

Beyond Violence: *The Merchant of Venice*

Caroline Lion

Professor Ewan Fernie, Shakespeare Studies

Professor Isabelle Wollaston, Jewish Studies

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Summary

Beyond Violence: "The Merchant of Venice" borrows from Jewish and postmodern thought to engage in an epiphanic analysis of Shakespeare's play. This thesis begins with the important and foundational critical history of *Merchant*, tracks the epiphanic drive of five characters in five chapters, reviews the humiliating trial scene as an important moment in the plot, and finally points to the rings as the material realization of the epiphany itself. This thesis argues that the epiphanies in *The Merchant of Venice* finally merge in the figure of the rings revealing a transformed spiritual and societal paradigm. The corrupt, racist, and antisemitic characters of *Merchant* do not necessarily form heavenly bonds with God or the other by the end of the play. They each, however, drive themselves beyond religion to a potential trace of an epiphanic transcendence. This trace of transcendence indicates that even within the cruelest cultures, there is the eternal possibility of astounding love and a world community beyond violence.

A Note on References

In this thesis, quotations from *The Merchant of Venice* are from the Arden Shakespeare Third Series, ed. John Drakakis (London: Bloomsbury, 2011). John Drakakis, with his thorough research, has provided an important foundation for mine. I agree with much of his interpretation and while questioning it, I like to think that I am also perhaps adding to it. I am grateful to him for his advice during this process.

Productions that have influenced me include the performance directed by Polly Findlay at The Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford upon Avon, 2015, and that by Bill Rauch at The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland, Oregon, 2010. I was also influenced by the production at the Globe Theatre, London directed by Jonathan Munby in 2015. It was a 2015 performance of *Pericles*, however, at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival that has ultimately led to this thesis. In that performance, director Joseph Haj managed a synthesis of the spiritual and the political that I felt could be further explored via *The Merchant of Venice* and Jewish thought.

A Note on the Choice of Chicago Style

I have chosen the Chicago style and American conventions for this thesis. Words that are referenced directly from Shakespeare's plays are spelled as they appear in the text. Since this thesis has been researched and written at the Shakespeare Institute, I am using the English convention of single quotes for clarity.

A Note on the Emailed Submission

Sometimes, elements of a document get jumbled via email. This document is double-spaced with single-spaced blocked quotes. All paragraphs are indented except for the opening paragraph of each section. Endnotes and bibliographical notes are lined-up as required.

A Note on the Transliteration of Hebrew Words

1. I have tried to write transliterations as close as possible to the Hebrew enunciation.
2. I am not following any established school of thought concerning transliterations. My goal is consistency and accuracy of sound.
3. The *chet* is written as an *h* sound. This holds true unless the transliteration is spelled differently in Websters Dictionary or a citation.
4. Transliterations are italicized if they are *not* in Websters Dictionary. Midrash, for example, is not italicized. You can see Webster's definition here: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/midrash>.
5. This thesis quotes from the Hebrew Bible to illuminate parts of *The Merchant of Venice*. I will quote the Hebrew, with a translation, when the English language feels like it does not quite capture the essence of the Hebrew passage. Otherwise, I will use transliterations or translations.

6. There are two instances where I have cited phrases or sentences in Hebrew. They are not four lines. I have still decided to use block quotes since Hebrew is written from right to left and it helps with clarity.

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Introduction

The Introduction to this thesis examines a representative Jewish critical history of *The Merchant of Venice*. Jewish criticism of *Merchant* has been evolving rapidly since the Holocaust and needs some clarification. This systematic critical review prepares us for the transformative analysis in the body of this work.

Jewish critical history refers to any criticism written by or significantly about Jews. *Merchant* Jewish critical history, I suggest, can include critics from any culture or religion. Jewish thought, a term I will be using in this thesis, refers to the volumes of commentary on the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible, in Christian terms, shares writings with the Christian Bible and omits the New Testament. In Judaism, the Hebrew Bible is the authoritative collection of Hebrew scriptures. It is primarily studied in biblical Hebrew, a language that arguably offers something compelling and ancient as compared to secular translations, including the modern Hebrew. The Torah is within the Hebrew Bible and consists of the five books of Moses or the scriptures gifted figuratively or literally by God at Mount Sinai. The Talmud and the related Mishnah consist of oral teachings, conversations, or authoritative commentary on the Hebrew Bible redacted on parchment between the 2nd and 5th centuries CE.¹ Maimonides (12th century), Moshe de Leon (13th), Nachmonides (13th), and Rashi (11th) are respected medieval rabbis, or teachers, who created commentary on both the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. Seventeenth, 18th, and 19th-century rabbis who figure in this thesis include Isaac Luria, the Baal Shem Tov, and Schneur Zalman. Twentieth and 21st-century rabbis include Abraham Joshua Heschel, David Rosen, and Jonathan Sacks. The rabbis mentioned and others cement a balance between law and love that this

thesis agrees with. I am a liberal Jew. It feels strange to quote mostly Orthodox rabbis. My rabbinic training, however, was at an interdenominational college. There, I realized the beauty of many of the teachings that will be expressed in this thesis. Jewish thought is not only rabbinic. Some postmodern philosophy, we will see, such as that of Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas can be included in Jewish thought in its reflection of biblical commentary and motifs. Criticism of *The Merchant of Venice* has begun to increasingly engage with the Hebrew Bible and synthesize with Jewish thought. However, something intimately connected to Judaism has been minimized or ignored in that criticism. This crucial element is the epiphany, or in the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, the “creative force.”² The epiphany is understood in literary criticism as “a sudden spiritual manifestation” or realization.³

Critics such as Julia Lupton⁴ and Kenneth Gross⁵ touch upon the epiphany, or a similar experience, in Shakespeare studies. There is still, I contend, a need for a more thorough representation of the epiphany in *Merchant* to tap the Judaic potential in illuminating the play. This Introduction demonstrates that need and suggests a detailed analysis of the epiphany in *The Merchant of Venice*. The Hebrew term for the epiphany is הִתְגַּלּוּת or *hitgalut*. The intensive reflexive tense, implied in the prefix *hit*, indicates an intense agency that is also reflexive. The root word is *gal* which means redemption. The epiphany, if analyzed in the Hebrew, is an intense action of redemption in which the direct object is the same as the subject. The epiphanic experience is cyclical. The person advancing towards the epiphany receives the partial experience and continues advancing in his yearning for complete satisfaction. *Hitgalut* also means revelation, such as the revelation at Mount Sinai (Exodus 18-20). This thesis begins with a response to *Merchant* critical history then tracks five characters (within five subsequent chapters) to demonstrate their drive and approach to the epiphany. I am concerned with where these characters go, what they say, and how

others respond to them. The thesis reviews the trial as an important moment in the plot and finally points to the motif of the rings as the material realization of the epiphany itself. I argue that the epiphanies in *The Merchant of Venice* merge in the figure of the rings revealing a transformed spiritual and societal path. *Merchant* helps to create a continuation of the Abrahamic scriptures in its revealing of a new paradigm. The epiphany potentially helps to unfold this new societal paradigm and reveal a compelling theme of repair, transcendence, and love in *Merchant*.

The method of analysis in this thesis partly borrows from the rabbis of Talmud. These rabbis attempted to clarify ancient biblical myths and negotiate ancient laws in their present world. They also attempted to clarify their present world through that same ancient myth. I will be examining Jewish thought to illuminate a historic narrative, in this case, *The Merchant of Venice*. I will also be gleaning meaning from that historic narrative—*Merchant* and its criticism—to negotiate Jewish thought in the present. This task includes putting into creative dialogue Shakespearean and Jewish sources. I believe that this method of analysis can help to illuminate themes in *Merchant* that transcend victimhood, possibly the dominant reception of the play post-Holocaust. Victimhood is not the same as victimization. Victimhood is a self-definition limited to the horrors of victimization. The Jews have certainly been victims of persecution for centuries. Such a restricted definition, however, promotes a view of the Jews as an “ever-dying people”⁶ and is not necessarily healthy or constructive. Many cultures experience victimization and the questions posed in this thesis about Jewish victimhood are, I hope, partly helpful for all. I take the focus on antisemitism concerning *Merchant* seriously but argue that there are limitations and potential dangers in the preoccupation with victimization. Ultimately, I will apply the Shakespearean epiphany to a human and community transformation beyond violence.

Some might understandably question the goal to indicate epiphanies within a play notorious for its antisemitic and corrupt characters. In Judaism, the epiphany of creation, as understood in the Torah and interpreted in the 16th-century mystical *Zohar*, rises from a formless dark void or *tohu va bohu v'hosheh* (Genesis 1:3).⁷ Revelation in Judaism occurs after the Israelites have escaped slavery (Exodus 15–20), arguably, we will see, the slavery imposed by their own doubt and fear. The human epiphany in Jewish myth rises from darkness. The darkness of the present shocks us with images of racism, antisemitism, and materialistic corruption. The ugly hatred in Shakespeare's *Merchant*, I contend, disturbingly intimates the violence we live with today. Shakespeare's themes are humanitarian, spiritual, and transformative.⁸ His characters potentially have epiphanies that are transformative. An epiphanic analysis of *The Merchant of Venice*, given its corrupt setting and twisted characters, is not only Jewish and Shakespearean but, I suggest, relevant in the present in our drive towards peace.

Antisemitism in "Merchant"

At the start of the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, Gratiano says this to the Jew Shylock,

That souls of animals infuse themselves
 Into the trunks of men. Thy currish spirit
 Govern'd a wolf, who, hang'd for human slaughter,
 Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,
 And whils't thou lay'st in thy unhallow'd dam,
 Infus'd itself in thee; for thy desires
 Are wolfish, bloody, starv'd and ravenous. (4.1. 131–37)⁹

The speech portrays an animal soul traveling covertly through the air, trunks (not bodies) of men, and ravenous wolves hanging from trees. A wolf is 'hang'd for human slaughter'. Shylock is described as 'lay[ing]' strangely in an 'unhallow'd dam', perhaps figuratively the seeming polluted

or Jewish uterus of his mother. The spirit of the ‘hang’d’ wolf seemingly infuses itself viciously into the fetus of Shylock while still in his Jewish mother’s womb. A woman is estranged from her cognitive being as her uterus is secretly entered by ‘currish spirits’.

The hope for an orderly and fair trial collapses with the vocalization of these grotesque images. Some sense of order, however, is strangely apparent in this same speech. Literally, people, not wolves, are hanged for ‘human slaughter’. The speech begins with a wolf as personified in the passive—he is ‘hang’d’—and ends with a person or fetus passively transformed by a wolfish soul. There is something cyclical here, a chilling announcement of the circulation of evil in which the Jew is central.

We learn two things from this speech. First, the seeming evil of Shylock is not seen as an active decision on his part, rather as a passive event. Shylock is seemingly infused with evil before he is a sovereign being. Second, imagery has the power to cement evil into the setting as if factual. Gratiano’s speech is so intensely realized that it supervenes on the ‘reality’ of the play and explains, without ever excusing, a fantastical attraction to racial hatred. Shylock, after all, takes Gratiano’s words seriously enough to respond to them even if he describes Gratiano’s speech as a “rail” (4.1. 139) of illogical images. The cyclical agency found within the speech can strangely indicate not only the recurring and chaotic force of antisemitism and evil. It also, I will demonstrate in this thesis through the image of the rings, can be redirected positively. The cyclical agency of evil, if refashioned, can possibly indicate a transcendent and totalizing epiphanic reality. The rings are circular. They have cyclical agency in their form. Shakespeare creates a cycle of darkness and antisemitism in Gratiano’s speech. He then possibly refashions the experience of circularity in the figure of the rings. I contend that it is possible to illuminate epiphanic love and potential beauty in

Merchant through the symbol of the rings. First, though, we must negotiate the backward, twisted, and flagrant antisemitism and pain so obvious in the text of the play.

Given the above speech by Gratiano and many similar, it is understandable that much criticism post-Holocaust is committed to centering itself politically on the violent setting in *Merchant* with minimal regard for anything else. Before examining some of that criticism, I want to discuss a recent event that exemplifies that political commitment. This event concerns a 1978 monograph, *The Harmonies of "The Merchant of Venice"* by Lawrence Danson.¹⁰ Walter Cohen in 1982 described *Harmonies* as "the most comprehensive and compelling study of the play yet produced."¹¹ Cohen summarizes *Harmonies* as the attempt to "dramatize not one set of values (Christian or Jewish) over the other but the transformation of conflicts into harmonies that incorporate what at the same time they transcend."¹² Decades after its publication, John Drakakis in his Introduction to the Arden edition (2010) strangely cited *Harmonies*.¹³ The problem is that Drakakis cited *only* Danson's opening claim that much of the then-present criticism centered on Shylock. Danson's theologically influenced monograph has become seemingly altered in present criticism to possibly support a focus he was mostly moving away from. Drakakis syntactically bridges Danson to John Gross who, we will soon see, consolidates his research on the victimized Shylock.¹⁴ Drakakis then moves swiftly to the 1998 statement by Harold Bloom that one "would have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to recognize that Shakespeare's grand, equivocal comedy...is nevertheless a profoundly antisemitic work."¹⁵ I will return to this quote. Drakakis arguably connects a theologically oriented Danson to Gross and his focus on antisemitism as well as to Bloom's cry for that same focus. This process of criticism is important to note. It indicates that post-Holocaust criticism of *Merchant* not consumed with antisemitism has ultimately become subsumed by that same theme, antisemitism, and the related victimhood. In this way, what I will

now call victimhood criticism feels like it has weirdly been, for a lack of a better word, snowballing since the Holocaust. Even criticism such as Danson's not singularly concerned with antisemitism has possibly been represented as such. This strange decision on the part of Drakakis, a fine scholar, indicates an absolute commitment to political and social equality but feels inconsistent with Jewish moral codes. The commitment is understandable. In this post-Holocaust world, it arguably feels academically impossible to realize any release from victimhood especially when antisemitic acts continue to be perpetrated.

Drakakis claims through Bloom that "a context [in *Merchant*] is provided that invites us to read [antisemitism] critically."¹⁶ This critical reading of antisemitism can seemingly validate that same antisemitism. I partly agree with Drakakis and Bloom. *Merchant* seems to strangely and superficially allow an analysis of antisemitism that can encourage the possible acceptance of it. The audience seems, on the surface, to be constantly spinning on the moral compass between compassion for the otherized Jew and condemnation of Shylock as the vengeful would-be murderer. That experience is so disorienting that it is easy to discount other expansive themes in the play, themes that can possibly help to curtail violence. The problem is that if the illogical hatred of the Jews is the predominant theme used by fine scholars and directors to transmit Shakespeare's popular play, the Jew will finally define himself as a victim. Victimhood is then perpetuated in literary criticism and elsewhere. Drakakis traces the early-modern "demonization" of the Jew.¹⁷ His exploration maintains this fixed focus and culminates in the text "On the Jews and Their Lies"¹⁸ by Martin Luther and its "hideous apotheosis in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*."¹⁹ The connection of Luther's work to Hitler's is intimated in one sentence that takes one second to read. It is difficult to accept, given the interconnecting and often seismic events occurring over almost four hundred years of European Christian history, that Luther's one piece of writing in the 16th century could

be the single most formidable cause of an event as atrocious as the 20th-century Holocaust, or of the related book by Hitler. Drakakis successfully and heroically fights antisemitism but in so doing cannot seem to avoid victimhood. Once victimhood is given power, I argue, it can preempt logical thinking. Victimhood possibly gives rise to polarities. While defending one culture, Jewish, Drakakis in his Introduction reaches to the extreme of demonizing another, Protestant, as the alleged perpetrator. This approach, while in support of the Jewish people, ironically and arguably conflicts with the aims of Judaism. *Dibru Emet* (Speak the Truth), a document signed by more than two hundred rabbis and scholars in 2000, states that “[there is] a Jewish willingness not to forget, but to put behind us the unique tragic past that bedeviled the Jewish-Christian relationship.”²⁰ I suggest that while the inspection of antisemitism within *The Merchant of Venice* is necessary to achieve accurate criticism of that play, that inspection at the expense of present cultures or values does not help the Jewish people.

Drakakis examines the “oral tradition” of *Merchant* in Robert Wilson’s *The Three Ladies of London* (1584), in prose texts such as Anthony Munday’s *Zelauto* (1580) or Silvain’s *The Orator* (1596), as well as Giovanni Fiorentino’s *Il Pecorone*, published in Milan in 1558.²¹ ‘Oral tradition’ and “early-modern folklore” are described by Drakakis as an “[Elizabethan tradition] of a rich tapestry of collective fantasies, which...were capable of endlessly innovative repetition.”²²

The 20th-century pre-Holocaust Rabbi Gerald Friedlander in *Shakespeare and the Jew* also focuses on the influences of historical myth in Shakespeare’s problematical plot.²³ He describes a woodcut from the *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1496) that depicts a Jew producing the devil from the blood of a child’s crucified body. He claims that “the Jews...were accounted pariahs, born only to be reviled and persecuted and plundered.”²⁴

Friedlander claims that “the perfect type of Judaism... bears no relation whatsoever to Shylock. He has no likeness to the Jew in any age. Shylock is a monstrosity, not a real human being created in the image divine.”²⁵ Friedlander suggests that Shylock is not an authentic representation of ‘Jewishness’. I suggest that Friedlander is perhaps using the play to argue to the reader that the Jew does not fit the image created by the Christians, but instead, as in the scriptures, the image created by God. Friedlander’s criticism can partly be explained by its pre-Holocaust origins. Critic Arthur Horowitz has claimed that *Merchant* criticism cannot ever be the same after the Holocaust.²⁶ One contention in this thesis is that violence itself is perpetrated by the obsessive fascination with it. It is also perpetrated by the juxtaposition of *Merchant* to such a horrific event as the Holocaust, even if this juxtaposition has good intentions. In Jewish thought, the best way to understand the above argument is in the biblical discussion of *Amalek*. The Israelites are told to “obliterate the remembrance of *Amalek*, the symbol of evil, from beneath the heavens. We must not forget” (Deuteronomy 25: 19). This is a confusing statement. Simply put, the way of Judaism is to write *Amalek* as a remembrance, then to erase the name continually. We are, therefore, in the continual space of remembering *Amalek* and creating some potentiality beyond evil.²⁷ Much post-Holocaust *Merchant* criticism does not create that potentiality. This can be seen in the apologies for Shylock—soon to be examined—and in the continual re-establishment of victimization in *Merchant* through Holocaust references. Logically, while *The Merchant of Venice* has antisemitic characters, the play is not and can never be the Holocaust. Nothing but the Holocaust can be the Holocaust. Events can be atrocious, and some, hard though it may be to think, might be even more atrocious than the Holocaust. But the Holocaust was a singular event. Finding the Holocaust in *Merchant* minimizes or at least blurs the Nazi atrocities. It also discounts and hides themes of potentiality in the play. Given our present experience

including genocide and poverty, the play seems strangely innocent of the vilest materialistic and antisemitic practices. The setting of *Merchant*, we will see, is corrupt and could indicate future horrors. However, it is possible to revisit the play without re-living genocide in it. I suggest that “pageants of the sea” (1.1. 171) carrying “spices” and “silks” (1.1. 177–178), even if symbolizing a latent corruption, do not feel as totally noxious as the oil spills and atomic bombs of the recent present: they are, in fact, described notably beautifully. This present world needs themes of potentiality. Criticism of *Merchant* before the Holocaust such as that of Friedlander, while not current, can help to open the play up again.

Friedlander emphasizes that in *The Three Ladies of London* the Jew is a likable character. As compared to Shylock, Gerontius forgives all money owed. Friedlander claims that Wilson’s play contradicts any argument that early-modern playwrights felt obliged to reflect antisemitism in their work. Emma Smith, we will soon see, views Wilson’s play similarly.²⁸ Drakakis includes *The Three Ladies* in the ‘oral tradition’ of *Merchant* but does not mention the seeming generosity of the Jewish character Gerontius. Drakakis refers to the character of Usury in the later *The Three Lords of London* (1590) and Usury’s claim that her grandparents were Jews.²⁹ Friedlander and Drakakis respond to *The Three Ladies* differently. This difference in the critical response to the *Merchant* ‘oral tradition’ reflects the varying responses available to Shakespeare to the same myths at the time. In Talmudic or rabbinic exegesis, ‘oral tradition’ implies the repetition of storylines to most often transform meaning for use in the present.³⁰ In Judaism, to apply the phrase ‘oral tradition’ to Shakespeare resonates with the suggestion that Shakespeare is working to transform, not to repeat, a received story about the Jew. The received story—from woodcuts, narratives or theater—was possibly a source for Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's brilliance, I argue, comes partly from his ambition not to repeat but to transform the received story and his social and political setting accordingly.

