrow,
And, had I but escaped this stratagem,
I would have brought confusion on you all...

(5.5.81-5)

While Ithamore’s betrayal and the Malta government’s retaliation are what enable Barabas’s eventual defeat, Barabas himself is portrayed as the evil villain until the very end. It leaves audiences with questions about the validity of Barabas’s hatred despite the fact that his several shocking revenge plots result in several deaths at his hand. Audiences are not given the opportunity during the progress of the play to truly grapple with the driving force of Barabas’s hate, since they are distracted by what they presume to know about a population that Barabas is meant to represent. Clayton MacKenzie questions Ferenze’s role in this exchange as he discusses the irony that Ferenze dispenses the punishment: “Is there any moral compass at all in a scheme of crime and punishment where wrongdoers are put in charge of punishing other wrongdoers? And is it not in some

sense ironic that lessons on eternal punishment should be delivered to pilgrims and onlookers by demonic rather than angelic teachers?" (MacKenzie 544). This further addresses the unfairness of the situation, in which Barabas's revenge against the Malta government, regardless of his personality traits, is in direct response to the repossession of his wealth. It is in these moments that his priorities and behaviors are highlighted to represent the ongoing anti-Semitism occurring in England and other parts of Western Europe.

Shylock, in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, while not blatantly presented as Machiavellian like Barabas, raises questions of the complexities of villainy based on societal perceptions of the Jewish population that makes audiences perceive him as the antagonist of the play. Catherine S. Cox offers her perspective on the anti-Semitic intent of this play when she asserts, "Readers who assume that the play is intended to appeal to a unified homogenous audience of anti-Semitic sympathizers, or, conversely, who consider Shakespeare himself a prescient spokesperson for current multicultural agendas, will find their argument subtly destabilized by the compromises and contradictions that generate the play's numerous and intricate subtexts" (Cox 363). However, despite Shakespeare's distinctive rendering of a Jewish Machiavellian character, Shylock and Barabas still share a common drive: a thirst for revenge against those who threaten their "realm." Both of these characters are deceived by a Christian force that caused them to seek revenge against them. While Barabas, can arguably be interpreted as a "Vice figure," Shylock is drawn to take a more subtle approach, revealing more of the political side of Machiavellian traits. Jonathan Elukin poses the simple and powerful question, "If Shylock is supposed to embody Jewish evil, why does Shakespeare give him this great

speech that humanizes him?” (Elukin 44). One way to answer this question is to consider the idea that perhaps this speech is not really meant to incite sympathy from audiences. James Shapiro cites Richard Burton’s interpretation of Shylock’s “hath not a Jew eyes” speech as a “spirit of vengeance” (9). He states:

Quoting these lines would have brought this argument to a halt. For where others have seen Shylock’s famous speech as an eloquent plea for the fundamental likeness of Jews and Christians, Burton chooses instead to find in it confirmation of the Jews’ insatiable lust for revenge.

(Shapiro 10)

While Burton’s view has an anti-Semitic overlay, if one reads this speech closely, there is a strong chance that Shylock’s frustration with Antonio’s excuses and entitlement to not pay serves as a driving force for the later events that make audiences perceive Shylock as a villain. The very first line of this speech is, “To bait fish withal; if it will feed nothing else, / it will feed my revenge” (3.1.48-9), which can lead one to assume that such is Shylock’s ultimate plan. However, as he continues, he takes a slightly different turn that muddies such an interpretation:

He hath disgraced me and hindered
me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at
my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains,
cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what’s his
reason? I’m a Jew.

(3.1.49-53)

This poses many questions that have yet to be solidly answered, specifically concerning Shylock’s motivation. Shylock is listing all of the ways that the Jews have been persecuted, incidentally all of the ways that they were targeted in Western Europe. The relevance to Barabas’s situation in *Malta* is striking; both of these characters have been swindled, but their responses in which they attempt to claim what they are owed are what

make them seem villainous. While Shylock's demand for Antonio's pound of flesh seems barbaric, it is in response to being denied money he is owed because he is Jewish, something that Shylock knew would occur.

Shylock then proceeds to ask the rhetorical questions, "Hath not a Jew eyes? / Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" (3.1.53-4) and so on, but then returns to the topic of revenge:

And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we
are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If
a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge!
If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should be 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.