Many critics, we will see, understandably believe that *Merchant* can best be analyzed through a focused study of antisemitism informed by history and myth. Any analysis, however, that defends the Jew must at least recognize Jewish thought which is about much more than antisemitism. I, therefore, question a singular cultural materialist method in the analysis of *Merchant*. If cultural materialism aims to heroically defend those who are victimized—and I believe it does—then a continual re-establishment of that victimization is required for the theory to be well developed in its application to the text. I agree with the goal, but the process applied to *Merchant* might be self-defeating. Stephen Greenblatt in “The Limits of Hatred” speaks of Portia's anticipation of the “final solution”³¹ in her speech on mercy, a speech we will look at in the chapter on her. Greenblatt is referring to the final solution of the Nazis and the carnage of the Jewish people. If cultural materialist theory, through Greenblatt, creates a Nazi of Portia even creatively, then Portia, like the Nazis, deserves to be stripped of possessions and punished severely. The Belmont plot led by the character of Portia includes the rings which, we will see, indicate epiphanic agency. Judaism revolves around the epiphany and revelation.³² Greenblatt, therefore, diminishes an epiphany that is seemingly Christian but also Jewish. I will return to this. It is interesting that even though the Jews have been horribly victimized in *Merchant* and elsewhere a continual re-establishment of that victimization is not Jewish. Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, has claimed that victimization is not and never has been the chosen path of Judaism. He says, “Do not define yourselves by victimization. Define yourself as a free moral agent.”³³ Sacks is arguing for a positive content of Judaism based on moral agency and tradition. This positive content, to Sacks, defines the Jew rather than that which is

outsider imposed. Greenblatt seemingly conceives moral agency through historicism. One possible problem in that understanding of moral agency, however, is the impossible irreversibility of history and the totalizing experience of the victimization of the Jews within it. The question for a historian concerned with moral agency, I would think, is how to negotiate Jewish history within Jewish thought and without falling into the inevitable, I add, victimhood, pit. I will explore Greenblatt's fine article "The Inevitable Pit"³⁴ soon.

Talmudic rabbis and rabbinic scholars define Judaism as something more than victimization. *Chabad*, an Orthodox sect, claims, "Judaism is defined as the totality of beliefs and practices of the Jewish people, as given by G-d and recorded in the Hebrew Bible and subsequent sacred writings of Judaism."³⁵ Victimhood, I suggest, is neither a belief nor a practice. It is the definition of a people through an abhorrent state of being. Victimhood is not theologically Jewish, despite, we will see, claims that it is. God does not say, "Choose victimhood." God does say, "Choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). I suggest that any exploration of Judaism that emphasizes victimhood contributes to a politicization of Jewish victimization. Victimization becomes so engrained in the Jewish mentality and decision-making that it becomes a useful political tool. This politicization of victimization puts cultural materialist and historicist critics in a difficult position. The cultural materialist rightly defends the victim in *Merchant*. However, the singular focus on Jewish victimization can lead to victimhood, which in turn can lead to political manipulation and further persecution. I will return to this.

Greenblatt deserves great respect for the role he has played in legitimizing, even championing, Jewish Shakespeare criticism. He says, "what you inherit, what you receive from a world that you did not fashion but that will do its best to fashion you, is at once beautiful and repellent. You somehow have to come to terms with what is ugly [and]...precious."³⁶ I agree.

This statement shows an understandable need to somehow reconcile with a despicable era in human history. While critic Hugh Grady points to the history of philosophy to explain historicism,³⁷ Greenblatt, I believe, wants to connect with some of the finest Jewish scholars and scriptures to negotiate impossible past tragedies. The process of coming to terms with any devastating historical rupture has been expressed not only in the poetry of Lamentations but also in the observations of Holocaust survivors such as Elie Wiesel in *Night*³⁸ and Martin Buber in *I and Thou*.³⁹ Greenblatt famously admits, “I began with the desire to speak with the dead.”⁴⁰ I suggest that this resonates not just with a criticism that deals with dead authors, but also with the memory of the millions murdered by the Nazis. Terence Hawkes responds that he speaks with the living.⁴¹ I resonate with and support the presentism of Hawkes, which will be discussed throughout this thesis. However, it is not easy to be Jewish post-Holocaust. It is even more difficult to reach for a moral Judaism, or an epiphanic analysis of *Merchant*, with the knowledge of genocide in my parents’ generation. At the possible crux of that conversation between Hawkes and Greenblatt is the violence out of which the Jewish people have been continually experiencing an understandably difficult emergence.

This brings us to Greenblatt’s 1988 essay “Invisible Bullets.”⁴² Greenblatt often beautifully negotiates the subtle and often intangible historical realities that have contributed to violence and arguably to the violence in Shakespeare’s plays. In “Invisible Bullets” Greenblatt analyzes Shakespeare’s history plays. The political reality he describes strangely connects with Jewish thought in his later “The Limits of Hatred.”⁴³

In “Invisible Bullets” Greenblatt demonstrates the perversion of Christianity in early-modern England in its coercion of the other. The accusation of atheism would lead to not only social exclusion but to torture.⁴⁴ Ironically, the Christians would subvert their religion by

demonstrating ‘miraculous’ scientific advances as a means to ‘civilize’ and coerce the American Native. Greenblatt claims that the subversion of religion “impos[ed]... socially coercive doctrines by an educated and sophisticated lawgiver on a simple people.”⁴⁵

This “sophisticated confidence trick [of religion],” to Greenblatt, contributed to a seeming “heightened consciousness” among some writers and thinkers.⁴⁶ Included was Thomas Harriot, a mathematician who wrote *A Brief and True Report of the Newfoundland of Virginia* (1588).⁴⁷ Greenblatt claims that Harriot, knowingly or unknowingly, while living in Virginia recorded the forceful domination of the Natives by the Christians as well as the ‘subversion’ of Christianity. There was a ‘coercive’ power of European beliefs supported by inventions such as the compass and the book over the American Natives which caused their own beliefs to “collapse” under them.⁴⁸ Harriot, as demonstrated by Greenblatt, contributed to that coercion even if unintentionally. Greenblatt claims that “in the Virginia colony, the radical undermining of Christian order is not the negative limit but the positive condition for the establishment of that order.”⁴⁹

I argue that unknowingly Greenblatt in “The Limits of Hatred”⁵⁰ also takes part in the subversion of religion, not to coerce a ‘simple’ people but to defend a shocked people. “The Limits of Hatred” stresses victimization. “Shakespeare’s aesthetic solution,” Greenblatt writes, “lies in an assimilation to which the enemy...consents because the alternative is to lose his...livelihood”⁵¹ The Jewish victim Shylock must assimilate to the Christian enemy. I contend that the continual re-establishment of Judaism as singularly a religion of victimization is itself coercive. Jews who have become alienated from their religion because of the inherent strictness of orthodoxy or because of the Holocaust, and the connected generational trauma, are then confused by the unintended coercion of great critics like Greenblatt. They begin to see Judaism

as Greenblatt and other critics see it, as defined by victimization. Political entities can, and do, use that victimization in their various violent endeavors. Historicists and material culturalists influenced by Greenblatt and like critics reasonably see how victimization can contribute to their theories. The Jew finally sees a validation of a Jewish identity based on victimization. The Jews, therefore, continually re-identify as victims. The resulting anger, I believe, can be used in an unplanned manner by politicians and contribute to the perpetration of violence, this time against other cultures.

What is happening, I argue, is, borrowing from Greenblatt's language, "an imposition of socially coercive doctrines [such as victimization] by an educated and sophisticated lawgiver [or scholar or scholarly establishment]" on not a 'simple' but a shocked people. I want to stress that in aligning Judaism only with victimization Judaism is distanced from foundational rabbinic teachings. Without the moral compass and spiritual encouragement of these teachings, Judaism arguably begins to reflect the stigmatization assigned to it by the same antisemites, bigots, politicians, and warmongers against whom the cultural materialist criticism is often intended. I will be expanding on this in greater detail in my discussion of Hannah Arendt.

Finally, the intentional or unintentional appropriation of Christianity in the early-modern era to force civil order among the American Natives, as described in "Invisible Bullets," is, therefore, comparable to the unintentional appropriation of Judaism via *The Merchant of Venice*. Whenever a religion or criticism associated with that religion is helping to coerce a people, whether 'simple' or devastated, into a new identification, one that can lead to the undermining of the main beliefs of that people, there are the figurative 'invisible bullets'. This thesis discerns between a dominating and aggressive use of religion deliberately to undermine one people, and a sympathetic and pro-Jewish attempt to identify and condemn antisemitism. In the case of the

American Natives, a different religion, Christianity, was and still is used to undermine them. In the case of the Jews, a subversion of their same religion is unintentional in that the Jewish people have been associated with victimization for good reason. However, when victimization becomes the singular most important element in criticism or Jewish thought, the Jews are undermined. Just as the Natives are stripped of their spiritual beliefs, the Jews' spiritual beliefs and ethical codes lose their foundation. I am not comparing the pain of one people to the other. I am, though, comparing figurative bullets and their overall effects. In both sympathetic and unsympathetic situations, there, unfortunately, results the subversion of the positive identity. Victimhood criticism is necessary to face present problems and incite change. The concern for me, however, is how to direct change. Victimhood, in its subversion of the positive identity, seemingly directs society right back to violence.

This brings us to a more detailed examination of "The Limits of Hatred." In his criticism of *The Merchant of Venice*, Greenblatt attempts to fit Judaism into the person of Shylock, rather than fitting Shylock into Judaism. The religious scale in Judaism and Christianity is founded on the construct, not on the being who claims the construct. If a Christian wants to humiliate the other, it does not mean that Christianity supports humiliation. If a Jew wants murderous revenge, it does not mean that Judaism supports murder. The explanation of Judaism through the person of Shylock feels illogical. "The Limits of Hatred" depends on Shylock's absolute Jewishness. Greenblatt claims that "take away Shylock's Jewishness and he shrivels into nothingness."⁵² I argue that Shylock, as seen, is Jewish, but not completely. I claim that 'take away Shylock's Jewishness and Shylock is not 'nothing' but partly "emptied out." In "Shakespeare and the Exorcists" Greenblatt examines the 'emptying out' of institutions, but he subtly indicates that of the human as well.⁵³ I will be expanding on this in the chapter on Shylock. There *is* something

left in Shylock, though, at the end of Act 4. This something is the memory of murderous inclinations, and in the words of Friedlander, is not Jewish at all.

Rabbi Haggai in 1st-century commentary connects the choice of life to mercy. In Talmud, *pikuash nefesh*, saving a life, is a statute.⁵⁴ Haggai claims that the choice of life results from an opportunity that the Israelites receive because of God's administration of mercy. Without mercy, choosing life is seemingly impossible.⁵⁵ As discussed, Greenblatt claims that Portia points to 'the [Nazi] final solution' in her speech on mercy. Like Haggai though, she aligns mercy to life when she claims that mercy is "above the sceptered sway [of justice and monarchy]" in its indication of both "salvation" and life (4.1. 180–201). Portia's thoughts on mercy strangely parallel those of Haggai of Talmud, and since the latter is not a Nazi but a rabbi, perhaps the former is not as Nazi-like as Greenblatt might believe. Portia is far from perfect but aligning Nazi sensibilities to her idea of mercy feels extreme. Not only does it normalize the Holocaust, but it prevents an expansive analysis of mercy, even if that is mediated through the questionable character of Portia.

Greenblatt's attempt to insert Judaism and Jewish thought into Shylock resonates with the attempt by Drakakis to insert antisemitism into *Merchant* at the expense of other themes. Both attempts are replete with convincing historical data or biblical quotes, but they both miss the point of Judaism, the religion they are attempting to defend or explain. In so doing, we will see, they miss out on evocative themes in *Merchant*.

James Shapiro in *Shakespeare and the Jews* centrally positions *The Merchant of Venice* and early-modern England within a landscape in which the Jew is reviled, "the Jewish man was constructed as a creature of the bodily fluids, spitting, stinking."⁵⁶ This historical context creates needed empathy for Shylock. Even if Shapiro is correct about this early-modern 'construction',

the vividness of the imagery indicates Shapiro's belief that the best way to respond to present antisemitism and to analyze *Merchant* is to focus vigorously on its vilest images. This thesis argues that this fixation on the grotesque can create a strange fascination with it and the associated antisemitism. To Drakakis, Shapiro "shuffles uneasily between a...structural account of the impact of [the Jewish experience], and an empirical account...of [religious] oppression."⁵⁷ Neither critic mentions the Jewish theological impact or expansive mystical insight as a "true model for...community."⁵⁸ This theological impact is missing from both Shapiro's monograph and Drakakis's review. Because the theological is missing, it seems unimportant. This thesis claims otherwise. In *Shakespeare and the Jews* Shapiro has an illustrious goal in his call to mitigate "racial, national, sexual, and religious difference."⁵⁹ My contention is not with what he wants to do. I do not think his method is the most advantageous.

John Gross demonstrates in *Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy* that the myth of Shylock has "flourished with very little reference to *The Merchant of Venice*."⁶⁰ Gross agrees with Edna Nahshon, the editor of *Wrestling with Shylock*, that Shylock holds a "unique place in world culture."⁶¹ These critics understandably stress victimhood. Victimhood, a foundational theme in the Jewish experience, reflects the convictions of the founder of Israel, Theodor Herzl. Herzl believed that antisemitism is the eternal future of the Jewish people.⁶² In this paradigm of thinking, victimhood connects Israel to all Jews through 'eternal' antisemitism. Given the importance of Israel to the Jewish people, American Jewish critics of *Merchant* understandably centralize antisemitism in their work.

Martin Buber, in fusing Zionism with the beliefs of Hasidic rabbis or Hasidut—soon to be explained, advocated for a different type of Israeli state. He speaks of a Jewish people who "desire[s] to live in peace and brotherhood with the Arab people, and to develop the common

homeland into a republic in which both peoples will have the possibility of free development.”⁶³ The postmodern philosopher Arendt, we will see, supported Buber. Buber’s ability to maintain his message of peace and compassion before the Holocaust,⁶⁴ through it and afterward,⁶⁵ attests to the ability of the Jewish people today to do the same. Buber exemplifies a Jewish path beyond victimhood. Nevertheless, the subtle message transmitted to the reader in much *Merchant* criticism is that victimhood is the primary theme of *Merchant*, and perhaps the outstanding identity of Judaism today. This same criticism usually does not offer a methodology to circumvent this victimhood which, as discussed, can have a destructive impact. Shakespeare’s arguable attempt to rewrite the story of the Jew can strangely conflict with the Jewish self-identity post-Holocaust. Shakespeare could have been intending to mitigate anti-Judaism while the Jewish people today understandably identify themselves in part by it. Saying that Shakespeare was not antisemitic could seem strangely antisemitic, not because Shakespeare seemingly intended to humiliate the Jews. Rather, if Shakespeare is freed from that stigma, some Jews might feel understandably frightened or diminished in self-identity. Some Jews, I claim, are so interpellated in victimhood, that they see any contradiction of it as threatening. Interpellation implies the theory of Louis Althusser in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.”⁶⁶ Interpellation suggests that a being from any religion or culture can be so immersed in an ideology that he *thinks* he is subjective. Unfortunately, his subjectivity might be contained within the same ideological framework he abhors. Someone with kind instincts can be strangely complicit in a destructive ideology and not even know it.

Critic Janet Adelman in *Blood Relations* calls for a theological analysis of *Merchant* that does not enter into “Christian triumphalism.”⁶⁷ Her theological analysis, to Julia Lupton, is devoted to psychology and history rather than to ethics and an ultimate power. Lupton claims in her review, “Adelman... brings little of the Jewish tradition itself to bear on the play.”⁶⁸ Lupton praises

Adelman and, I argue, is correct in claiming that Adelman's seeming theological reading of *Merchant* is itself ironically founded on historicist readings of the Torah. Adelman, it seems, cannot get away from historicism. Adelman represents biblical stories, and the religion of Judaism, as "a major tool of ideology and social control."⁶⁹ Adelman's vision comes short of offering a whole Jewish, or biblical, analysis. What is missing is not a theological analysis (a historicist reflection of the scriptures is normative in the Reform denomination)⁷⁰ but one that can more accurately represent Judaism as a spiritual path. Adelman's strength at historicism can be seen in her Introduction in which she discusses an antisemitic sermon of 1577 on the part of the "propagandist" John Foxe.⁷¹

Lisa Freinkel's 2002 *Reading Shakespeare's Will*, borrows from the theology of Paul to attempt to repair the seeming race/religion dichotomy in Judaism.⁷² This thesis does not support the use of the term 'race' to define the Jewish people and will from now on refer to culture instead of 'race'. Freinkel, in attempting synthesis within Judaism through Pauline thought, can be likened to the Israeli scholar Ishay Rosen-Zvi. In "Between Origen and the *Mekhilta*: Toward Comparative Midrash,"⁷³ Rosen-Zvi claims that Origen takes on expansive themes that can negotiate Jewish midrash (exegesis) of the same era. Rosen-Zvi is not concerned with Shakespeare and does not include metaphysical thought but simply the literal text of the midrash. I contend that Jewish theological thought can also negotiate the culture/religion dichotomy suggested by Freinkel. This negotiation indicates a possible synthesis of victimhood, as it relates to culture, and the epiphany, as it relates to religion, within Shakespeare. Freinkel claims, "the truth is only found on the recognition of a lie and is thus itself always vulnerable to a further unveiling."⁷⁴ The truth relies on the corruption of the setting in that it must, by definition, result from it. This is very similar to what I have been saying about the epiphany that rises from relative darkness. This idea is present

in Jewish mystical thought in the concept of the *baal teshuvah* in Rabbi Schneur Zalman's 18th-century *Tanya*.⁷⁵ The *baal teshuvah*—literally, the one who returns—is the corrupt human who transforms and seeks intimacy with a greater power. He relies on the corruption of the setting in that he turns from it. In this way, the agency of the unveiling, as explained by Freinkel, creates a synthesis between God and human as well as between the truth and the lie. Whether one is using the agency to 'turn' or 'unveil', synthesis is created. Likewise, I claim, the agency of the epiphany in *Merchant*, while 'unveiling' victimhood, must logically include it. I agree with Freinkel that a culture/religion synthesis within Judaism is possible. She seems to see that synthesis through a mostly Christian lens, while my lens is mostly Jewish. What we will continue to realize in this thesis is that the two lenses seem to unify when we consider the epiphany.

Emma Smith in her 2013 article "Was Shylock Jewish?" has challenged the dominance of antisemitism in *Merchant* criticism, asserting that early-modern representations of the Jew, as expressed by Shapiro, do not fairly reflect the play.⁷⁶ She claims that "evidence—that Shylock is a negative dramatic character type of the 'Jew'...has very little archival or historical basis."⁷⁷ Smith claims that the seeming antisemitism of the early-modern era was a fabrication of the Victorians. She says, "evidential arguments that Shylock was not depicted in terms of grotesque racial stereotypes appear to be less useful to the critical story [of *Merchant*] than the description spuriously attributed to the play's original depiction."⁷⁸ Smith does not question why seeming evidential arguments are being minimized in the critical story of *Merchant*. What is strange is that evidential arguments do not take a priority. Something else seemingly does, something left unexplained by Smith, and which this Introduction examines. Smith calls for a *Merchant* analysis that explores other themes besides antisemitism. She claims that Shylock may not have even been Jewish, but only referred to as such figuratively. She might be right, but I claim it does not matter

in the antisemitism, or victimhood, argument. Figurative representations of cultures or religions can be as derogatory as the real. Smith claims that the seeming antisemitic language of the early-modern era and in Shakespeare's play resulted from "connotative and denotative syntax."⁷⁹ She uses the phrase "like the Jewes you eat us up as bread" to explain her argument. She claims that the common phrase historically focused on Protestant immigrants. Therefore, she claims, it is not antisemitic but anti-Protestant. This thesis suggests that the 'Jewes' in that phrase are a standard for greediness. This standard disparages the Jewish people. Therefore, the statement with the standard is antisemitic. The figurative, I suggest, can be even more harmful than the real. If Shylock is described as Jewish—even if he also symbolizes the seemingly hated Protestant—he must have seeming Jewish characteristics, in the case of *Merchant*, greed, and aggression. We can illuminate the problem of early-modern antisemitism in literature if we consider racism in the work of the American novelist Mark Twain. Twain in *Huckleberry Finn* uses slurs to describe the slave, Jim. It has been argued that Twain is commenting on the racism prevalent in his society, or even attempting to transform that racism,⁸⁰ like Shakespeare, I have claimed, is possibly doing through Shylock in *Merchant*. I argue that even if a slur in great literature is used unintentionally, imaginatively, figuratively, thematically, dramatically, or for societal commentary, we must contend with it directly today. Heschel, at a conference where he befriended Martin Luther King, claimed, "To think of man in terms of white, black, or yellow is more than an error. It is an *eye disease, a cancer of the soul*."⁸¹ This 'thinking' by nature, I suggest, includes the figurative as well as the real. The scholar Hilton Als claims in "More Harm Than Good: Surviving the N-word and its Meanings" that the N-word perpetrates a degrading self-image and causes the other to "see himself as nothing but."⁸² We are looking at more of the 'invisible bullets' of Greenblatt. When limited to derogatory slurs—or to a dominant ideology that might create those slurs, figurative or

not—people lose their identity. When people lose their identity, there is a reaction, sometimes violent. Religious slurs arguably ferment victimhood in the Jewish mental being. Any minimizing of the antisemitism that elicits that victimhood, whatever the circumstance, is not constructive. It is far more constructive to first, face the antisemitism and racism in literature, and next, stress themes within the work that can negotiate the resulting victimhood. That is what I am doing in this thesis. Even if religious and cultural remarks in early-modern England might not have been meant as derogatory, in the present they are. The present foregrounds the past because it is where we are now. We do not ‘thought’ in the moment. We think. Arguably, the resonance of almost everything around us, including our language, keeps us cognitively in the present. In *Merchant*, there evolves a seeming unending pejorative juxtaposition of Christian to Jew.⁸³ Shylock is called “the devil himself” (2.2. 23), “a kind of devil” (2.2. 21), and “the devil...in the likeness of a Jew” (3.1. 19–20). This figurative language is partly used for character description. It still ‘[for the moment] makes [the Jew] see himself as [such]’. Like Emma Smith, I am opposed to the singular focus on antisemitism in *Merchant* criticism. Smith brilliantly offers the historical context that can give agency to new explorations of the play. There still needs to be a way to negotiate the antisemitism within it. Smith’s method through literary syntax is perhaps not completely convincing, especially in today’s world.

Sarah Coodin in *Is Shylock Jewish?* claims that today the play has a “tendency to bleed off the page into historic actuality.”⁸⁴ I agree. The antisemitism of the characters in *Merchant* creates a cognitive re-awakening of genocide. I claim that we as critics can bleed *onto* that same page. We influence the work. Hawkes references the influence of our mental beings on the play when he says, “We do the perceiving. We speak. We mean.”⁸⁵ I add, we bleed. In this bleeding, the intensity of our written words furthers victimhood. We may as well figure a way to staunch

that bleeding. Our criticism then might hopefully mark a positive transformation in this world. Ewan Fernie in *Shakespeare for Freedom* emphasizes the urgency of that transformation. He says there is a question of *what* to do “now.”⁸⁶ The question for me is *how* to affect change. I argue that how to affect individual and societal change is a theme of *The Merchant of Venice*, hence the emphasis on the epiphany in this thesis. The epiphany, we will see, marks the moment of astounding change. Victimhood, today, is the prevailing influence coming from established critics and characters, real and not real, all strangely complicit—or fashioned as such—in the same seemingly contagious and powerful continuum of victimhood.

The response of some Jewish critics to *Merchant* antisemitism has been to explain Judaism. Greenblatt in his autobiographical article “The Inevitable Pit” portrays his family’s experience of immigration.⁸⁷ What is strange is Greenblatt’s omission in his family history. In rabbinic Judaism, the towns of Vilna—Greenblatt’s maternal heritage—and Kovna (paternal) are significant. Vilna, associated with the 18th century Gaon of Vilna, offers an opening to explore the legalistic foundations or Talmudic halacha of Judaism. The Gaon, a great Talmudic scholar, was also a Kabbalist or an authority in Jewish mysticism. Kovna, associated with the 18th century Hasidic Baal Shem Tov, indicates a Judaism for the people, a mysticism that is communal and in the heart. A discussion of the two villages would require a synthesis of complicated concepts and laws, as studied by the Gaon, with a Torah for the people. The negotiation of Vilna with Kovna, two cities mutually hostile in the 18th century, could be used to analyze in part Shakespeare’s plays.

To Bloom, the way to handle antisemitism in *Merchant* is by slurring anyone who does not. Bloom, as discussed, has claimed “[One] would have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to recognize that Shakespeare’s grand...comedy...is a profoundly anti-Semitic work.”⁸⁸ Bloom is

inferring a certain, even comical, idiocy on the part of anyone who does not relate Judaism to a victimhood ideology and apply it to *Merchant* criticism. Coodin is less caustic in her response to antisemitism. She wants to explain Shylock as she feels he may have seen the world through his prism of early-modern Jewish thought.⁸⁹ This thesis agrees with her attempt to create compassion for Shylock through cultural understanding. Because Shylock is victimized, Coodin is saying, we must know more about the Judaism to which he clings, a strong contention. I claim that apologizing for Shylock, who attempts murder, and defining him by his victimization is not a way to singularly reflect Judaism. The way to reflect Judaism, I contend, is by foregrounding the epiphany or revelation. In Judaism, murder is unanimously condemned. While Coodin does honorably call for a “multivocality of voices”⁹⁰ in *Merchant* criticism, murder is not condoned in the voices of rabbinic leaders. Murder is prohibited in the Noahide laws (Genesis 2:16), in the 613 mitzvot of Maimonides,⁹¹ and, as best known, in the Ten Commandments, thou shalt not kill (Exodus 20:13). In the present, David Rosen, the International Director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee, writes, “Halachically (in Jewish law) taking revenge is categorically prohibited in Leviticus. Punishment for crime is of course mandated by the Torah, but essentially for the purpose of protecting society.”⁹² Even the late liberal US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Ginsburg, in a 2016 mock appeal of Shylock, ruled against Shylock’s pound of flesh and the subsequent murder of Antonio.⁹³ The primary law about murder though, I believe, lives in our hearts. We do not know it as much as feel it when we march against it. Killing, even if seemingly legal, feels outrageously wrong.

The problem is that Coodin, like other critics discussed, tries to fit Judaism into Shylock rather than fitting Shylock into Judaism. Judaism is thereby explained through a supposedly perfectly Jewish Shylock. This apology for Shylock weirdly points to a simile used by Leonard

Tennenhouse in *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres*. There, Tennenhouse says that the attempt to immerse himself in the distant past and remove himself from the present is like “wriggl[ing] out of a close-fitting...shirt” or a “cultural skin.”⁹⁴ While this comment has sparked interesting discussions, I want to emphasize that in this above-mentioned effort of wriggling, the figurative shirt likely gets wrecked. The present must by nature become somewhat mangled while the critic is wriggling out of it. Likewise, Judaism must be somewhat mangled while the critic is wriggling *it* into the person of Shylock. While the comparison has its flaws, it does help to indicate the feeling that something in the perfectly Jewish Shylock motif is just not fitting right. It is *so* not right, I claim, that it leads to fascism and totalitarianism. Adolf Eichmann for example, during his trial, as explored by Arendt, spoke of the humbling of the Nazis who were often exhausted and cold. The image of humility indicates a certain Christian ethos. Arendt writes in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, “The murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders.”⁹⁵

Here, Eichmann arguably mangles Christianity to fit it into Nazi soldiers. Eichmann and Shylock are clearly of two vastly different worlds. They are both outrageously involved, however, even if at various levels, in the potential or real devastating consequences of seemingly mangled religions. I am arguing that if we allow the alignment of justice with possible murder, in any setting or beginning at any level, we can face nightmarish consequences. If we want to mangle Judaism to fit it into Shylock, even where we are well-meaning, we cannot be surprised by the questionable actions and beliefs that a mangled Judaism might initiate. In the example of the hard-working Nazis, Arendt alludes to the capitalization of violence. The nation at war, in Arendt’s analysis, began to operate as a well-organized capitalist enterprise. The Nazi soldiers, in the above quote, resemble hard-working blue-collar workers on a factory line. Within this capitalization of violence,

there is a politicization of victimization. Governments today make the most of victimhood and fear to support the enterprise of war or defense. The re-establishment of the identity of victimization through criticism as well as in other venues like the internet, I claim, itself is capitalized upon by politicians for reasons of war. What becomes secondary in the case of the Jews is the ethical foundation of religion concerning this convenient and now conventional identity of victimization. There happens a decimation of the human self, both outer or situational as well as in the inner monologue, as victimhood is by nature self-deprecating. There results what I call an ‘*Amalek Syndrome*’, an inability to remember to forget. One forgets to forget. Destruction and victimization are fed to the public daily. This victimization helps to create a convenient paradigm of fear, one which influences the voters’ box and puts despots in power.

This identity of victimhood is elusive. In “Shakespeare’s Jewish Experience,” a review of Coodin’s and Nahshon’s work to be analyzed, Shaul Bassi states, “It is this condition of exile and alienation that invites many Jewish scholars to identify with Shylock.”⁹⁶ Bassi says it is ‘this’ condition of exile indicating that Jewish scholars identify predominantly with exile and antisemitism. I agree that since the Holocaust, antisemitism has become a dominant identity of Judaism. But it does not have to be. There is not a law in the Talmud assigning a victim persona to the Jewish people. Bassi claims that *Merchant* is not an antisemitic play but a play “about antisemitism.”⁹⁷ I agree with Bassi. *Merchant* is about antisemitism, but partly. I suggest that there are other themes as well.

Julia Lupton claims, “the ‘victim’ as we mean it today comes from a deep anthropological layer in ancient Judaism (and other religions), with developments in liturgy and mystical practice.”⁹⁸ Lupton’s work will be discussed soon. Here, she is indicating an explanation of victimhood based on ‘anthropology’ and ‘liturgy’. I agree that the Torah, and the associated

liturgy, speak much on sacrifice. The word in biblical Hebrew for sacrifice is *korban*, which means, literally, a coming closer, such as a coming closer to God. The victim of the present arguably feels confused, angered, and farther from God. In secular Hebrew, the words victim and *korban* have synthesized. Lupton, I believe, is referencing the ‘deep anthropological layer’ of the *korban* even if she is using the English word victim. This thesis discerns between the victim and the *korban*. The victim is a secular term and not positive. The *korban* is a theological term that finally indicates prayer and is positive.⁹⁹

René Girard in “Sacrificial Ambivalence in *The Merchant of Venice*” claims that “everyone believes that Shylock is a scapegoat.”¹⁰⁰ Girard’s work on scapegoating, victimization, and sacrifice has been influential in several disciplines. Here, Girard is indicating both the *korban* in Leviticus and the victim of today. The biblical scapegoat is literally a sacrifice, or a *korban* (Leviticus 7–26).¹⁰¹ In the Hebrew Bible, Aaron brings two goats. Both goats are sin-offerings or sacrifices. Girard aligns Antonio and Shylock to the two goats and neglects to say that the fate of the Antonio-goat is far more mundane. It is sacrificed immediately without the holiest of appointments. The scapegoat, like Christ in Christian thought, internalizes and metaphorically eradicates through its death the sins of humanity. Girard sees Antonio as “a scapegoat-in-the making.”¹⁰² The idea of a scapegoat ‘in-the-making’ assigns it a Derridean resonance of a present messianic gift. The sacrifice ‘in-the-making’ is both future and present in that it is happening now.¹⁰³ I will be discussing Derrida more soon. Antonio does not become the proverbial sacrifice in *Merchant*—he is not symbolically crucified in court—and Shylock, we will see, does not receive his revelation. Girard, while aligning Shylock with victimization, still infers a certain *korban* potentiality. Even if the characters are seeming victims during the play,

they are not completely victims. There is a chance for intimacy with something greater. There is something, as Girard says, ‘in-the-making’, something different, awesome, and revelatory.

In *Wrestling with Shylock*, the editor Edna Nahshon claims that “the character of Shylock...channels and promotes...antisemitism.”¹⁰⁴ The only way to negotiate antisemitism in *Merchant*, as seen in the article “Jessica’s Jewish Identity” by Michelle Ephraim, is to change the plot. In Ephraim’s article Jessica, seen as a “lacuna of opportunity,” is “rehabilitated [into a] loyal daughter who feels no ‘strife’ about embracing her Jewish identity.”¹⁰⁵ Ephraim enables the reader to envision Jessica within several new liberating settings. The problem is that, ultimately, Jessica’s success must be derived from within her setting as it is with all of us. The creation of Jessica outside of the literal context finally thwarts her potentiality within context. This Jessica beyond-the-plot surmises an identity of victimization within-the-plot from which Jessica cannot escape.

This brings us to the political thinking exemplified by Arendt. Among her many writings, she offers a vision beyond victimhood which, along with an explanation of Jewish thought, can help to substantiate an epiphanic analysis of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Another Way to Look at “The Merchant of Venice”

Freedom, to the political thinker Hannah Arendt, explained in “Freedom and Politics: A Lecture,” is the “*raison d’être* of politics.”¹⁰⁶ Arendt wants freedom. An identity of victimization prevents that same freedom. Arendt’s goal seems to be to figure a path to freedom after the victimization of the Holocaust.

The field of experience of freedom, Arendt claims, is action. Freedom is an action based on principle rather than intellect or will. She allocates freedom to Brutus in Shakespeare’s *Julius*

Caesar when he says, “That this shall be, or we shall fall for it.” (2.1. 128).¹⁰⁷ Here, according to Arendt, Brutus is “calling something [an action] into being which did not exist before.”¹⁰⁸ The action of Brutus is not intellectual, but one based on a seeming higher virtue. Freedom, to Arendt, is like a “flowing stream” and is a “marginal phenomenon, which somehow forms the boundary a government should not overstep.”¹⁰⁹ Arendt is describing how non-thought can lead to freedom. The challenge in Arendt’s analysis, I suggest, is that the only way to negotiate a virtue or a principle is ironically to think about it. We must think about a principle before we act on it. We recognize our will when we act on the principle. We first must see, judge, and give definition to the figurative stream before flowing with it. Non-thought, to Arendt, leads to evil. It would seem illogical that non-thought can lead to both evil, and at times, freedom.

I argue that non-thought to Arendt can be compared to the rings as symbolized in Shakespeare’s play. Non-thought is abstract. The rings are a solid thing. They both are possible placeholders for potentiality. The need for non-thought, despite the danger, calls for unconventional thought. It calls for an exceptional moment, such as an epiphany, framed by and guarded by thought. Likewise, the need for the rings and their symbol of love—despite the cycle of corruption in *Merchant*—calls for an exceptional moment, such as an epiphany framed by and guarded by love. We will be looking at the rings at the end of this thesis. The epiphany, I contend, leads to a transformative freedom in that it raises awareness of virtues and principles. Transformation, even among characters as corrupt as those found in *The Merchant of Venice*, is, therefore, possible.

Antisemitism presupposes a lack of freedom. The quest for freedom and transformation becomes strikingly important in the wake of the Holocaust. This quest itself requires, as in the theories of Arendt, a way to thoughtfully navigate around the intellect and the will. The epiphany

offers that opportunity. I argue that the acceptance of the epiphany and the ability to recognize it are vital in humankind's attempt to move beyond antisemitism, racism, and violence.

We find that the epiphany, or this metaphysical possibility, is supported by Arendt in a 1947 article in *Commentary* magazine. Arendt says,

a Jewish culture could be constructed by fusing three strands: the great religious and metaphysical post-biblical tradition [...], Jewish folklore and rescued Yiddish writers of Eastern Europe, and finally all those who either came or come into conflicts with Jewish orthodoxy.¹¹⁰

What is required is an unfolding of the Jewish terms mentioned above. While Arendt's writings can be interpreted in diverse ways, Arendt's discussion of these Jewish terms, we will see, suggests her support of the epiphany. Arendt validates the epiphany in the academic world.

Jewish Thought: An Overview

This section will explain the three-part theological construct suggested by Arendt. It will review the trajectory of the rabbinic metaphysical teachings, the Yiddish mythic culture, and Arendt's suggested reaction to orthodoxy. The epiphany, the focus of this thesis in the analysis of *The Merchant of Venice*, is suggested in Arendt's theological construct.

The 'metaphysical post-biblical tradition' begins possibly with the Dead Sea Scrolls (3 BCE to 2 CE). The *Book of Mysteries* includes an eschatology in which the end of time is represented epiphanically. There is "a steady increase of light, [through which] darkness is made to disappear."¹¹¹ *Merkabah* (Chariot) myths (100 BCE to 1000 CE) reflect apocalyptic beliefs as well as what is termed the *Pardes* mystical ascent to God, which will be discussed in this thesis. Talmudic rabbis such as Rabbi Akiva were practitioners of *Merkabah* mysticism. They

meditated on a Neoplatonist vision of hierarchical layers to God. They focused on rising through levels of divine intimacy.

Gershom Scholem in *Kabbalah* connects *Merkabah* to Hellenistic thought as well as to early Gnosticism.¹¹² In my experience, mystical studies in rabbinic college began with a review of both Plato and Plotinus.¹¹³ Jewish mysticism has historically been associated with transitional steps to a higher power, as indicated by Plotinus, or an impermeable boundary between good and evil, as in Gnosticism. The influence of the classical Greek period on Renaissance thought would possibly indicate that both are interconnected with Jewish mysticism. This implies that certain elements of Jewish mysticism, while far, are possibly not that far from the historical Shakespeare who alludes to Greek symbols such as the “two-headed Janus” (1.1. 175) in *Merchant*. The Jewish metaphysical trajectory includes important constructs such as the sephirot, emanations outlined in the ancient *Bahir*,¹¹⁴ and the *Sefir Yetzirah*.¹¹⁵ These writings led to the *Zohar*, three volumes of midrashic commentary on the Five Books of Moses. The word *Zohar* in Hebrew means radiance. The commentary itself was published in Venice in the early 16th century and begins with a holy epiphany. There is much to be discovered in the study of the mystical *Zohar*. This study, or the study of all Jewish mysticism, is seen as Kabbalah. The problem was that by the time of the *Zohar*, mysticism had become intellectually difficult and elitist.¹¹⁶

Then, in the 18th century came Hasidut, a school of Orthodox Judaism that aimed to connect Jewish mysticism to the people. The traveling maggid or storyteller of eastern Europe would transmit the epiphany of the *Zohar* through stories and songs about everyday life.¹¹⁷ This tradition of the maggid, and the metaphysical as a gift to the people, is what Arendt seemingly references in her focus on Yiddish stories. The most notable maggid (1698 to 1760) was the Baal

Shem Tov (the master of the good name), who seemingly saw epiphanies in each being he encountered.

Since the Holocaust, scholars, and rabbis influenced by Hasidut, have focused on the metaphysical while applying the Talmudic laws to the demands of modern times. Such rabbis and writers include Heschel (1907–1972)¹¹⁸ and Buber (1878–1965).¹¹⁹ These neo-Hasidic rabbis have had a large influence on American Judaism. Some Shakespeare scholars are starting to reflect the direct or indirect influence of the maggid. Kenneth Gross exemplifies neo-Hasidic themes in *Shylock Is Shakespeare*. Gross creatively reveals not only his own subjectivity but that of Shakespeare, arguably turning Shakespeare into a maggid, himself. Gross writes, “This character I’ve made, this Shylock, is myself. . . . I, like Shylock, deal in strange promises, merry bonds with hidden stings.”¹²⁰ Gross’s scholarship, coupled with the maggidic instinct, forms a meeting ground between the intellectual and the accessible through a poetic subjective style. This poetic subjectivity, seen in Judaism as maggidic, circumvents victimhood and points to attitudes of care in Shakespeare’s plays, a moral agency which we will soon see is intimated by Lupton.