(3.1.60-6)

Shylock emphasizes here that anything that occurs in the name of his revenge is on the Christian characters. Saying "The villainy you teach me I will execute" makes clear that he will learn from the way the Christian characters interact with him, except he'll do it with "better instruction." Those two words undoubtedly refer to the idea that the surrounding anti-Semitic society typically paints Jews as those who excel at violent revenge plots, which means experience will assist him with his plan. Shylock also has a more subtle way of showing his disdain for Christians than Barabas. While Barabas describes his plans for revenge detail, Shylock emphasizes the justification that his debts be paid even as he expresses his resentment. In Act I, as Antonio and Shylock are negotiating the bond, Antonio takes Bassanio aside and warns that "The devil can cite Scripture for this purpose" (1.1.94), which is meant to suggest that Jews are inherently deceptive and satanic. Later, when Antonio and Shylock settle the bond, Antonio

remarks, “The Hebrew will turn Christian, he grows kind” (1.1.174) and Bassanio responds, “I like not fair terms and a villain’s mind,” (1.1.175) mockingly suggesting that because Shylock has agreed to a deal with Antonio, he is like a “gentle” Christian, whereas being Jewish renders you a villain. Cox mentions that “While professing moral contempt for usury, Antonio doesn’t hesitate to obligate himself to Shylock on Bassanio’s behalf, seemingly in the belief that his contempt exonerates him of any moral offense” (Cox 365). Portraying Shylock as an individual who is not to be trusted when it comes to making deals and paying debts return us to the subject of usury. Cox continues:

The tensions reflected by and reproduced through these and similar historical and cultural conditions are perpetrated, identified, and articulated throughout *Merchant*, most significantly in connection with the Christian ambivalence toward usury, a financial service vital to the commercial interests of Venice, but which carries with it the freight of historical conflicts and strained relations. (Cox 364)

Shylock, like Barabas, is meant to be a blatant representation of common stereotypes about the Jewish population, especially in reference to economy and finance. He is another Jewish character meant to embody the Christian population’s disdain yet perceived usefulness of usury, causing them pass it on to the Jews. Moreover, Shylock’s plan for revenge can be construed as a Machiavellian way to see that actions are done for one’s own benefit.

Shylock’s declaration to Salanio and Salarino that Antonio’s bond is sealed points to the economic crimes of which Jews were constantly accused. When Salarino inquires about Antonio’s ships, Shylock replies:

There I have another bad match: a bankrupt,
 a prodigal, who dare scarce show his head on the Rialto,
 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.

(3.1.39-45)

Shylock obsessively warns that Antonio must pay his debts, raising doubts about Antonio's trustworthiness, which becomes an additional driving force for his decision to enact his revenge. According to Anna Forrester, because Antonio freely lends credit and finances Bassanio's journey to pursue Portia, Shylock resents him even further for deliberately going further into debt since that creates more problems for Shylock's occupation, especially when that is the only way he can make his living (Forrester 38). This exchange is essentially "the core of the play" (Elukin 47). As he explains later, this is part of his revenge plot, since he is sure he will win his pound of flesh. This and the fact that he enacts this plan carefully exhibits literary Machiavellianism; that is, being cunning but in a villainous way. The repetition of the line, "Let him look to his bond," reminds audiences that Shylock will not let this pass, especially since this was his plan from the beginning. Shylock is not portrayed positively in this play, given his demand for repayment on a bond that he purposefully made in hopes of entrapping Antonio, and his obvious desire for revenge on those who wronged him. Shylock's inevitable desire for revenge, especially against Christians, is also slightly ambiguous; for a while, audiences may question how figurative this "pound of flesh" really is. Again, like Barabas, while his actions may be justified, Shylock's appalling actions are meant to make audiences question this.

The infamous “pound of flesh” demand is likely reflective of a ritual murder stereotype. Shapiro discusses those who identify a connection between Shylock’s insistence on the pound of flesh and circumcision. He states, “an occluded threat of circumcision informs Shylock’s desire to cut a pound of Antonio’s flesh” (114). A common anti-Semitic claim was that Jews force circumcisions on Christians as part of the process of their ritual murders. They subverted the true symbolic representation of circumcision⁴ and developed a sinister interpretation that made circumcision a way of “becoming a Jew”⁵ (114). According to Shapiro, “flesh” usually means “penis,” specifically in the context of language in Renaissance dramas, so until the trial in Act IV, it is assumed that cutting off a pound of flesh meant castration, an undoubtedly embellished form of circumcision (121).

Furthermore, Shapiro cites Paul’s Romans as it pertains to circumcision:

For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and circumcisions is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.