This brings us to Arendt’s contention with orthodoxy. The Talmudic laws strictly applied, as happens in orthodoxy, can indicate the degradation and humiliation of certain groups, such as the bi-sexual, the non-Orthodox, and women. The strictness of the Orthodox explains in part the description of the prayer *Kaddish* by Stephen Greenblatt in *Hamlet in Purgatory*.¹²¹ He mentions the burden of having to recite *Kaddish* daily for his deceased father, an Orthodox custom, and his irritation that his father designated other people to recite the prayer for him. After his autobiographical narrative concerning the prayer *Kaddish*, Greenblatt says that he does not know how to pray. This intimate comment can be compared to his previous comment, discussed above, in *Shakespearean Negotiations* about speaking with the dead. Greenblatt knowingly or

unknowingly through these comments engages in a maggidic story-telling style. In Hasidic tradition, he is relaying that he values, even if he does or does not experience, metaphysical moments. He points perhaps to a breakthrough of Jewish theological impact in Shakespeare scholarship. However, Greenblatt's literal explanation of *Kaddish* feels incomplete. He does not relate the metaphysical potentiality of the Aramaic prayer. *Kaddish*, this thesis adds, possibly creates 'chapters' in the prayer service. There is more than one *Kaddish*. There is, for example, a full *Kaddish*, a scholar's (or rabbi's) *Kaddish*, a half *Kaddish*, and a mourner's *Kaddish*. Each is similar rhythmically though not the same. When a *Kaddish* is recited there is a cognitive awareness that the congregation is entering the next, for a lack of a better word, 'chapter' of the service. The prayer *Kaddish* is, therefore, seen by some as a figurative gate in liturgy. *Mourner's Kaddish*, the final prayer of the service, focuses on life but indicates to the congregants a time to honor the dead. As a *Kaddish*, it actively creates a feeling of entry and continuation, as if a whole new 'chapter' is about to begin. This new 'chapter' references the possible soul of the dead as well as the experiences of those who mourn. In this way, not only prayer but also the essence of those passed remains intense in the mental being of the mourner. The writer Elie Wiesel claims in *Night* that he will say *Kaddish* for his father because it is all there is, however limited.¹²² For him, saying *Kaddish* for his father is an assertion of continuity even if the Holocaust was all about discontinuity and rupture. Ultimately, because of the rhythmic element of *Kaddish* and its repetition, it inspires moments of non-thought or transcendence. *Kaddish* supplies, in Arendt's philosophy, a moment of freedom, specifically free moral agency, within its very thoughtful construct. It is more than a hex, an obligation, or a historical event that indicates victimization. If Greenblatt included a similar explanation of *Kaddish* with his powerful maggidic style, I believe his already penetrating analysis of Shakespeare's ghosts could find even greater depth.

This brings us to a review of further Shakespeare criticism which, in my opinion, indicates a theological foundation for an epiphanic analysis.

Influences from Criticism Directly Related to This Thesis

Greenblatt's style is often maggidic or influenced by Kabbalistic roots. He tells anecdotes, relates historical narratives, remains subjective, creatively interweaves the historical narrative with the text, and culminates with a strong analysis. James Stephenson in a 1988 review of Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations* calls Greenblatt's style, "imprecise, idiosyncratic and metaphorical."¹²³ Frank Kermode in the *New Republic* calls Greenblatt's maggidic style "Greenblattian."¹²⁴ Kermode claims that Greenblatt gives primary importance to the margins and far more power to historical or dead characters within those same margins. Where I depart from Greenblatt is margin substance. History, as important as it is, I claim, should not fully dominate the margins in Shakespeare criticism. Present human transformation, in this thesis a transformation influenced by the epiphany, should. The Talmud contains wide margins for medieval commentary. In Jewish thought, margins are wide. This thesis shares the width of the figurative margins within a 'Greenblattian' analysis but offers a new margin substance.

Lupton, I suggest, also includes figurative margins in her criticism. Her criticism contains a margin substance of early-modern art. She creates a connection between the plays of Shakespeare and the theological through art. She does this while brilliantly assimilating to the dominant historicist criticism of the day. In her more recent work such as *Shakespeare Dwelling* Lupton includes early-modern art in her figurative margins but dares to jump straight to the political theological as well.¹²⁵ I respectfully suggest that Lupton has beautifully opened up the

critical arena not only for themes such as those expressed in this thesis but for a later Lupton as well.

In *Afterlives of the Saints*, Lupton observes the subordination of the saint to secular subject matter in Renaissance art. She calls for a reevaluation of where we see ourselves and, by extension, Shakespeare's characters on the spiritual/secular spectrum.¹²⁶ Lupton compares the representation of the religious in Caravaggio's *Amor Vincit Omnia* (1601) to that in Michelangelo's Sistine *Last Judgment* (1536). Caravaggio's later work, Lupton claims, in its realism suggests a weighing down of the spiritual which causes the Cupid to seem "carnated" rather than "incarnated."¹²⁷ The "Christian-classical reconciliation affected by Michelangelo's work" becomes "deflated and secularized." The dream of that "totality" and reconciliation becomes punctured with fragments represented by figures of secular things at the foot of Caravaggio's painting.¹²⁸ *Afterlives*, Lupton declares, sets out to study those fragments as symbolized in the characters of early-modern literature. Lupton expresses how the collapse of the totality of Christian synthesis in Renaissance art creates the opportunity to find fragments pertaining to all religions in Renaissance characters. Lupton bridges the gap between religions. The fragments of Christian synthesis must by nature encompass paganism, Judaism, and Islam. Lupton's use of the word fragments reflects the Kabbalistic spiritual catastrophe described by the 16th-century Rabbi Luria. Luria teaches that God's great flow of love destroys the world, creating fragments and calling for a *tikkun olam* or a healing of the world.¹²⁹ The fragments indicated by Luria illuminate the fragments painted by Caravaggio indicated by Lupton. The fragments are made up of both spiritual and secular stuff. What we will soon see is that the fragment inferred by Lupton becomes partly re-imagined in this thesis as the epiphany in *Merchant* characters. This transubstantiation of the fragment to the epiphany is inherent in

Kabbalistic discourse. Abstractions and the real in Kabbalah are mutually constituted. They combine and harmonize. The resulting transformations can be true if not each singularly realistic. The truth, Shaul Magid claims in “Lurianic Kabbalah and Its Literary Form,” does not necessarily have to be realistic. Magid claims that there can be a regenerating of Kabbalistic myth, and an interrelation of this myth in our culture, as in the new historicism of Greenblatt.¹³⁰ Kabbalistic myth, Magid suggests, not only grows from biblical myth but interrelates with literary fiction and, I add, Shakespeare’s plays. Magid claims,

The underlying belief in...Kabbalah, drawn in part from rabbinic tradition is that the world is constantly undergoing re-creation. In Kabbalah, however, as opposed to its rabbinic antecedent, this renewal is facilitated in part by the cosmic actors in the daily supernal drama... and the actors’ empirical behavior serves to mend or complete (or in the case of transgression, further damage) a cosmic dimension in need of repair.¹³¹

The renewal inherent in Kabbalistic myth does not necessarily have to pertain to biblical characters but may to any being or character. These cosmic actors, to Magid, are characterized by “soul impregnation” in fiction or drama.¹³² ‘Soul impregnation’ does indicate an epiphanic experience in that it intimates that a soulful moment is sustained by the character. Fragments such as those mentioned by Lupton, as illuminated by Magid, set a strong foundation for this epiphanic analysis.

In “Grace and Place in *Pericles*,”¹³³ Lupton unifies Jonah with Paul, then with Shakespeare’s *Pericles*, demonstrating the interconnections of the messianic in Judaism, Christianity, and in Shakespeare’s play. Her analysis aligns the potentiality of *Pericles* to that of the prophets as portrayed by Michelangelo in his Sistine Chapel portraits. These prophets, Lupton surmises, have “a dark wisdom, they know without knowing what they know...they refuse to relinquish the open address of their truth to a determinate confessional knowledge.”¹³⁴

The prophets in Lupton's analysis of Michelangelo suffer in their refusal to limit their expansive and beautiful intimacy with God for the goal of public transmission. She borrows the term "prophetic dramaturgy" from Daniel Keegan. Keegan claims, "[there exists] an inductive process that cues our thinking to more general, more complex topologies of...theatrical life that abide beyond. . . the representation and the performance."¹³⁵

Whether prophetic or epiphanic, there is something else happening on the stage, more than we can imagine. This something else can be felt and anticipated dramatically but rarely defined in its essence in writing. Lupton, through *Pericles*, creates a synthesis of religions to negotiate a Torah-like God-on-earth. The Torah, in its figure to the Jewish people, fosters a synthesis of the temporal with the otherworldly. The dwelling, whether on earth or elsewhere or both, to Lupton, *becomes* the action of synthesis. Lupton claims that in the character Marina's dialogue, "dwelling shifts from mere occupancy...to a form of dramatic and cognitive engagement."¹³⁶ The epiphany, I add, is likewise an inner dwelling and an outer act of engagement with the divine and the secular. It sensually and dramatically breaks the dichotomous paradigm, that of divine and secular, and brings along those who experience it. The dwelling seemingly, to Lupton, begins as place and transforms to include action. The epiphany, in this thesis, begins as a cognitive action and transforms to include place. The biggest difference between the epiphany as I am analyzing it in *Merchant* and the dwelling in Lupton's analysis of *Pericles*, is that the epiphanic, I claim, forward a positive prophecy, a Heschel-like faith that foregrounds prophetic suffering. Heschel claims, "Wonder or radical amazement is...our honest response to the grandeur and mystery of reality, our confrontation with that which transcends the given."¹³⁷ Heschel includes suffering in his work, certainly the suffering of the prophets, but 'radical amazement' acts as repair. The prophets, to Heschel, hold God and humankind in a

single thought.¹³⁸ They see faith as a refuge, as an inner and heightened dwelling. The prophet tries to share that dwelling despite the violent setting. In this way, the awe and amazement of the prophet, and I add the epiphany, continually become a future dwelling for all beings and all communities. Soon, I will be discussing the epiphanies of the *Merchant* characters as illuminated by Jewish thinkers such as Heschel. I think that the beautiful Marina of Lupton might find even greater prophetic potentiality if influenced by Heschel's philosophy.

Mary Jo Kietzman's literal reading of the Jewish covenant, and the related *chosenness*, courageously redirects much Jewish criticism away from victimhood.¹³⁹ The problem is that a literal reading of chosenness implies Jewish entitlement. Before the Holocaust, the *Jewish Encyclopedia* openly supported love as law or halacha. It states, "there is nowhere a dissenting opinion [to an all-inclusive love] has been expressed."¹⁴⁰ Chosenness, if seen literally, cannot easily synthesize with this all-inclusive love. Kietzman is leading us away from a focus on Jewish victimhood but towards the difficulty of Jewish entitlement.

The Talmud, according to Rosen, focuses primarily on biblical chosenness rather than on victimization.¹⁴¹ Chosenness connects *being chosen* with choosing. If one is seemingly chosen to have a bond or a covenant with an ultimate power, then one is choosing to act on that bond, which means acting with a moral agency. Chosenness, compared to victimhood, is pro-active. Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* shows that chosenness becomes corrupted when commodified. Being chosen, as Portia declares, comes from being able to "choose right" (3.2. 11). If a suitor first chooses the right casket, he is then chosen. He is chosen to be Portia's husband and mate. Of course, choosing right in the *Merchant* plot is connected to a language of economics, like "winning the fleece" as Gratiano claims (3.2. 236), and Portia's "counterfeit"

(3.2. 115). *Merchant* characters in this way become complicit in a behavior of materialist obsession continually reestablished by the mercantilist culture of 16th-century Venice.

Chosenness is corrupted when it becomes exclusive. This is the chosenness, I believe, that Arendt in *Origins of Totalitarianism* calls “racist superstition.”¹⁴² An exclusive interpretation of chosenness is a covenantal ideology in which a covenant is offered only to the Israelites. Even if this is the literal reading of the Hebrew Bible, by repeating it without traditional rabbinic commentary and the associated emphasis on love, the critic reflects and reestablishes an ideology of entitlement. He and the acquiescent reader become incorporated in a potentially violent paradigm. I claim that the continual re-establishment of entitlement coupled with victimhood creates a behavior of violence. The victim wants more than the other and feels entitled to it and will fight for it because he feels that his victimization is more extreme. In Judaism, every human is created in the divine image. I claim that it is not rabbinic to say that one person is chosen for a special covenant and the other is not.

When chosenness is not corrupted, it offers the freedom of moral agency. It frees humankind beyond the limitations of ideology. The positive tradition of religious chosenness, I argue, partly explains Arendt’s comment in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that “the lesson [of the Holocaust]...is within everybody’s grasp.”¹⁴³ It makes sense that if we can all in our plurality choose to be free moral agents, then we can all learn lessons from world tragedy and be held equally responsible for that same tragedy. We can all then initiate a world free of tragedy. We empower ourselves by choosing to be responsible.

Kietzman creates a foundation of changing covenants even if she does not envision in Shakespeare a new way to enact more change in the world. She claims that “reformation covenant theology bred new kinds of political communities (congregational republics) and

contained the seeds of secularism.”¹⁴⁴ Before the Reformation, the covenant, she claims, was not influenced by concerns of modern commerce. During the early-modern era, the need for moral reformation in the form of a covenant was acute. I claim that the vast amount of Talmudic commentary, which continually renegotiates covenant, and Protestant covenant theology as expressed by Kietzman, could be mutually reinforcing. This thesis is attempting to show that potentiality through Shakespeare’s play. I also claim that today there continues to be that need for moral reformation not because of modern commerce but because of a vastly changing world sparked by modern technology. Shakespeare’s seeming expression of covenantal need, I claim, reflects modern concerns.

Kietzman claims that Shylock’s bond, to him, is a covenant and he, therefore, offers the moral foundation which is then destroyed by the Christians. Shylock seemingly becomes a Barabas-like caricature after his covenant or bond is broken. I agree that Shylock enters the courtroom with a broken covenant, but only partly. Kietzman, like Coodin, makes Shylock into the perfect Jew.¹⁴⁵ She uses Jacob as a Shylock comparison and intimates, as does Coodin, that Shylock’s biblical interpretations are midrashic or in line with the essence of Judaism. This Introduction has already responded to that argument at length. I ultimately agree with Kietzman’s focus on transitional covenants. By offering an interpretation of the biblical covenant in Shakespeare’s plays as a past vehicle of change, Kietzman intimates the possibility of even more change. She, even if unintentionally, creates the foundation for the new paradigm discussed in this thesis.

In *Shakespeare and Abraham*, Ken Jackson claims that sacrifice, as in the *Akeda* or the sacrifice of Isaac, can help to unfold Shakespeare’s plays.¹⁴⁶ He explains at length why and how behaviors in direct relation to the divine Other (or God) parallel those concerning the human

other. Jackson states, “We rarely consider that our critical, seemingly secular... interest in the “other” ...is inextricably tied to a religious understanding of the “other” beyond being.”¹⁴⁷

We rarely consider that there is a God that illuminates humankind’s connection to the other. We base that connection on secular and ethical interests. Jackson’s claim can be further illuminated by a discussion at the British Association of Jewish Studies at Oxford, 2019. There happened an agreement that Jewish thought reverberates in postmodern philosophy and is concealed in the philosophical writings of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas.¹⁴⁸ I will explain this at times in this thesis.

Lowell Gallagher in “Waiting for Gobbo” connects theology to postmodern theories through Shakespeare and the gift of doves in *Merchant*.¹⁴⁹ Gallagher presents Jean-Luc Marion’s claim that the gift’s excess “exposes a ‘new horizon’, one of unconditioned, super-abundant givenness.”¹⁵⁰ Gallagher aligns this givenness to grace as in Pauline thought. Paul, Gallagher quotes, says in Romans 6:14, “You are not under the law but under grace.” Grace cannot be anything, claims Gallagher in quoting Alain Badiou, but “pure givenness.”¹⁵¹ This pure givenness is the kenosis or the “self-emptying.”¹⁵² In comparison, the gift, as expressed by Gallagher to Jacques Derrida, is a “withdrawal or a subtraction from our everyday phenomenal world.”¹⁵³ This withdrawal meets with Marion’s over-abundance in the realm of impossibility. Gallagher also focuses on Emmanuel Levinas. The other, to Levinas as described by Gallagher, requires a “breach made in totality by the ‘infinity’ of desire and responsibility for the Other.”¹⁵⁴ The face of the other becomes divine and eternal in humankind’s ability to cut through human limitations. The alignments of postmodernity with theology lead to Gallagher’s declaration that “Badiou and Levinas share with Paul (as do Derrida and Marion) the conviction that subjectivity is not, as it is for cultural historicism, socially determined: it is exactly what exceeds social

determination.”¹⁵⁵ In Christian and Jewish postmodern philosophy and Christian theology, subjectivity—such as, I suggest, that expressed by Greenblatt in his criticism—is not fully subjective because it is socially determined. I agree with Gallagher. The gift of doves in the criticism of Gallagher results from a situation in which restraint, as attributed to Derrida, plus abundance, as attributed to Marion, plus a breach, as attributed to Levinas, lead to the grace as discussed by Badiou and as revealed by Paul. What Gallagher does not mention is that this description resonates with the process of Lurianic Kabbalah, such as that described by Magid.¹⁵⁶ Lurianic Kabbalah suggests an event of *tsimtsum* (restraint) of God and His love. Then there happens a breach in the social construct caused by the overflowing of God’s love from this place of restraint. This happening is so forceful that it causes breakage (*shevirah*). There follows a cleaning-up or a *tikkun olam*, as discussed, a cleaning up of the fragments. I claim that *tikkun olam* can be aligned to Paul’s grace as described by Gallagher. Both concepts share the idea of repair. The breakage can be aligned to the breaking-out of ‘social determination’. The gift of doves breaks out of expectations of the plot. The epiphany breaks out of expectations of character and out of the linear and literal text. The epiphany, like the doves, occurs in one moment to one being and then in a community of beings. The epiphanic analysis is the result of the synthesis of Christian and Jewish thought as further understood through a synthesis of postmodern thinkers. The gift and the other can connect, I claim, within theological concepts which can be illustrated in both seemingly small (the doves—Gallagher) and large (the trial scene, we will see) matters in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. The epiphany is postmodern, Jewish, Christian, and Shakespearean.

The conversion in *Merchant* modern criticism threatens to monopolize the agency away from the epiphany. Jackson claims that the “forced conversion to Christianity...contradicts the

prime direction of our contemporary ethics; you must respect the difference of the ‘other.’”¹⁵⁷ Jackson is correct. However, the question is why and how this conversion is atrocious.

The conversion will be discussed at length in the chapters on Antonio and Shylock. The conversion is a dramatic moment of shock and humiliation. However, the conversion rituals intimated in *Merchant* are Christian. If a Jew does not believe in the rituals, a Jew does not believe in the conversion. The disrespect intimated by the forced conversion is not any worse than the horrific disrespect shown throughout the play to Shylock. So, while the punishment of conversion is a sign of continued otherization of Shylock, it is not as conclusive as critics today might believe. Any belief that the conversion is the ultimate humiliation would intimate that Christian tropes are more powerful than the Jewish mind. It would seem, given the weight applied to the conversion by critics such as Jackson, that the conversion would put a stop to the covenantal narrative in this thesis. I claim, though, that the conversion is not an impermeable boundary to any future synthesis of Christian and Jew. The forced conversion, even if Shylock goes through with it in the aesthetic space after the play, does not prevent the epiphanies of the characters from happening. The new paradigm ‘in-the-making’ continues to be ‘in-the-making’. The epiphany is not stopped by grotesque and humiliating human behavior. The epiphany is eclipsed by the murderous behavior of Shylock. It is hidden and, therefore, needs to be revealed.