(Romans 2:28-29)⁶

Shylock’s expectation that the pound of flesh should be extracted from the area near Antonio’s heart alludes to the unsettling, yet common assumptions society has about Jews and their traditions. In fact, Shapiro states, “Shylock will cut his Christian adversary in that part of the body where the Christians believe themselves to be truly circumcised: the heart” (127). Shapiro then comments, “Shylock’s threat gives a wonderfully ironic twist to the commentary on Paul’s Romans that ‘he is a Jew indeed...who cuts off all

⁴ As a covenant between God and Abraham (and by generational extension, between God and the Jewish people).

⁵ Alleviating original sin, which was meant to associate Jews with the idea of sin (Shapiro 114).

⁶ quoted from the King James Bible

superfluities and pollutions which are spiritually though not literally meant by the law of circumcision” (127). Ultimately, the two types of circumcision indicated in the play, both meant to be repudiated based on anti-Semitic attitudes, are inward and outward; or, more specifically, that of the flesh and the heart (128). Challenging circumcision and its purpose, while deliberately associating the tradition to promote murderous intent further exemplifies the generational anti-Semitism that was the driving force for the creation of villainous Jewish characters.

As previously mentioned, when Abigail in *Malta* decides to convert to Christianity and move to a nunnery, Barabas becomes even more vengeful and poisons her. While Shylock does not reach this murderous extreme, when Jessica marries Lorenzo and takes some of Shylock’s money, it becomes a major reason for his desire for revenge against the Christians in the play. What makes Shylock and Barabas similar in these situations is their rage over both their daughters leaving the faith and the theft of their wealth. Audiences are provided with a third-person account of Shylock’s reaction from Salanio:

As the dog Jew did utter in the streets:
 ‘My daughter! O, my ducats! O, my daughter!
 Fled with a Christian! O, my Christian ducats!
 A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
 Of double ducats, stol’n from me by my daughter!

(2.8.14-9)

Salanio tells the tale of Shylock crying for his daughter and his money, as if the loss of his money is equivalent to the loss of his child. As Salanio, a Christian, recounts this moment, Shakespeare highlights the economic stereotypes that have been targeted towards the Jews; specifically, how important wealth is to them and what they will do to retain it. Following Shylock’s cry of “O, my daughter! O, my ducats!” he also reportedly

lists each individual gem and gold piece that has been stolen, which is meant to reinforce this point.

Later in Act III, Jessica and Lancelot the Clown discuss Jessica's marriage to Lorenzo and her conversion to Christianity:

JESSICA I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian!

CLOWN Truly, the more to blame he; we were Christians enow before, e'en as many as could well live one by another. This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs: if we grow all to be pork eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money.

(3.5.17-23)

Jessica's view that Lorenzo "saved her" by converting to Christianity underscores that being Jewish is something that one needs to be rescued from. Because Judaism is tied to the complex relationship between the Vice figure villain and the layer of humanity that contradicts it, this one exclamation epitomizes the fear that society channels towards the Jewish population and why one must be saved from the possibility of being Jewish.

Jessica has clearly been influenced by Christian society, causing her to seek disassociation from her family. Marrying Lorenzo and extricating herself from her father's authority exemplifies the "princess in the tower" motif with her father as her captor and Lorenzo as her savior. As with Barabas, the Christian connection, whether it is through marriage or joining a convent, is what hurts these fathers the most. With Barabas, his resentment at this betrayal runs deeper and in fact implodes when the government takes his wealth and his daughter leaves; with Shylock, his resentment is, at least for a time, more successfully focused on a plan of revenge.

In the Act IV trial scene, many instances of demonizing Shylock appear through Portia's manipulation at the end. The scene opens with the Duke sympathizing with Antonio, as he says,

I am sorry for thee. Thou art come to answer
A stony adversary, an inhumane wretch,
Uncapable of pity, void and empty
From any dram of mercy. (4.1.3-5)

It is clear that Shylock will be the one who is left to suffer the consequences despite the debt that he insists must be paid. Although Shylock initiates this deal in order to avenge his own ostracism, the fact that Antonio escapes payment (despite what is actually owed) and Shylock is forced to lose his estate and convert is a clear demonstration of how a Christian-dominated society functioned in England and Western Europe. Anna Forrester observes that "Given that the humanity of the Jewish denizen often fell secondary to his economic function, it is not surprising that complications arise when Shylock contends with one of Venice's most protected, admired citizens" (Forrester 38).