I want next to discuss Danson and *The Harmonies of “The Merchant of Venice.”*¹⁵⁸ Like Danson’s 1978 monograph, this thesis is not about theology. It is about *The Merchant of Venice*. I am looking at *Merchant* from what I see as a constructively Jewish angle, one not overpowered by law and victimhood. Danson assumes that Judaism prioritizes the law, and Christianity, love, and mercy.¹⁵⁹ I suggest that this is an archaic and dangerous polemic created by the Christians. Law is certainly important in Judaism. The word law in Hebrew is halacha, or literally a way of

walking. In Talmud, halacha codifies behaviors as well as laws. This way of walking, we will see, is not the end but the path towards divine and human love. I will return to this. Jewish and Christian values can synthesize in *Merchant* not only because, as Danson claims, one religion is old and the other, new, or because both ways of seeing the world are equally correct.¹⁶⁰ In *Merchant*, Jews and Christians must synthesize or find harmony to access moral agency as well as human and divine love. The ‘enemy’ is not the other. Danson quotes G. Wilson Knight that “imagery is becoming the very plot [of *The Merchant of Venice*] itself.”¹⁶¹ Danson stresses “things round or circular.”¹⁶² He says,

Patens of bright gold, the heavenly spheres...these are some of the glorious rounds to which, in Act 5, other less perfect circles, more darkly glimpsed in the course of the plot, eventually give way...But because the characters still wear their ‘muddy vestures’...the play achieves its vision of immortal harmonies without being unmindful of the conditions of the moral world.¹⁶³

I agree with Dawson. However, I add that the circularity and the ‘harmonies’ in Shakespeare’s play lead the characters to stronger even muscular epiphanic realizations that are continually in process. This epiphany is a singular moment of repair and love that can cut through ‘vestures’ of antisemitism, corruption, and violence. The epiphanic focus can also cut through victimhood, as seen in both the play and its criticism. Finally, I claim, the circularity in the symbol of the rings indicates the continual building of a transformed societal paradigm. The sweet soft community revelations envisioned by Danson in his explanation of Act 5,¹⁶⁴ I believe, do not offer the strength we need today or what Shakespeare needed for transformation in a violent world. The epiphanies or revelations in this thesis are sweet but also work-oriented and driven. Finally, Danson’s Christological analysis of Shylock, in which conversion reflects the weakening of the law and the welcoming of the alien into the larger community, is not the opinion of this thesis.

That is Antonio's intention with the conversion and only if we interpret it idealistically. We will see that Christian and Jewish tropes by the end of the trial are foregrounded by an epiphanic agency that propels the play beyond the boundaries of religion. I feel that, with the aid of Jewish and postmodern thought, we can take the remarkable and now neglected *Harmonies* to a new level of revelatory, inclusive, and epiphanic potentiality. I argue that revelation and love are not found in the seeming old or new anymore but the agency driving towards that which can be.

Jackson claims, "It is the Abrahamic situation, not an Abrahamic resolution, that links the ancient world, Shakespeare and us."¹⁶⁵ I agree. I add to Jackson's comment that the characters of *Merchant* do have the potentiality of Abrahamic love. They love now. The love is right on the edge, about to be real and, therefore, is real now. This thesis shows that the epiphany and that love are intrinsically connected. This connection can only be established through the examination of each character. In *Merchant*, we will see, there is an Abrahamic situation *becoming* an Abrahamic resolution. My goal is to show how and where these epiphanies happen in the experience of the characters and how these epiphanies begin to unite. This new covenant and paradigm that results from the unified epiphanies, as indicated in *Merchant*, is the finalizing and incomplete action 'in-the-making'. The new covenant indicates the new paradigm. The new covenant is literally love-making. It must always be 'in-the-making' now or it becomes obsolete with termination and time suggested in any 'situation'. This new paradigm possibly results from continually seeing a behavior and narrative of epiphanies in the stories and dialogue of the corrupt characters in *Merchant* and, by extension, this world.

This thesis claims that *Merchant* does not end—as has been claimed by the Jewish critical history, as demonstrated—with the delegitimizing of Shylock's bond, because Shakespeare, influenced biblically, does not end his play with the delegitimizing of one

figurative covenant. There is a covenantal agency that cannot stop. It continues within the actions and dialogue of all the characters in Act 5. This agency continues in Shylock through the silent Jessica. It continues in the audience through the *Merchant* characters, all silenced at the end of the play.

The foundation for the epiphanic analysis of *The Merchant of Venice* is not relegated to only Jewish, or biblical, *Merchant* critical history. My hope is that by connecting the ancient foundation of Jewish teachings to expanded criticism, there can be mutual reinforcement and discovery. This next section will review the wider Shakespeare criticism.

Influences from Expanded Criticism

This thesis moves from an ideology of victimhood towards a transforming biblical covenant. It indicates the epiphany and a new paradigm ‘in-the-making’ beyond religion. It is concerned with the epiphanic agency woven into *The Merchant of Venice*. This same agency moves through the characters and the audience. There are, we will see, obstructions to the epiphany such as the “muddy vesture[s] of decay” (5.1. 64–65) described by Lorenzo. These obstructions often occupy our focus. They are and are caused by corruption, racism, antisemitism, repression, violence, and the materialistic ideology that consumes the *Merchant* setting. The epiphanic agency remains. This agency is sexual, ecstatic, honest, and deep. It never stops. It cannot stop as it is intrinsic to our humanity. Shakespeare cannot let this agency stop. Neither can the characters. If we in the present choose to be driven by this epiphanic agency, we learn to direct our love beyond violence. An epiphany-less reality, I suggest Arendt is saying, can arrest artistic as well as political freedom. It can arrest the dramatic and climactic flow of *Merchant* as well as that of the expansive world beyond the play. If we refuse the epiphany, we refuse our true

beautiful selves. We need the epiphanic analysis especially now to free us from violence and allow for a transformation in spiritual, political, and loving relationships.

Certain Shakespearean themes expressed by respected critics are valid in Jewish thought and create a synthesis that illuminates various ways to envision the epiphany. These themes are important to this thesis. They offer expansive ways to envision the new paradigm in discussion and can help cement the epiphany in our minds now before I establish it in *Merchant* characters.

These themes are here being represented in abbreviated fashion as consolidated into the essence of one word in biblical Hebrew. Three critics who in their singular ways express these themes are Jonathan Dollimore, Ewan Fernie, and Kiernan Ryan.

First, the epiphany is an experience of meaning. Jonathan Dollimore, at the Radical Mischief Conference in 2018, emphasized a search in communication for “the potential for something precious—something at once simple yet complex, potent yet subtle, namely, shared meaning: the connection with others through what is meaningful.”¹⁶⁶

The biblical word for meaning is *hohmah* or wisdom. In the Kabbalistic construct, *hohmah* symbolizes the God-mind. The epiphany in this thesis calls for precious meaning. It intimates not only a refusal of commodified education, as Dollimore supports but of a corrupt societal construct as we experience in *Merchant* and elsewhere. The characters of *Merchant* cannot walk out. Neither can we from our various corrupt communities. The vision of the epiphany offers us the glorious opportunity to walk out. It offers us freedom through first inner, then outer, transformation. It indicates a peaceful revolution, a refusal to sacrifice self and soul for the present system, and a conviction that there is meaning beyond violence.

The epiphany implies individual and community freedom. Ewan Fernie finishes *Shakespeare for Freedom* with this claim,

Today, I'd suggest, it is more important than ever to learn from Shakespeare that we're free. The plays...are not in any simple way utopian. They are politically unstable, always in process...ethically promising... Undeniably dangerous...an extremely precious phenomenon.¹⁶⁷

The freedom intimated by Fernie is reflected, I suggest, in the biblical word *yoval*. The *yoval* occurs in the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 25: 10) at the end of seven seven-year periods, or a seemingly very long time when everyone returns to God or their rightful place. Horns are blown in celebration. The land is not sown or harvested, and servants are liberated. The only bond is that of the heart. It might seem like chaos in temporal terms, but it marks a rediscovery of love and truth. Fernie, I suggest, is describing a *yoval*-like freedom within the work of Shakespeare. This freedom of Shakespeare's plays speaks to everyone equally and happens despite deep-rooted complications. The epiphany in this thesis indicates a heightened sensitivity to the humanity of the other and the world community. The epiphany, like the *yoval*, is work-oriented. It is a moment of gentleness, joy, compassion, openness, faith, and positivity. It is when amazement and beauty can happen within a prism of responsibility. The *yoval*-like freedom, implied by Fernie, connects the epiphany to a foundation of love.

Finally, the epiphany is universal. Kiernan Ryan in *Shakespeare's Universality* writes,

That Shakespeare's plays possess, as has been widely agreed for centuries, a timeless universal quality is not the problem. The problem is the conservative construction that has been placed on this quality.¹⁶⁸

The fight against universality is by those who connect it to a conservative ideology that supports corruption. This epiphany in this thesis by no means supports constructs of religion—Christianity, Islam, or Judaism—more than the truth that these religions at their best transmit. The critical story of *Merchant* presented in this thesis seeks to break through those stuck

paradigms and any interpellation associated with them. The word that reflects universality in Judaism is *l'olam*. In the prayer *Kaddish*, a phrase is *l'olam ul'al'mei ol'maya* or forever and all time. The universe is repeated three times in different grammatical forms. The epiphany here is better defined through its agency rather than through any specific revelations. This agency continually pierces through superficial narratives, even superficial universal narratives. Love is the final resting place of the epiphany on its universal journey away from victimhood.

Victimhood is important. It is the dominant story of *Merchant* as cemented by criticism for decades. It is a reasonable critical story and it has been productive for the right era. I claim, though, that the epiphanic analysis presented in this thesis is also a possible way to envision *Merchant*. The flexibility of the *Merchant* critical story, as suggested in this thesis, can hopefully help to introduce transformation on a wider scale. The epiphany cuts a flash-vision of moral agency through victimhood. The epiphany, or that flash-vision as it occurs in *Merchant* characters, is charted and described in the coming chapters. Ultimately, this existing and incomplete epiphany in the *Merchant* setting, I claim, can, in the words of Arendt, “open up to us with unexpected freshness and tell us things no one has yet had ears to hear.”¹⁶⁹ The best place to begin this analysis is with Lorenzo, who offers not only ‘unexpected freshness’ but also realizations otherwise lost. Lorenzo is special because he steps forward and acts. He expresses to Jessica the visions of the epiphanic experience and in that sense how it feels to love. He bravely expresses his hurdles as well as the most vivid epiphany in *The Merchant of Venice*.

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Chapter One

Lorenzo: Braving the ‘Perhaps’

Lorenzo potentially experiences his epiphanic moment during his speech in Act 5. Lorenzo’s language suggests both the epiphanic and the desperate. The epiphany indicates a “creative force”¹ and is “a sudden spiritual manifestation” or realization.² Desperation points to impassioned action stimulated by painful need.

Ewan Fernie claims in *Spiritual Shakespeares* that Lorenzo’s epiphanic speech in Act 5 comes “hard on the heels” of Shylock’s humiliation.³ Lorenzo says,

There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st
 But in his motion like an angel sings,
 Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims.
 Such harmony is in immortal souls,
 But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
 Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it. (5.1. 60–65)⁴

The charged language in this passage indicates Lorenzo’s complexity. He is more than the “Christian fortune-hunter” suggested by Stephen Greenblatt⁵ or the “dog of a Christian” noted by Horace Howard Furness.⁶ The unfolding of the character of Lorenzo, this thesis claims, cannot rely on materialistic tropes: it must accent his epiphany and his connected desperation. This chapter will first negotiate the unsettling proximity of Lorenzo’s epiphany to his questionable desperate and humiliating behavior. Then, Lorenzo’s drive for the epiphany will be tracked dramatically within the linear structure of *The Merchant of Venice*. Finally, the speech with its potential epiphany will be analyzed in detail.

Lorenzo's Epiphany and His Desperation

Lorenzo's language in the quoted speech (5.1. 60-65) is literally epiphanic. His epiphany is cemented within the words of the text. Lorenzo is perhaps experiencing a transformative realization. Not only do angels sing, but 'immortal souls' are likened to 'young-eyed cherubims'. Lorenzo's connection with an ultimate power, as implied in his language, is far more personal and real than that acknowledged within the tribal customs of the mercantilist Venice or the magical Belmont.

The emphasis in the above paragraph is on the word 'perhaps'. Lorenzo in Act 5 is 'perhaps' experiencing a transformative realization. John D. Caputo in *Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* says that "perhaps [is] the courage required for what Nietzsche calls the 'dangerous' perhaps, for the courage for the open-ended, for the fear and trembling before the uncontainable."⁷ The 'perhaps' is an "unnerving relationship to the real, to the real beyond the real [or the transcendent]."⁸ Lorenzo is focused on a transcendent 'harmony', one which he arguably feels is not 'contained' by the singular 'real', or by that which is, for example, "dull as night" (5.1. 86). Lorenzo is in a place of courage as described by Caputo. He is seemingly aware of an obtrusive and threatening "muddy vesture of decay" (5.1. 64) and brave enough to vocalize it. This 'decay', to Lorenzo, is the body or the flesh. Given the corruption in *Merchant* soon to be explored, he understandably associates humanity with decay. I suggest that Lorenzo achieves his epiphany despite the 'decay' and simultaneously does not. He is in the process of such a realization. There is an incompleteness to his epiphany and while that incompleteness inspires Lorenzo and gives him courage, it feels as if he is in a place of self-discovery and sensual investigation. He is desperate to access that which he feels is un-heard (5.1. 65).

Lorenzo's desperation to access the transcendent is revealed in his poetic persistence. Lorenzo's Act 5 monologue of thirty-four lines is more verbally sustained than, for example, Bassanio's confession of love for Portia (3.2. 175–185), Portia's confession to Bassanio (3.2. 149–174), or even Lorenzo's confession of love for Jessica (2.6. 53–58). Love in *Merchant* is arguably more verbally fixated on supernal than human intimacy. Lorenzo wants to entice Jessica to the supernal with words like "immortal" (5.1. 60–63) because her transcendence, Lorenzo feels, can bring agency to his. If Jessica can hear the heavenly, then perhaps Lorenzo will too. He says before the words quoted above,

Sit, Jessica, look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold. (5.1. 58–59)

Lorenzo is offering Jessica a home or a dwelling, floor and all, in heaven. Decorated with gilded tiles, this fantastic dwelling is a visible sanctuary available to those who seemingly have the faith to 'sit' and 'look'. It is a shelter that signifies a heavenly connectedness, perhaps a sukkah among the 'orb[s]'. The sukkah, a temporary place of protection for the traveling Israelite (Leviticus 42–43), is possibly re-envisioned by Lorenzo as a heavenly abode for Jessica. This abode is not by the sea, as is Marina's in *Pericles*, as described by Julia Lupton in "Grace and Place in *Pericles*."⁹ Lorenzo's abode is celestial and possibly sukkah-like in that it is "a form of architecture that builds itself out of the available forms and resources of its site."¹⁰ These 'forms' and 'resources' can be seen as the 'immortal souls' and 'cherubims' of Lorenzo's mental being and personal insight. Lorenzo's offer of an abode to Jessica, suggested by the imperative 'sit', creates immediacy. Lorenzo not only desires but needs Jessica to see what he sees. Lorenzo, we will explore, strangely offers Jessica this sanctuary, needs her validation, and otherizes her at the same time. Jessica needs a dwelling. Not only has Jessica left her home but her father has

figuratively de-housed her. Shylock does not even recognize Jessica as his daughter in all of Act 1, Scene 3, a scene in which he has more than two hundred lines.

Gold, as in Lorenzo's 'patens of bright gold', is a debated subject in *Merchant*. Kenneth Gross in *Shylock Is Shakespeare* cites G. Wilson Knight that in *Merchant* "gold as soul symbol gets infected by gold as synecdoche for commerce."¹¹ The corrupt 'infection' implied by Knight is quite virulent in the world of *Merchant* and will be discussed. However, this thesis contends that in Lorenzo's speech this same 'infection' is not depicted. Lorenzo's poetic language parallels biblical images such as the candelabra forged from one piece of gold (Exodus 23: 51). Lorenzo uses biblical imagery to cement the supernal quality of his vision, not to glorify wealth. Poetically, Lorenzo possibly attempts to bring Jessica into a three-way conversation between himself and a greater power. He seemingly and elegantly believes that if both he and Jessica reach conjointly for that power; their relationship will be blessed. He strangely recognizes the exquisite truth of love but does so through his interpellation in a materialistic culture. Two souls in a materialistic culture, such as in Shakespeare's Venice, would seemingly be more effectual in accomplishing spiritual realms than one. Lorenzo states that beings who make a "mutual stand" (5.1. 77) access heavenly music. The singular man, however, does not access the "concord of sweet sounds" (5.1. 84) and has "dark" affections (5.1. 87). Lorenzo disturbingly suggests that materialistic values—such as the more, the better—can facilitate celestial experiences. Lorenzo concurrently presupposes an I–Thou discourse of love as in the philosophy of the 20th-century philosopher Martin Buber.¹² Buber writes, "[The word] Thou is found in Shakespeare and [is] at home in the English Bible, but it [presently] has no place in ...human relationships."¹³ The I–Thou discourse of Buber presupposes that all conversations include God. Such conversations and behaviors stress compassion, sensitivity, and respect. Buber supports sacred communication

symbolized by the pronoun ‘thou’ and found, he claims, in works by Shakespeare. Lorenzo seemingly resonates with Buber’s philosophy. Lorenzo arguably attempts to refashion the materialistic culture which he believes can positively establish a transcendent reality of love on earth. In the opinion of this thesis, once in a place of transcendence, Lorenzo might recognize the truth of love completely through that same transcendence rather than also through values that rely on counting and calculations. However, Lorenzo can have an epiphany only because of the materialistic culture. If there was nothing to refashion or calculate, Lorenzo’s epiphany would be eternal. He would not *have* an epiphany but *be* it. He would, I suggest, live where epiphanic experiences and the resulting moral agency would not be the exception, but the norm.

Something unrecognizable, “this muddy vesture of decay” (5.1. 64), is holding Lorenzo back. Since he is in a place of self-discovery, it can be inferred that this ‘decay’ is both societal and within his undiscovered self. This ‘decay’ symbolizes flesh but not all flesh, just some flesh, and certainly Venetian flesh in *Merchant*. Lorenzo does not know how to free himself from this same ‘decay’ or corruption. The corruption in *Merchant* has triggered comments from notable scholars. Kiernan Ryan in “‘The deed of kind’: *The Merchant of Venice*” claims that *Merchant* reveals a world in which “commodities count for more than kindness and human values are at the mercy of monetary calculation.”¹⁴ Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* indicates that the Venetians are in a world of savage monetary self-interest.¹⁵ This thesis suggests that Lorenzo desperately does not want to be corrupt. He yearns to hear the ‘angel’. He twists his attention toward what he sees as the angelic. He does not fully interface with the present and its corruption, thereby neglecting the details in his sweeping comments and generalizations. Lorenzo speaks of “trees, stones, and floods” (5.1. 80) but does not specify which flood. He speaks of “treasons, stratagems and spoils” (5.1. 85) but not of specific treasons. If he cannot

identify each specific vile act, he cannot identify each victim. Lorenzo does not, for example, identify Shylock as a victim. After hearing about the trial, Lorenzo does not suggest that Shylock was treated unfairly (5. 1). Beforehand, he describes Shylock as a “faithless Jew” (2.4. 37), generalizing him through his religion. The audience cannot overlook Shylock’s pain. After the seeming confiscation of home, daughter, and religion during the trial in Act 4, Shylock says, “I pray you. Give me leave to go from hence. / I am not well” (4.1. 391-393).

Lorenzo’s actions of otherization question his ability to even engage in a spiritual quest. The implicit contradiction between otherization and the divine intimacy of an epiphany is examined by Emmanuel Levinas, who defines God in the face of the other.¹⁶ In “Ethics and Infinity” Levinas explains, “since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him...His responsibility is *incumbent* on me.”¹⁷ If God is in the face of the other, the obvious action in seeking God would be to honor the obligation of the other. Lorenzo humiliates the other by not thinking about her needs. In Act 2, Scene 6, Lorenzo is late to meet with Jessica, thereby disrespecting her. Gratiano reveals Lorenzo’s non-thinking behavior when he says, “All things that are, / Are with more spirit chased than enjoyed” (2.6. 13–14). Gratiano, whether correct or not, is thinking. He is trying to analyze his friend’s tardiness to the meeting with Jessica. Gratiano’s thinking, I claim, underscores Lorenzo’s lateness and associated non-thinking. Meanwhile, Lorenzo is desperately trying to think with moral agency. He does say that “in such a night” Jessica slandered her love, and Lorenzo “forgave it her” (5.1. 22). Forgiveness arguably is a moral decision. The problem is that otherization ironically and disturbingly inspires Lorenzo’s epiphany. Otherization strangely helps Lorenzo to feel closer to a supreme being yet concurrently prevents an absolute intimacy with that same being. It is complicated, so I will review this contradiction with as much clarity as possible.