Portia plays a prominent role in Shylock's ultimate fall. Disguised as her husband, she seems to lean towards an outcome in favor of Shylock until the sentence is ready to be served. When she enters, she first asks, "Which is the merchant here, and which is the Jew?" (4.1.170); according to Drakakis's brief comparison to *Malta*, "Marlowe's play conflates 'Jew' and 'merchant,' whereas Shakespeare maintains a distinction between them, notwithstanding the apparent confusion that some critics ascribed to Portia's question..." (Drakakis 24). This ambiguous question is intentional, since Shylock's career is economic like Antonio's, yet the inquiry is meant to highlight Shylock's "otherness" even further. Drakakis states, "the Jew is a theatrical stereotype, a cultural fantasy, invoked as a manifestation of the principle of *otherness* against which Venice is

made to define its own identity” (24). Here, it is implied that the Venetian is meant to differ from the Jew. This principle of difference underlies his refusal to be merciful during the trial. While Shylock is made to believe that his revenge plot will be successful, the tide is turned when Portia reminds him of the semantics of the written bond. Cox claims, “Shylock’s imminent legal and financial victory over Antonio is therefore perceived by the Venetian spectators as an unacceptable reversal of power, reflecting the foremost patristic and medieval rationale for anti-Judaism, that no Jew should ever be allowed to have power over a Christian” (Cox 368). This trial echoes Barabas’s fate, in which his revenge plot is subverted and turned against him. The idea that the Jewish person must never have power over a Christian represents traditions that are reflective of a pre-existing bias present in the drama and its audiences. Shylock’s need for revenge, whether justified or not, is perceived as a villainous plot by the play’s Christian characters. In this context, the need for the victory over the Vice figure who is usually inherently evil, is reinforced by the idea that Shylock’s and Barabas’s villainy is in retaliation against a society that has wronged them. .

Finally, Elukin poses another question: “if Shylock is meant to be an object of pity and to challenge Christian prejudices, why is he brutally silenced by a forced conversion?” (Elukin 44). He is convincing in suggesting that Shylock was never meant to be an object of pity, and indeed his “forced conversion” is prime evidence of this. In fact, Elukin goes so far as to posit that the story is meant to be an allusion to the struggle between Christ and the Devil, stating, “Shylock was tricked into claiming Antonio, just as the Devil was seduced into seizing Jesus” (Elukin 46). Antonio inevitably is the one who condemns Shylock to poverty and mandatory religious conversion when he demands:

Two things provided more: that for this favour
 He presently become a Christian;
 The other, that he do record a gift
 Here in the court of all he dies possessed
 Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter.

(4.1.382-6)

Antonio's conditions serve to rob Shylock of everything he has, especially now that his daughter has converted to Christianity at this point. As in Barabas's fate, despite the fact that these economic stereotypes and isolation have driven Shylock to his revenge, the satisfaction of the Christian characters is equated with a positive resolution. The motif in comedies in which all characters are either married or paired off in some form by the end is perpetuated here, even as Shylock does ultimately walk off alone. His departing statement, "I am not well," (4.1.392) encapsulates the entire play and the events that led up to this point.

Both *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice* are structured to portray a good vs. evil perspective, the "good" being the Christians and the "evil" being the Jewish character. Shakespeare and Marlowe drew their characters as individuals who consistently reveal negative qualities that society construed as evil. Making these specific characters possess these qualities highlights anti-Semitic prejudices. In Machiavelli's own works, he describes a great ruler as one who ensures that his citizens view him as extraordinary by any means necessary. Throughout *The Prince*, Machiavelli suggests that rulers must work for their own benefit in order to keep control over their empire, and that the importance of religion is mainly for the benefit of optics. Shylock's and Barabas's constant need to be in control of their environments and individuals around them drive them towards immoral actions that can potentially be justified based events in the play that led to their tragic ends. While this may be considered Machiavellian, these characters

create questions for audiences as to who the villain truly is in these plays, despite the anti-Semitism exhibited before and during the Renaissance.

During the Renaissance, Shakespeare and Marlowe created Jewish characters who have a variety of roles in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Jew of Malta*. They serve as Vice figures, at times perceived as irredeemable by other characters and audiences, while other moments provide at least limited justifications behind the choices they make. Even as they are at times depicted as irrevocably evil, they are also specifically Machiavellian villains of their dramas, with such figures' seemingly selfish ways. The fact that these types of characters were specifically Jewish indicates society's bias against the Jewish population, stemming from centuries of anti-Semitism. Ultimately, the juxtaposition of the Vice figure and the way literary characters can be framed as Machiavellian is reflective of the ability to humanize even the most heinous of villains.

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