First, Lorenzo feels closer to God when otherizing Jessica because it is as if the otherization of the seemingly less faithful can validate his ideal self-image. He needs to juxtapose himself to the other, Jessica, and to contain her because in so doing he feels he can find intimacy with God. Greenblatt discusses the political angle of this otherization or subjugation in “Invisible Bullets.”¹⁸ Greenblatt claims that “the ideal image involves as its positive condition the constant production of its own radical subversion and the powerful containment of that subversion.”¹⁹ The language such as subversion and containment is used in the Introduction to *Political Shakespeare* by Jonathan Dollimore in his discussion of cultural materialism.²⁰ Spirituality is not a focus of either Dollimore or Greenblatt. Greenblatt refers to the political and not to epiphanic states, or even to *The Merchant of Venice*. I am using Greenblatt’s language in the above quote to suggest that Lorenzo’s ideal spiritual image and epiphany in *Merchant* involves as its positive condition the constant envisioning and production of the faithless subversive other, Jessica, and the powerful containment of her. Lorenzo does not introduce Jessica to Bassanio or even to Portia in Act 3, Scene 2. Lorenzo and Jessica have just arrived as a new couple at Belmont. Jessica is the stranger. Yet, she is made invisible by that same non-introduction (3.2 215–278). There are sixty-three lines before she finally attempts to make herself known with a statement ignored by everyone, Lorenzo included (3.2. 279–285). Lorenzo juxtaposes himself to those he sees as less faithful—for example, the Jew—for greater meaning and to convince himself that he has found that meaning. He seeks situations in which such juxtaposition is possible such as the acquiring of Jessica as mate. His reasoning is, of course, absurd: if she as the Jew is not close to God, then he certainly is.

This thesis suggests that Lorenzo needs Jessica precisely and partly because she is “issue to a faithless Jew” (2.4. 37). He needs to otherize her, so he can feel righteous. In this way,

Lorenzo's behavior resonates with that of the colonist as described by Paul Brown.²¹ In “‘This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine’: *The Tempest* and the discourse of colonialism” Brown analyzes the sexual and toxic relationship between the “mastered and masterful” in *The Tempest* through the prism of early-modern colonialist behavior.²² Brown examines John Rolfe's written request of 1614 to marry Pocahontas. In his letter, Rolfe describes the ‘savagery’ of Pocahontas and the need to “bring the other into his [Christian] service.”²³ Brown does not mention *The Merchant of Venice* and there are certainly differences between the character of Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice* and Rolfe as described by Brown. And yet, it helps us to understand Lorenzo if there is a comparison of the two relationships, that of Rolfe and Pocahontas with that of Lorenzo and Jessica. I argue that there are degrees of non-thinking. There are also degrees of domination, colonialist or not. There is a boundary between the two relational systems of subjugation presented by the two couples in question.

In terms of similarities, Jessica, like Pocahontas, is said to be from a faithless tribe. When Launcelot teases Jessica in Act 3, Scene 5, bringing up the influence of her conversion on the marketing of pork, Lorenzo sends Launcelot away but Launcelot's comment itself is not rebutted by Lorenzo. It is as if Jessica is only identified, in terms of value, by the fact of her faithless culture (3.5. 28–46). Next, as already discussed, both Jessica and Pocahontas are subjugated by their Christian lovers.

The most obvious difference between the two women is their respective assimilation. In *Shakespeare and the Jews* James Shapiro, quoting historian Lucien Wolff, states that the involvement of the Jews in early-modern England was “by no means inconsiderable.”²⁴ The Native in America such as Pocahontas, to Hayden White (quoted from Brown), is “‘just out of sight, over the horizon, in the nearby forest, desert, mountain or hills. [S]he sleeps in

crevices.”²⁵ Rolfe, to Brown, uses his Christian faith to subjugate the other. Lorenzo uses the subjugation of the other to achieve the epiphany. Lorenzo tries to achieve an ideal spiritual state or image by creating a subversive other and containing her. The Christian faith and the related epiphany, for Lorenzo, is the goal rather than, as with Rolfe, the tool of a seemingly civilized society in the efforts of colonialization. In Lorenzo’s speech in Act 5, Scene 1, Jessica is otherized, but she is not referred to as the savage. She is needed by Lorenzo to observe his vision. He needs her to observe the savage horses and to notice how music helps to bring on their epiphany (5.1. 70–77). This is very different than using Christianity and the epiphanies valued in that faith to subdue a being such as Pocahontas by referring to her as ‘savage’.

Lorenzo does not fit into the Rolfe archetype. This does not excuse Lorenzo. I contend, however, that one cannot understand Lorenzo without also understanding that which he is not. In the modern experience, there are degrees of domination and subjugation exemplified by religious hypocrisy and colonization that are more loathsome than that enacted by Lorenzo, as destructive as is his behavior. Lorenzo is not John Rolfe, who indirectly causes the death of Pocahontas. Lorenzo does not kill anyone. Lorenzo is also not defined by the unarguable antisemitism within his community. Shakespeare is creating unique characters with struggles, fears, attractions, indecision, and human weaknesses. These characters are convincingly human. Antonio, the wealthy merchant, is strangely and uniquely “sad” (1.1. 1). Portia, in a unique situation with her chests or caskets and her recently deceased father, is uniquely “weary of this great world” (1.2. 1-2). Shylock wants distinctive and absolute satisfaction of his bond (4.1). Lorenzo, claiming to love Jessica “heartily,” uniquely claims himself to be “beshrewed” (2.6. 52). Even if he is claiming to be cursed because Jessica is Jewish, the ironic focus of this offensive line is not his hatred: it is his love. Lorenzo, Shakespeare is demonstrating, I claim, wants desperately to

love God, or what he perceives as ultimate, and Jessica with a pure and authentic love, and he is uniquely and sometimes destructively engaged in desperate actions of love. Lorenzo's speech of Act 5, with its unique celestial invocation, reflects his desperation. Shakespeare often creates celestial invocations for unique and desperate characters. Cleopatra, devastated by the death of Antony (in *Antony and Cleopatra*), invokes the heavens, the world, and the spheres to arguably describe and make real her dream-vision of her beloved Antony (5.2. 78–83).²⁶ Her agency of love raises her climax from the temporal erotic to the supernal and to "rattling thunder" (5.2. 78–83). The amazing fact is that death does not motivate Lorenzo towards the supernal: life does. Lorenzo does not need an actual death for such an invocation or for a climax or epiphany. Lorenzo, with wild faith and wild poetry, focuses a wild agency on a full climax or epiphany in the living present. He speaks of living beings, to the living Jessica, and in the present tense. He says, "the moonlight *sleeps* upon this bank" (5.1. 54).

Ironically, Lorenzo's full epiphany is seemingly possible to attain only through a dark and deadly subjugation of the woman he loves. This, despite the related deep pain. By marginalizing Jessica, he is committing a desperate act for transcendence, a transcendence prevented by that same marginalization. Lorenzo assumes Jessica's agency. He literally places her in "[his] constant soul" (2.6. 57). He hands Jessica a torch that, we will soon see, symbolizes more than practical light. Jessica, with this torch, sensually assumes the figurative fire of Lorenzo's love and prophecy. He offers it. She accepts it. They both drive each other with assumed and entwined agency towards their mutual epiphany.

The epiphany also indicates a needed political transformation not only in Shakespeare's Venice but in our present day. Given so many grim events in our human experience, one in which laws, judgment, religion, and even revolution have consistently failed in freeing people of

color as well as and including the Muslim, the Catholic, the Jew, and anyone from cultural subjugation, there is no guarantee that new laws, restraints, ideologies, nations, or new governments will be successful in any attempt to offer that same freedom. The epiphanic and revolutionary transformation of self, as dramatized in Lorenzo's speech in Act 5, is the obvious next decisive step in global human growth. Of course, an epiphany, if it is to be so revolutionary as to defeat the status quo, must be desperate. If not, it lacks the agency to overcome the same subjugating behavior and tribal hypocrisy of the common and brilliant skeptics, thieves, and despots who inhabit a seemingly civilized society, such as Shakespeare's Venice. Lorenzo's hot desperation for the epiphany, soon to be exposed in the detailed analysis of his speech, is the ultimate deciding factor. Lorenzo's desperation tilts the scales.

Lorenzo's Speech within the Plot

Lorenzo's speech in Act 5, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, occurs immediately after Jessica has absconded from her father's house. She has joined with Lorenzo, as Tubal reports, spending "four score ducats at a sitting" (3.1. 103–105). Lorenzo seems to be impressed with, if not in love with, Jessica's pilfered wealth. In Act 2, Scene 4, Lorenzo brags to Bassanio of the "gold and jewels she is furnish'd with" (2.4 32) even though Jessica has requested "privacy" in her letter to him (2.4 20). This is a betrayal of Jessica. Betrayed or not, as a woman of the early-modern era, once she does leave her father, she must assure her identification with a man, in her case, with Lorenzo. Her identification, shifting from man to man, reflects her insecurity in transition. Jessica is, not surprisingly, astonished when Lorenzo does come to meet her. She exclaims, as if unbelieving, "Who are you?" (2.6 27). This insecurity can partly explain the

boisterous outing for Lorenzo's pleasure, seemingly to assure their partnership. Later, Jessica contends in response to Lorenzo's harsh judgment of her "stolen" wealth,

In such a night
Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
And ne'er a true one. (5.1. 18–21)

The 'stealing' of a soul is, of course, a materialistic metaphor. The metaphor, I claim, steals the spiritual from the soul by materializing it. Jessica is using the metaphor to reflect to Lorenzo the destructiveness of his earlier accusation of her "stealing from the wealthy Jew" (5.1. 15). Lorenzo hurtfully accuses her of spiritual hypocrisy. He describes Jessica as having an "unthrift love" (5.1. 16). He feels that Jessica loves easily or spends her money easily when in love. Jessica's culture has a complicated history of persecution, one which arguably is materialistic for reasons of survival. Lorenzo cannot negotiate the details of Jessica's human complexity, to be examined. How Jessica presents herself is how she is seen.

Lorenzo is not presented as wealthy. Before he runs off with Jessica, his wants seem simple. He wants a "torchbearer" and has "two hours to furnish us" (2.4. 1–10). The lack of an indirect object in the above quote is startling. One might ask, furnish us with what? With the torch? With fire? It is as if he does not want to end the sentence, rather leaving it open to eternal potentialities or stopping it before the onset of grammatical objects. He does not seem to be familiar with the riches soon supplied by his new torchbearer, Jessica. When he first greets Jessica, he says, "and therefore like herself, wise, fair and true, / Shall she be placed in my constant soul" (2.6. 57–58). She is commodified in that her attributes are placed, even if in his soul. Lorenzo is assuming Jessica's spiritual agency, but only through materialistic tropes.

Soon after their spree, Lorenzo and Jessica are in Belmont under the bright moon at night. They are engaged in what I see as a Spiritual Olympics. Whether in ‘such a night’ Troilus “mounted the Trojan walls” (5.1. 4) as says Lorenzo or “Thisbe. . .saw the lion’s shadow” (5.1. 7) as says Jessica, the aim of this competition is not romance. It is to prove oneself more intimate with the supernal. It is to sharply “out-night” (5.1. 23) or out-God the other while using the failed lovers in these myths as self-protection from vulnerable emotions. Lorenzo and Jessica poetically refer to that which is mystically “bright” (5.1. 1) or “shadow[ed]” (5.1. 7). They mention “enchanted herbs” (5.1. 12) and “vows of faith” (5.1. 19). The scene takes place dramatically at night with beings entering and exiting as well as secret messages transmitted. Lorenzo and Jessica both seemingly feel a transcendent agency “of soft stillness” (5.1. 56) but express it strangely through a harsh competition that resonates with a harshly materialistic society.

Lorenzo then decides (5.1. 47–51) to stay under the stars with Jessica to teach her about faith. Lorenzo is in modern jargon ‘mansplaining’. He speaks with false male superiority. He explains the heavens to Jessica without first asking her what she might already feel or know. Such ‘mansplaining’ requires his ideal image, one which enforces Jessica’s otherization. Launcelot’s entry and report of “good news” (5.1. 47) mean bad news for Shylock. With Shylock weakened, Lorenzo now feels the unquestionable male dominance to ‘house’ the ‘de-housed’ Jessica. This is when he delivers the discussed speech. With Jessica’s father humiliated, Lorenzo as lover confidently steps in. Of course, in the chapter on Jessica, we will see that Lorenzo, though well-meaning, does not fully understand Jessica’s potentiality.

Tracking Lorenzo: A Dramatic Analysis

Lorenzo first enters in Act 1, Scene 1 as a messenger uniting friends, Antonio and Bassanio, and reminding them twice of their imminent dinner (1.1 69–71, 105). Concerned with the community, he resonates with the messengers or guests of the Hebrew Bible. Biblical messengers appear in Genesis 16: 9, and 22: 11, for example, to Hagar, and Abraham respectively. Lorenzo, from his entry, suggests a spiritual goal. In Act 2, Scene 3, Lorenzo is the guest of Jessica's servant's new master as per Jessica's dialogue, "Lorenzo, who is thy new master's guest" (2.3. 6). He is the recipient of her letter (2.3. 7). Most importantly, he is Jessica's seeming savior from the "hell" where she feels she does not belong (2.2. 15–21).

Then, there is a twist. Launcelot, Shylock's servant, says to Jessica, "If a Christian [Lorenzo] do not play the knave and get thee [Jessica], I am much deceived" (2.4. 11–12). The knave in early-modern England "signifie a man of dishonest life and conversation and one that is a vagabonde."²⁷ In the next scene, Lorenzo acts like a knave. Gathering with friends, Lorenzo claims that they will "slink away come suppertime" (2.4. 1). The word slink refers to a baser activity than the word steal.²⁸ Jewish Talmudic teachings claim that a man who steals in the open receives a lighter punishment than he who sneaks into homes by cover of darkness.²⁹ While today the word slink feels casual, placed in the mouth of Lorenzo it reveals a quavering darkness, an unconscious inner conflict, and misdirection. Later, this side of him will darken his epiphany. We will soon see that it is as if Lorenzo is 'slinking' in his otherization of Jessica and Shylock.

However, there is a strange potentiality to this behavior. This idea of 'perhaps' unfolded by Caputo is snakelike and slinking in its quick disappearance.³⁰ The slinking of Lorenzo, while causing his epiphany to be just out of reach, creates a constant state of transformation within

him. Lorenzo's slinking cements his potential epiphany now. This is ironic since his slinking, I have claimed, is demonstrated by his discussed otherization. This is an outrageous circumstance which is partly illuminated by the 20th-century scholar Franz Rosenzweig. He claims, "[The mystery] is not yet manifest to us and cannot yet be manifest...This becoming manifest of the everlasting mystery of Creation is the endlessly renewed miracle of Revelation."³¹ The 'endlessly renewed miracle' or revelation accents the presence of the future. To Rosenzweig, and we will soon see, to Jacques Derrida,³² the 'miracle' is always renewed and always in the state of being renewed. The miracle is complete, and this same miracle is in process. This seemingly does not make sense. Nothing in linear time can be both complete and in process. The miraculous, therefore, defies linear time. The miraculous feels distant to those who are interpellated in a linear materialistic culture. In *Merchant*, this distance leads to Lorenzo's desperation and his inexcusable otherizing behavior. Lorenzo feels that he must continually focus on the far-away supernal and the related epiphany precisely because it is so far. The far-away naturally needs more focus if it is to be understood and achieved. Lorenzo does not think much about the present or think through his present action. The seeming outrageous distance of the miraculous leads Lorenzo to initiate outrageous actions in the materialistic present. The strange slinking of Lorenzo is his reaction to and leads to his epiphany.

For clarity, I want to revisit the quote borrowed from Leonard Tennenhouse in the Introduction. He claims that the attempt to immerse himself in the distant past and remove himself from the present is like "wriggl[ing] out of a close-fitting...shirt" or a "cultural skin."³³ I then claim that in this wriggling, the figurative shirt possibly gets 'wrecked'. Characters, as well as critics, can take part in this wriggling. Lorenzo is in a continual state of wriggling or slinking out of this 'close-fitting shirt' though not to immerse himself in the past like Tennenhouse.

Lorenzo is an epiphany-seeker. He wants to immerse himself in a past, present, and future of an epiphanic reality. Wriggling is not slinking though they both rely on bodily contortions.

Lorenzo's slinking indicates a noble attempt to negotiate the corrupt present not through the guise of the distant past but the salvation and cloak of the distant transcendent.

Critics and characters in their slinking and wriggling, I believe, have good intentions for humanity, or at least for their immediate community. The problem is that the present gets neglected. The present can then become even more corrupt or become disproportionately aligned with destructive behaviors, thereby perpetuating them. I claim, however, that the more we slink out of the corrupt present towards the transcendent, the more present the present can become. This is because transcendence includes the present as well as the past and the future. Strangely, transcendence can become a dominant agent for present change. The present can be seen and enacted as constructive rather than as corrupt and destructive. The immediate question, if we feel we need to slink and Lorenzo certainly does, is how to slink towards a loving transcendent without hurting those around us.

After Lorenzo's 'slinking' comment, he immediately expresses the need for a "torchbearer" (2.4. 1–10). The idea of a torchbearer is as symbolic as it is real. Jessica is literally designated as a torchbearer (2.4. 40) sorely needed, as claimed by Gratiano, to "prepar[e]" for a masquerade (2.4. 4). The lit torch, a plot point, can imply spiritual themes. Shakespeare often uses light to infer supernal powers. For example, when Romeo claims that Juliet teaches "the torches to burn bright" (1.4. 157–158),³⁴ Shakespeare certainly is not saying that Juliet strangely plays with fire. This thesis contends that both torches, that of *Romeo and Juliet* and Lorenzo's torch in *Merchant*, infer the Shakespearean sensual and supernal "light of truth" described by the character Berowne in *Love's Labor's Lost* (1.1. 72–79).³⁵

Once the couple arrives in Belmont, Lorenzo is characterized by both otherizing Jessica and epiphanic yearning. This is where Lorenzo does not introduce Jessica (3.2. 215), where he does not defend her (3.5. 23-50), where he becomes caretaker of Belmont (3.4. 1–44), and where he is uniquely and even pretentiously polite to Portia. Lorenzo says, “Madam, you have a noble and a true conceit / Of god-like amity” (3.4. 2–3). It is also where Lorenzo includes Jessica but subjugates her to seemingly enable his reach for his epiphany (5.1. 1–88).

Lorenzo is not the only character who takes part in otherization. Shylock, Antonio, and Portia do the same, sometimes much more violently. They will be discussed. However, it is not surprising that Lorenzo is next named inheritor of half of Shylock’s estate while Jessica, also an inheritress, remains nameless (4.1. 377–387). By redirecting the estate from Jew to Christian, the Christian community attempts to fix their spiritual need by once again subduing the Jew. The Christian will now have the Jew’s things. The problem is that the Christians fully blame the Jew during the trial for his own marginalization, not themselves, and do not recognize their own desperation (4.1). As long as the Christians feel far from themselves, they will need to stand the Jew or someone other before them as a reminder of the remaining sparks of light in their souls, sparks almost fully extinguished by their own hypocrisy. Lorenzo becomes not only an inheritor but, in that name, a symbol of the same hypocrisy and materialism beyond which he is continually reaching.

After Lorenzo’s speech, he gallantly welcomes Portia home. He also compares his recent inheritance to “manna” from heaven (5.1. 293–294). Lorenzo suddenly conjures the Hebrew Bible as has done Shylock to place himself in a spiritually superior position. Lorenzo is slinking once again in that he is subtly placing himself above, oddly, everyone. This comment, though

pretentious, reminds the audience of his speech about the heavens delivered at the beginning of the scene. Shakespeare seems to be saying, whatever happens, remember the epiphany.

Lorenzo's Speech and Epiphany: A Detailed Analysis

This brings us to Act 5. Lorenzo and Jessica are at Belmont under the stars at night. Lorenzo says,

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims.
Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But, while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it. (5.1. 60–65)

Here, there is a fusing of an ethereal orb, 'his motion like an angel sing[ing]' and the earthly 'muddy vesture of decay'. The 'vesture of decay', while it seems ominous, limits but does not stop the epiphany. Described by Fernie, Lorenzo's epiphany "'creeps' into the ears of men and women, tames savage horses and wields a charming power over 'trees, stones, and floods' but also reverberates at a superhuman pitch in the heights."³⁶

Lorenzo's drive has a fierce prophetic intensity. At first, he claims he does hear the music. Then, he does not. The world's decay that causes this deafness, in Lorenzo's vision, 'doth grossly close [the music] in'. This 'superhuman pitch' so hard to access is his next symbolic and even sexual fixation. His craving is seen through the enjambment of lines 71 to 73. They join with fast agency and little punctuation for a pause,

For do but note a wild and wanton herd,
Or race, of useful and unhandled colts
Fetching mad bounds, bellowing, and neighing loud. (5.1. 71–73)

Only after he packs the symbols into his speech and figuratively manages to stop the earthly as he stops wild horses, making them docile witnesses with “eyes turned to a modest gaze” (5.1. 78) rather than “fetching mad bounds... Which is the hot condition of their blood” (5.1. 73–74), can he perceive the music. In stopping the earthly, he gets caught up in himself and seems to forget the present Jessica, she who has stopped speaking. The speech exposes an epiphany, therefore, but as inferred by the mention of the Greek hell Erebus (5.1. 87), with a self-destructive element. In limiting his spiritual drive to the non-earthly, even to the extreme of sexualizing that drive, Lorenzo sacrifices the earthly world. The craving of spirituality and the related otherization of Jessica disables Lorenzo from accepting Jessica, who is by nature earthly, as sexual or divine. Lorenzo cannot accept the present humanity of Jessica and for the same reason, cannot accept the humanity of self. His epiphany relies on the embodiment of an existential disgust, one aimed at self, as if he is hooked and awaiting his next opiate. His suffering is as “dull as night” (5.1. 86).

Music, it seems, is all that can help him. That which can connect all beings and beasts to God and each other is music. That which can change that which is “stockish, hard and full of rage” (5.1. 81) is the “sweet power of music” (5.1. 79). It is as if Lorenzo has not only found the opiate in music but is close to indicting those who do not understand its “concord” (5.1. 85). He says,

The man that hath no music in himself...
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils. (5.1. 83–85)

Lorenzo is now beginning to otherize those who do not join in the supernal connection that he desperately describes. He is not only otherizing Jessica but anyone who, he feels, cannot

grasp the beauty and synthesis bestowed by the heavens. And so, what is a vision of binding love becomes segregation and authority.

Lorenzo's epiphany is partial but, in its reliance on his astounding agency, reveals a potential future fulfillment. Jessica, we will see in the chapter on her, can sensually absorb that agency and further direct it. The fact that Lorenzo is pointing to the epiphany means that he has and has not yet fully accessed it. If he does not point though, it becomes a potential otherwise neglected. As he says in his desperation, "Mark the music" (5.1. 88).

Conclusion

In the Hebrew Bible, Noah, who is righteous "for his generation" (Genesis 6: 9), gets drunk and naked (Genesis 9:21). Abraham almost sacrifices his son Isaac (Genesis 22: 2–19). Jacob lies to his father and steals the blessing (Genesis 17: 17–35). Moses kills a man (Exodus 2: 11). King David is not exactly the prototype of morality in his acquisition of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).

These biblical prophets, patriarchs, priests, prodigals, and misfit heroes are connected to Lorenzo and, as I will attempt to show, other *Merchant* characters, not by their unethical actions but by their yearning to be close to an unnamed power. That which makes them prophetic is their yearning for God, their related epiphanies, their related divine transmission to the people, and the resulting personal and community transformation. In the Hebrew Bible, one example of transformation occurs during the myth of the Exodus from Egypt. Moses has convinced Pharaoh to free the Israelites. As they run, they realize that Pharaoh is sending his chariots after them. The people cry and complain. In Exodus 14: 13, Moses responds with this word: *hityatsvu*. The translation is 'stand strong'. The root word *yatzav* means to stand with humility and spiritual

strength. In the Passover interpretation, *hityatsvu* means to stand strong not against another culture, such as the Egyptians, but against inner darkness.³⁷ Lorenzo is the character in *The Merchant of Venice* who resonates with *hityatsvu*. He is far from perfect. While the struggle against corruption leads him to hypocritical actions and sexual confusion, and the subjugation that results is repulsive, the power of his yearning is clear in Act 5. It resonates with the prophets of Judaism. The prophets, to Abraham Joshua Heschel, “[are] characterized as a communion with the divine consciousness, a sympathy with divine pathos.”³⁸ This thesis maintains that to Shakespeare, Lorenzo, not only despite but because of his humanity, has the potential of that divine pathos. There is a biblical potential within the character of Lorenzo of a pure human epiphany, one that can be the basis of a new paradigm within the political and religious nexus of society, a transformation on which the whole Bible is founded, one in which otherization is abolished and there is present peace.

Lorenzo’s behavior is often vile. Behavior such as Lorenzo’s destroys in small increments. Lorenzo’s powerful desperation for his epiphany eclipses his hypocrisy, even if for one startling moment. The epiphanic moment of the speech remains. It has a lasting impact that accents the plot but resounds beyond it. In Act 5, Bassanio, accompanied by Antonio, arrives at Belmont. Lorenzo might not hear the celestial ‘orbs’ of which he speaks so passionately. His near-epiphanic moment, however, increases his ability to hear the sounds that celebrate the celestial on earth and sanctify homecomings, divine vows, and the hopeful good intentions of his friends. “Your husband is at hand,” Lorenzo says to Portia, “I hear his trumpet” (51. 122).

Notes

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Chapter Two

Antonio: The Imprint of the Path

Antonio is often condemned in *Merchant* criticism. Antonio's antisemitism is so acute—to Sarah Coodin in *Is Shylock Jewish?*—that it reveals “the antisemitic designs of [the play's] author.”¹ John Drakakis claims that Antonio is the ultimate racist.² Bruce Boehrer in “Shylock and the Rise of the Household Pet” compares Antonio to a “work animal.”³ These scholars allow Antonio few redeeming character traits, and certainly not the transcendence associated with the epiphany. This thesis contends, in a new discourse, that even the most unlikely *Merchant* characters in the most awkward situations are driven towards satisfaction and transcendence. The characters of *Merchant*, I argue, do not achieve satisfaction during the framework of the play. What matters is that they each in some way allow their agency to be driven towards an epiphany that, itself, indicates a related community transformation. Antonio's potential transcendence advances that same potentiality in other *Merchant* characters. If Antonio can approach an epiphany, I suggest, anyone can.

Antonio's epiphany is revealed in Act 4, Scene 1. First, though, he says this to Bassanio,

Commend me to your honourable wife;
 Tell her the process of Antonio's end,
 Say how I lov'd you, speak me fair in death,
 And, when the tale is told, bid her be judge
 Whether Bassanio had not once a love. (4.1. 269–273)⁴

These lines reveal a curious synthesis of Antonio's erotic yearning (‘say how I lov'd you’) with a bizarre objectivity. Antonio does not say my end, rather Antonio's end. It is as if he

is referring to himself in the future when dead. Antonio demonstrates a charged desire to envision himself objectively from the transcendent perspective of his soul.

In the next forty lines, the knife will have been held to Antonio's bared chest. Antonio will have been (for 315 lines) listening to an amalgamation of animal inferences ("a gaping pig") (4.1. 46), biblical references ("a Daniel come to judgment!") (4.1. 219), questionable suggestions ("you may as well do anything most hard") (4.1. 77), and calls for mercy ("the quality of mercy is not strained") (4.1. 180). This pandemonium of imagery contributes to the setting that, to Janet Adelman, leads to Antonio's symbolic crucifixion.⁵ In *Blood Relations*, Adelman states that "the wound of the crucifixion" is nearly "re-play[ed]" in the person of Antonio.⁶ Adelman, of course, is referring to Christ's crucifixion in the New Testament. There does not seem to be a way to avoid the zenith of Antonio's death. The situation is outrageous but for Antonio, weirdly exciting, 'a tale to be told'.

Then, Shylock says, "let the Christian go" (4.1. 316).

Antonio might feel festive. He is going to live. Oddly, he reveals a ghostly silence. He does not speak for sixty lines. In *Shakespeare: Authority, Sexuality* Alan Sinfield partly explains Antonio's silence as a response to hurt love. Sinfield cites L.W. Hyman who suggests that Portia, in saving Antonio's life, "is preventing... the greater [biblical] love" referred to in John 15: 13.⁷ Sinfield, normally hostile to religion, moves beyond his own critical norm and evokes religious tropes to demonstrate the deep love between Antonio and Bassanio. Antonio has offered his life to Bassanio. For Antonio, since his ultimate expression of love is prevented, his life is not 'saved' but to become "wretched" with "lingering penance" (4.1. 265–268). Fortune, Antonio claims, is no longer going to "cut [him] off" (4.1. 268) from his life as expected. Antonio, we

will explore, expresses his love for Bassanio in many ways throughout the play. I agree with Sinfield and will comment more on this ‘greater love’ soon.

Antonio’s silence can also be unfolded through the mention of silence in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Hamlet, while dying, says, “The rest is silence” (5.2. 312).⁸ Hamlet’s personal experience indicates that there is not any guarantee that death, or the dead, are silent. Hamlet’s dead father is quite vocal in that play (1.5). The comment is strange. One wonders why Hamlet while dying would say ‘the rest is silence’ if he knows otherwise. I suggest that Hamlet is being ironic. He is saying that which is expected even if it is false to him. Neither Hamlet nor Antonio, I claim, receive the ‘silence’ of death. Hamlet, in death, might arguably inherit the voice of his ghostly father. Antonio becomes silent in life. Antonio expects that he is “meetest for death” (4.1. 114). The shock of life leaves a residue of ghostly silence. Antonio does die in part. His death is ironically the death of a death expected, not of life. He begins to understand something special, we will see, perhaps a trace of an ongoing agency possibly known to the dying. He realizes that he might one day achieve the unified spiritual and erotic climax, the death he seemingly craves, but not in the present.

Antonio, throughout Act 4, is being driven to the climax of his death. Unknown forces and characters drive him forward. We will examine the unknown forces soon. The characters who drive him towards death include Bassanio, the Duke, and Shylock. The presence of Bassanio has a large influence on Antonio. Antonio says that he wants Bassanio to “see me (Antonio) pay his debt” (3.3. 36) of death. Antonio later impatiently “beseech[es] the court [the Duke] to give the judgment” of his death (4.1. 239–240). Finally, Shylock’s “deep cut” will enable Antonio, so he says, to pay his debt “with all [his] heart” (4.1. 277). By referring to Shylock’s ‘deep cut’ Antonio is vocally acquiescing to Shylock the agency to kill him (Antonio).

I argue that in this line Antonio compares himself to a passive sacrificial animal. In the Hebrew Bible, the sacrifice of sheep and goats enables the forgiveness of sin and the freedom from community iniquity (Leviticus 16: 7–25). Antonio, we will see, is on a climactic path leading to his expected Christ-like death. He has a goal-oriented interior narrative driving him towards his own sacrifice. Through his death, he foresees his sacrificial release from sin and debt, as well as the seeming parallel release of the community. Antonio, during the trial, knows that he has never been so close to that transformative climax of sacrificial death. There is devastating shock, therefore, when he realizes he will live. There is also a fleeting grasp of an important moment achieved on his climactic path. He has achieved a sensual and spiritual peak in which he is “arm’d and well prepare’d” (4.1. 261) for his death. I claim that he wants to imprint that climactic moment in his memory. The imprinted memory can be likened to the ‘event’ in the language of Slavoj Žižek.⁹ Žižek describes the ‘event’ as “the effect that seems to exceed its causes.”¹⁰ So too, the imprinted memory is the effect that seems to exceed the climactic path itself. Antonio projects a path of spiritual and erotic desire that is frustrated but which leaves a trace of what fulfillment might be.

By applying the erotic and the spiritual to Žižek’s political philosophy of ‘event’, my hope is to cement the imprinted memory as an ‘event’ that might or might not happen in the text. The ultimate cause of the ‘event’ in Antonio’s experience is possibly, for lack of a better word, the aborted climax. Antonio’s epiphany, we will see, happens and does not happen. The action of almost happening is, however, a happening. Antonio’s climactic path is darkly stopped short. The epiphany that results serves a purpose, to imprint the memory of the climactic path lost. This thesis claims that one day this psychic imprint might help Antonio to find the same spiritual and erotic path again and to begin at the place where he left off.

This chapter will analyze Antonio's epiphanic drive and the shocking abortion of that drive. Jewish mysticism, an academic discipline examined by Gershom Scholem in *Kabbalah*,¹¹ can help to illuminate the epiphanic experience of the antisemitic Antonio. After illuminating Antonio's epiphany through Jewish mysticism, this chapter will track Antonio dramatically within the plot. Since the final chapter of this thesis focuses on the trial and the rings, I will only touch upon the trial scene. Antonio's repression, I suggest, strangely points to his transformative potentiality and his epiphanic experience.

Antonio's Epiphany and Jewish Mysticism

Shakespeare, I argue, may have been familiar with the epiphanic constructs of Jewish mysticism without realizing that they are Jewish. Stephen Greenblatt in "The Circulation of Social Energy" speaks of Shakespeare's "totalizing society" or the "occult network linking all human, natural and cosmic powers."¹² He claims that cultural information in mercantilist England could have been available to Shakespeare through human circulation. Knowledge can disseminate in strange and subtle ways. This thesis adds Jewish mystical constructs and the epiphany to Greenblatt's 'network'. Jewish mystical teachings and even the Hebrew language could have been made strangely accessible to Shakespeare through possible lovers, tradesmen, his drinking companions, theatrical or musical connections, and through the circulation of rabbinic handbooks. Rabbinic handbooks such as those by Nachmanides (13th century)¹³ and Abraham Ibn (Aben) Ezra (11th century)¹⁴ were published in Latin and circulated in England beginning in the Middle Ages. These handbooks include quotes from the Talmud and other Jewish writings such as the *Zohar* (12th century), and the *Sefer Yetzirah* (The Book of Creation, 4th century).¹⁵

Jewish mystical commentary is often woven into biblical teachings, such as that on covenant.¹⁶ Mary Jo Kietzman discusses the politicization of biblical covenant by early- modern reformers such as William Perkins. Such reformers focused on “binding the old and new covenants together.”¹⁷ I suggest that this “new life”¹⁸ given to ‘old’ or Hebraic scriptures created renewed or continued interest in Hebraic scholars such as Ibn Ezra. Hugh Broughton, for example, would cite Ibn Ezra and other mystics often in his sermons even if negatively in juxtaposition to Christian biblical interpretation.¹⁹ This transmission by theologians of Jewish mysticism as recorded in rabbinic handbooks possibly influenced the populace and the mental being of Shakespeare. Even if Shakespeare was not exposed to Jewish mysticism, Jewish constructs, and specifically the epiphany, I contend, can illuminate *Merchant* in a new manner.

Jewish mysticism places the epiphany in the “white space.” The ‘white space’ refers to transcendent events that may have happened, and in their potentiality, did happen, beyond the cryptic Hebrew text of the scriptures.²⁰ The 20th-century Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook, as interpreted by Chanan Morrison, states that “the white parchment around the letters is an integral [sublime] part of the Torah... that cannot be read in the usual manner.”²¹ Kook claims that God’s call to Moses on Mount Sinai as written only precedes the actual call that is intensified in the ‘white space’. While the ‘white space’ refers to scriptures, this thesis will be using this term expansively in reference to the canonized texts of Shakespeare. The ‘white space’ in Shakespeare, this thesis contends, indicates sublime happenings that may not be directly in the text but that are substantiated by elements of textual plot and character. If we use Jewish thought to analyze *Merchant*, I claim that Lorenzo’s epiphany, as we have seen, is textual for other implied epiphanies in the play, while Antonio’s epiphany happens mostly in the ‘white space’. Antonio’s epiphany is not as literal as that of Lorenzo but is present and is close to literal by the

end of the play. The non-literal interpretation of *Merchant* is founded on the ‘white space’ as described by Kook, which itself is substantiated by Greenblatt’s ‘network’. Kook’s description of the ‘white space’ is itself founded on a history of Jewish textual analysis. I am taking the text very seriously by agreeing with Kook on the importance of not only the text but that which surrounds it. A Jewish analysis is interpretive.²² Any Jewish analysis of Shakespeare will reflect that value of interpretation.

This thesis will now exemplify how the ‘white space’ can be useful in the analysis of Antonio’s silence when Shylock says, ‘let the Christian go’. Antonio’s silence in Act 4 can be understood as rational. Antonio is convicted of forfeiting on his bond and the punishment is “an equal pound of [his] fair flesh” (1.3. 148–149). In court, he is represented by a “young and learned doctor” (4.1. 143). Antonio would naturally be silent to allow his lawyer to speak. The subject of the courtroom conversation turns from him to the alien Shylock who is now seen as guilty of attempted murder. Antonio, released from the center of focus, feels uninvolved in the “hold” that the law has on Shylock (4.1. 343). Therefore, Antonio’s prolonged silence.

In religious interpretation, Antonio is exemplifying through his silence a disappointment: Antonio cannot demonstrate the ‘greater [sacrificial] love’ mentioned in the book of John. Ken Jackson in *Shakespeare and Abraham* refers to sacrifice as an act of love in Christian thought.²³ I feel that this inference of love in Christian writings requires a Jewish comment. Jewish thought indicates the ultimate love for God as an act of human life, not death. In the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 22), God points Abraham to the sacrifice of his beloved son, Isaac. Abraham follows faithfully. God then stops Abraham so that Isaac can live. Life, not death, in Jewish scriptures, is an action of love made possible through faith. The Jewish explanation for Antonio’s silence would indicate Antonio’s faith and relief. His life is lovingly saved. The Christian explanation

would seemingly indicate Antonio's faith and disappointment. He is not allowed to die in loving sacrifice.

Antonio's silence can also be illuminated in the 'white space' of the *Merchant* text. I suggest that Antonio is shocked into silence. His prolonged silence possibly indicates that he is processing a realization so large, to him, that it takes time. This thesis claims that Shakespeare is saying through Antonio's silence that love is beyond religion. Religion in *Merchant* advances each character towards an epiphany but stops each pre-epiphany at a cut off point, a point where the constructs of religion can no longer be useful. In Antonio's words, he is "cut...off" (4.1. 268). The question Shakespeare raises is what comes next after religion. Shakespeare never mentions this question directly in *Merchant*. However, by showing that Christian love cannot be satisfied in the play—Antonio does not die—and by showing that Jewish love cannot be satisfied—Shylock arguably has to put his love on hold: his desire for judgment is unfulfilled—Shakespeare is indicating an ongoing agency that seeks satisfaction. There is an unsatisfied loving agency that keeps driving forward established at the end of the play. Portia says in the last lines of Act 5, "It is almost morning; / And yet I am sure you are not satisfied" (5.1. 295–296). Portia indicates an agency driving onwards towards satisfaction, towards morning and beyond. This agency drives the characters beyond religious rituals towards an ultimate transcendence or completion. This agency is too intense to just stop. Ultimately, we will see, Shakespeare is pointing to a fusion of all religions and of all love, whatever the limitations, through this ongoing agency.

Antonio, in his silence, is being rational. He is demonstrating his exhaustion, disappointment, or relief. He is possibly also trying to recapture the erotic and spiritual peak on the climactic path where he has been cut off. He wants to cement the imprint of that moment in

his mental being. That moment, now gone, is all that he feels he has left of a crucial erotic and spiritual force. At the end of the trial, Antonio bravely acts, even mistakenly, with the loving drive of that lost moment. He tries to express that agency in a virtuous manner. The problem is that he focuses on religion, rather than on the agency pointing to the climax beyond religion. How Antonio attempts this virtuosity is controversial and will be negotiated in the following dramatic analysis.

Tracking Antonio: A Dramatic Analysis

Antonio begins the play immersed in a sadness that “wearies” him (1.1. 2). He says that he has “much ado to know [him]self” (1.1. 6) which means that he does in part know himself. He knows enough to know that there is much that he does not know. There is a lucidity to his opening language. Then, Antonio becomes strangely passive and lost in his own confusion. Coodin claims that “Antonio exhibits an Esau-like inability to plan for future eventualities.”²⁴ Coodin compares Antonio to the biblical Esau who, while demonized in Talmud (as Coodin correctly demonstrates), has been rectified in post-Talmudic rabbinic teachings. Nachmanides claims that Esau is not evil but *ayefut* or world-weary.²⁵ Antonio, we will see, is also not evil.

Sadness is the object of the first fifty-six lines in Act 1. Salanio attributes Antonio’s sadness to a feared “Misfortune to [his] ventures” (1.1. 20). Salarino agrees that Antonio is “sad to think upon his merchandise” (1.1. 39). The speeches of Salanio and Salarino are replete with poetic language and metaphor. We hear of a vessel that “scatters all her spices in the stream” (1.1. 32), and of argosies with “woven wings” (1.1. 13). When sadness is attributed to love, there is one direct line (“Why then, you are in love”) (1.1. 45). Poetry is not needed to beautify love,

but it is to beautify mercantilism. Love and mercantilism are already juxtaposed at the start of *Merchant* in a discussion around sadness. While love and merchandise are equated as possible reasons for Antonio's sadness, the word love is adequate to indicate love. Mercantilism, I claim, and we will continually see, hides something abstract and harsh under "roaring waters [enrobed with] silks" (1.1. 34).

The beautifying of mercantilism through poetry, where small boats "curtsy" (1.1. 172) to Antonio's "rich burghers" (1.1. 170), paints an exquisite picture. The reason for the exquisite picture, however, seems to be beauty itself. Something important begins to feel concealed under the exquisite imagery. Meaning, I suggest, begins to feel lost. Walter Cohen claims that Antonio is a "harbinger of modern capitalism"²⁶ and, I add, a harbinger of the corruption often associated with capitalist-like ventures. Antonio, like Salanio and Salarino, speaks of beauty for beauty's sake. Antonio compares the world to a stage "where every man must play his part" (1.1. 78). Antonio is indicating the dramatic beauty of the stage within his world as well as his own seeming powerlessness. He 'must' play a part. This powerlessness, I suggest, indicates repression. Antonio conceals the corruption of his mercantilist ventures but also seems to conceal something more, perhaps his true inner self. Concealment, we will see, causes Antonio to be carefully indirect in his speech and leaves an opening for others to be direct. Antonio becomes controlled by others. It is Bassanio who seeks out Antonio's loan (1.1. 179–180) and Shylock who specifies the rules of the bond (1.1. 141–147).

Antonio's character exposition is likewise indirect. Antonio's otherization of Shylock is mostly exposed through the dialogue of Shylock. In Act 1, Scene 3, Shylock says, "You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, / And spit upon my Jewish gabardine" (1.3 107–109). Antonio responds, "I am as like to call thee so again" (1.3. 125). Previously, Antonio's antisemitic

comments, while brutal, were private asides. Antonio assumes humiliating behavior from the expectation of Shylock and returns that behavior violently to Shylock's face. Antonio's violent antisemitism remains unexcused. However, this behavior results from his lack of direction and passivity, which in turn result from his repression and sadness. Antonio's sadness and repression cannot be underestimated as a driving force of the plot.

Oddly, this sadness can be compared to Hamlet's ghost in *Hamlet*. Hamlet's ghost takes up the first important moments of that play, obsessing the characters and creating the defining tone that conjoins "metaphysical horror" (in the words of Greenblatt) to the real world.²⁷ Barnardo's question when Horatio first sees Hamlet's ghost is thus, "Is not this something more than fantasy?" (1.1. 53). The ghost is not fantasy. The ghost is alarmingly real. The ghost can also conceal itself at will. Greenblatt's reference to horror describes *Hamlet* and not *The Merchant of Venice*. I claim that Antonio's sadness also takes up the first important moments of the play, obsessing the characters and creating the tone that conjoins 'metaphysical horror' to the real world.

Antonio's sadness and repression affect both his mood and appearance. Gratiano says that Antonio "looks not well" (1.1. 73). This seeming illness indicates that there is more being concealed than materialistic corruption. Antonio, I contend, loves Bassanio homoerotically and conceals that love. Since I am referring to concealment, not the text but the 'white space' can substantiate this love. It is difficult to prove that something concealed is real. What I can do is accent the related textual foundations.

There are potentially four textual foundations for homoerotic interpretations of Antonio's dialogue in *Merchant*. First, Antonio is willing to die for Bassanio. In the Hebrew Bible, men or prophets die for God or as a form of punishment, one of which is for the seeming sin of

homoeroticism (Leviticus 20: 13). In this way, death and the homoerotic as well as, I argue, prophecy and the homoerotic in the Hebrew Bible, are strangely conjoined. It is possible that in the being of Antonio, Shakespeare is indicating the homoerotic through the punishment of death as happens in the Hebrew Bible. While Antonio is possibly to be punished for defaulting on a loan, it is a loan for Bassanio. Next, Antonio's concealed expression of love in the opening acts becomes direct after the trial. Then, he refers to his love as a known fact, saying "my love withal" (4.1. 447). Next, the plot hinges on a love that denies nothing. At the start, Antonio says to Bassanio, "say to me what I should do" (1.1. 158). Antonio loans money he does not presently have to Bassanio and then is willing to give up his life for him as well. Antonio says, "My purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlocked to your occasions" (1.1. 138–139). Note 'person'. It makes sense that if life is not held back by Antonio, the sensual body would not be held back either. Finally, the first reference to love in *Merchant* infers the erotic in a play in which the comic business of erotic love and marriage are central. Salanio accuses Antonio of being "in love" (1.1. 45), which Antonio refuses with "fie, fie" (1.1. 47). This could be a plain denial, but it could also be coy refusal and concealment, especially in the comic and romantic context of the beginning of the play. Dramatically, the erotic is the first vision that the audience has of love. Since all other mentions of love in *Merchant*, except for familial, are erotic, it seems plausible to analyze Antonio's dialogue of love for Bassanio in *Merchant* as fundamentally erotic. These four foundations in this thesis substantiate a 'white space' analysis of Antonio's dialogue as partially erotic. That eroticism is often concealed in a wider early-modern context, of course, where it is literally unspeakable.

Homoerotic interpretations of *The Merchant of Venice* are no longer controversial. These interpretations have become the norm if we look at modern productions such as that of the Royal

Shakespeare Company directed by Polly Findlay in 2015.²⁸ Antonio, played by Jamie Ballard, is seen kissing Bassanio passionately. Alan Sinfield in “How to Read *The Merchant of Venice* without Being Heterosexual” claims,

the fact that the text of...*Merchant* gives no plain indication that the love between Antonio and Bassanio is informed by erotic passion does not mean that such passion was inconceivable, then; it may well mean that it didn't require particular presentation as a significant category [in early-modern England].²⁹

I agree with Sinfield that the homoerotic is a crucial theme in the play, but not at the expense of eviscerating religion. Sinfield mostly ‘empties out’³⁰ the religious content of *Merchant* as if to support his reading. I see a more complex interplay between homoerotic desire and religion in *Merchant*. For me, these things come together. I claim that the remarkable action of Shakespeare is that through a conjunction of central religious ideas and the homoerotic, Shakespeare goes beyond those religious ideas themselves. It is as if the divisiveness does not work. Shakespeare, we will see, through Antonio, invokes crucifixion, makes it dramatic in homoerotic love, gets us tempted into thinking it will happen, then refuses it. It is a major epiphany that Shakespeare creates which he then stalls and blocks in the experience of Antonio. *Merchant* is arguably Shakespeare's most notorious play about religious differences and in it, he teases the audience with this enormously powerful trope of crucifixion in conjunction with the early-modern Jew. The most obvious biblical comparison is the *Akeda*, or the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22–23), which has a similar build-up of agency and which is stopped by God. I claim that religion or religious drive occupies and creates the character of Antonio as much as his homoeroticism. Religious drive is the trajectory of Antonio until he is stopped at his very crucifixion. This drive is often concealed by Antonio through poetry and metaphor. Because it is

often concealed, it is, like his homoerotic tendencies, one cause for his sadness. He possibly feels confused by his religious drive given his homoerotic tendencies. His religious drive is also in the ‘white space’ and difficult to prove.

There are three textual foundations for this religious interpretation of Antonio in *Merchant*. First, we can look at the plot. Antonio is prepared to sacrifice himself to satisfy a debt. Antonio writes that the debt created for the “pleasure” of Bassanio, makes it “impossible [he, Antonio] should live” (4.1. 317–319). During the trial, Antonio acquiesces to Shylock the agency to “cut deep enough” into his “heart” (4.1. 277). Abraham Oz in *Transformations of Authenticity* describes the sacrificial agency of Antonio seen in a 1972 production in Tel Aviv directed by Yossi Yzraeli,

Antonio sat with a huge black cross fastened to his back. Thus made a type of Christ, Antonio himself did not become an object of empathy; the pathos and compassion evoked by the scene were directed to the figure of Christ beyond him rather than to Antonio in person.³¹

The sacrificial agency of Antonio described by Oz in this image is moving through Antonio to Christ as suggested by such a dominant image of the cross. Antonio’s opening question is rooted in religious scriptures. Antonio asks how he “caught” or “came by” his sadness, “what stuff ‘tis made of and whereof it is born” (1.1. 3–4). This type of questioning can best be reflected in Lamentations 1:1 in which the opening word is (in Hebrew) *eichah*, or how? While the how in Lamentations questions the destruction of Jerusalem, the how in *Merchant* is minimized to Antonio’s personal experience. This reduction of biblical questioning to the seeming self-indulgence of a merchant is so extreme, it could be comedic. However, in Ecclesiastes 1: 1–2 we visit this personal sadness with the word *havel*. The biblical word *havel*, often translated as vanity, is best understood as a mist or a strange empty darkness.³² All, we read in Ecclesiastes, is

darkness. Why bother doing anything, for example sowing the fields when all is empty and dark? The question in Ecclesiastes reduces the larger questioning in Lamentations to singular beings and, therefore, gives a serious biblical foundation for Antonio's dramatic and personal inquiry at the opening of the play. Antonio, himself, claims religious agency. Antonio, in response to Shylock's interpretation of Jacob's brilliance at sheep breeding, says, "That was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for, / A thing not in his power to bring to pass" (1.3. 87–88). Antonio is claiming a Judeo-Christian belief in a spiritual agency that has the power to control the fertility of animals through human behavior. Later, Antonio, "a tainted wether of the flock" (4.1. 113), compares himself to the animal controlled by the human controlled by a greater biblical power. Antonio takes upon himself an indirect agency relegated down from God.

The homoerotic interpretation of Antonio fuses with the religious interpretation in the plot and dialogue of *Merchant* to create an Antonio who is both erotically repressed and spiritually driven.

In Act 1 when Bassanio begins his opening request for a loan, his claimed wish is to "get clear" (1.1. 134) of past debts. Antonio assures Bassanio that he is 'clear' and that Bassanio in Antonio's words still "stand[s]...within the eye of honour" (1.1. 125–127). The eye in Shakespeare's writings has erotic and spiritual undertones. It signifies an erotic intensity of agency in Sonnet 104 ("when first your eye I eyed")³³ as well as a surreal and lustrous spirituality in *The Tempest* where eyes become pearls.³⁴ In Sonnet 104 the eye, an opening of the beloved, is suggestively penetrated by the narrator, making two eyes one. The sheen of pearls in *The Tempest* is iridescent, suggesting a dreamy sensual reality. The word 'honour' indicates actions of faith. The 'eye of honour' intimates a poetic fusion of Antonio's erotic faith in his lover Bassanio with his spiritual faith in God. Antonio's mind conjoins erotic and spiritual

desires not only into one climactic path but into a path that potentially is one of faith. Antonio, I claim, mixes up homoerotic love, spirituality, and mercantilist corruption because they are all strangely concealed in his mind. Antonio, we will see, inwardly fabricates a corrupt love, even if it is not at all corrupt, and in concealing it, makes it seem even more spiritually perverse.

Antonio never says to Bassanio, I love you. He says, ‘my purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlocked to your occasions’. Drakakis claims that the metaphorical meaning of the line suggests sex.³⁵ The concealment of homosexuality by metaphor and early-modern slang debases that same homosexuality and weirdly makes it seem deserving of concealment. Twenty lines later, Antonio requests to hear what Bassanio needs so that he may be “pressed unto it” (1.1. 160). ‘Pressed unto’ is a term used by Shakespeare to sometimes suggest torture. In *Measure for Measure*, a punishment includes being “pressed to death, whipping and hanging” (5.1. 520–521).³⁶ The twenty-line proximity of the concealment of Antonio’s possible homosexuality (‘my purse...my extremest means’) to his expression of repression (‘pressed unto it’) indicates that Antonio’s possible homosexuality is being repressed and is torture to him. I claim that all that is repressed undergoes in Antonio’s mental being a mutual convergence, a mutual reinforcement, and a mutual seeming ugliness. In concealment, the proximity of corrupt materialistic behaviors to homosexuality and spirituality informs a seeming perversion of love, both human and divine.

This thesis claims marked collusion between Antonio and Bassanio that is repressed. Gratiano says to Antonio, “you are marvelously changed” (1.1. 76) inferring time passed between meetings. Gratiano seems not to have seen Antonio for a while. Bassanio says to Salanio and Salarino, “You grow exceedingly strange” (1.1. 67) also inferring time passed. Antonio and Bassanio have both created distance from mutual friends, each man’s singular distance marked by an analogous mystery.

Since this thesis applies Jewish thought to *Merchant*, it makes sense to explore how the Hebrew Bible can help to elucidate the seeming homoerotic repression experienced by Antonio. In Judaism, the erotic is celebrated. The Hebrew Bible supports sexuality not only for procreation but for pleasure. The *Song of Songs* begins with this line,

יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ, כִּי-טוֹבִים לְדָוִד מִיַּיִן.

In English, “let him kiss me with kisses of the mouth, for it is good that your intimate love is from wine.” Note the term דָּוִד (your intimate love) or *dodehah*. The term liturgically refers to a bride or a wife. Yet, the suffix *hah* denotes the masculine. So, this liturgically female lover is grammatically masculine. In this way, for example, homosexuality is inferred in the *Song of Songs*.

In *Merchant*, Antonio not only “offers his body [to Bassanio] as a kind of casket but also bewilders Bassanio.³⁷ Bassanio slips into prose in lines 1.1. 114–119. Finally left alone with his lover Antonio, Bassanio forgets or forgoes the normative structure of elocution for that setting. They were speaking in poetry. He speaks in prose. This thesis suggests that this narrational glitch indicates Bassanio’s difficulty in synthesizing the private romance with his public persona.

This concealment of intimacy between Bassanio and Antonio can be compared to that between King David and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1. At the death of Jonathan, David says,

צָר-לִי עֲלֵיךָ, אָחִי יְהוֹנָתָן--נֶעְמָתָ לִי, מְאֹד; וּנְפִלְאֹתָהּ אֶהְבֶּתְךָ לִי, מֵאֲהָבַת נָשִׁים.

In English, “Unhappiness is to me, my brother Jonathan, (who was) very pleasant to me, wonderful was your love to me, from the love of women.” The Hebrew word pleasant (*n’amtah* or נֶעְמָתָ) indicates Jonathan but also God in liturgy and, therefore, in this context, indicates

intimacy. The Hebrew word wonder (*niflotah* or נִפְלוֹתָהּ) that describes Jonathan's love for David is the same root word used to describe God's miracles in Egypt (Exodus 7). There is a climactic experience inferred here, the erotic triumphs involved in freedom. In biblical Hebrew, the homoerotic in this line is repressed in its concealment but intelligible.

The five books of Moses, the core of Jewish scriptures, condemn homosexuality (Leviticus 18: 22). Since other scriptures engage with it though, a liberal Jew can find flexibility of interpretation. In Shakespeare's Venice, Antonio, a citizen of a restricting society, must repress his homoerotic self. The repression of eroticism is conjoined with that of spirituality, including hopeful kindness and patience. Spirituality is silenced by Antonio in an action of confused self-protection. It is not surprising that Antonio might confuse his erotic and spiritual desires: the desires, we will soon see, are equally powerful. Both desires, spiritual and homoerotic, have such force that they cannot be fully concealed. Antonio cannot seem to restrain the mistaken, unavoidable, and recurring slip of his desires. The force of desire, repression, and shame spill into his self-otherization and otherization of the Jew. The toxic dynamic builds throughout the play and culminates in the appalling trial scene (4.1).

Act 1, Scene 1 ends with Antonio, a merchant with ships out at sea, promising to borrow money to loan to his friend or lover Bassanio to enable the solicitation of the wealthy Portia. Antonio and Bassanio exit with funding as the objective. Elements of mercantilism and possible homosexuality strangely and grotesquely converge not only in Antonio's mental being but in the *Merchant* plot. Antonio prioritizes funding as an action of plot to satisfy the beloved Bassanio.

In the first lines of Act 1, Scene 3, Bassanio has found a possible loan, that from Shylock, the Jew. Bassanio is quick to say to Shylock that it is Antonio who will be bound, not himself (1.3. 1–10). Shylock wants to take part in this deal in which he, not Antonio, will have the

advantage. When invited to dinner, Shylock responds, “Yes to smell pork...I will buy with you, sell with you...but not eat with you” (1.1. 30–35). These lines demonstrate how Antonio is now regarded, not because of Jewish laws, but because of the humiliation Antonio has brought upon himself as the non-visible borrower in a visibly materialist society. Shylock states that Christ “conjures the devil” (1.3. 31). Christ, to Antonio, is the beloved son of God. This insult would require a response. Antonio and Bassanio do not respond and reveal themselves as hypocritical. They are intent on bargaining not only their money, their future, and their bodies as Shylock summarizes, “three thousand ducats, for three months and Antonio bound” (1.3. 9–10), but their souls for the loan.

When Bassanio introduces Antonio saying, “This is Signor Antonio” (1.1. 36), it seems as if Shylock is not aware of Antonio the human, rather, Antonio the symbol of antisemitism. Shylock responds, “He hates our sacred nation” (1.3. 44). Bassanio, far from perfect, finally, in introducing Antonio, asks, “Do you hear?” (1.3. 48), telling Shylock to see the being before him. Otherization is endemic in *The Merchant of Venice*. Everyone marginalizes everyone. While Shylock, we will soon see, is a symbol of oppression, I add that Antonio is as well. He is a symbol of the archetypal antisemite, a symbol from which it is understandably almost impossible to evolve. I will be discussing the marginalization of Shylock. For now, it is important to consider that Shylock’s objectification of Antonio only exacerbates Antonio’s struggle.

Antonio’s entrance has been planned. When Shylock asks Bassanio, “who is he comes here?” (1.3. 35), Antonio is suddenly present. Bassanio makes the request for the loan and Antonio is there, and nowhere else in the big city of Venice, to close the deal. Antonio, I claim, has decided to send Bassanio ahead before he, Antonio, enters at the right moment. Antonio’s decision is biblical. In the Hebrew Bible, Jacob sends his beloved ahead when approaching his

betrayed brother, Esau (Genesis 33: 1-20). Jacob, frightened, must travel with his expansive family and face Esau, who has threatened to kill him (Genesis 26-28).

Antonio's decision to send Bassanio ahead in *Merchant* (Act 1, Scene 3) can be related to Jacob's decision to send his wives ahead. Jacob possibly feels that the women and children might appease Esau. Antonio's impulses are not far removed from Jacob's. Antonio knows that his presence is alienating. Antonio has seemingly called Shylock "dog" (1.3. 124). If Bassanio approaches Shylock first, there is a greater chance that the loan will be approved.

Antonio is far from a patriarch. Still, he knows that Shylock hates him, but approaches Shylock anyway, as does Jacob with Esau. His behavior is biblical, even if not in the way we presently admire. What this says in this thesis is that Antonio is following the same scriptures that ultimately condemn otherization. Even if Antonio is not following the central scriptural dictum "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19: 18), he is emulating biblical behaviors of characters who move in the same mythic world as that dictum. This does not make Antonio's action good or likable. It does give Antonio's action a potential transformative agency resonant with the biblical agency of Jacob. Both Jacob and Antonio seemingly attempt to satisfy practical goals the same way. They send peacemakers or messengers ahead.

Shylock is understandably furious at the antisemitic Antonio. In a twenty-three-line speech, Shylock vehemently describes Antonio's antisemitic actions. The verb tenses used by Shylock are in the past ("you have rated me") (1.3. 103), in the present ("you call me") (1.3. 107), in the present imperative ("go to then") (1.3. 111), in the conditional present ("we would have moneys") (1.3. 112), and even in the future ("shall I bend low?") (1.3. 110). The whole speech bears down on the otherization of Shylock in all matters of verb tenses. The dynamic of otherization is still not exposed in real-time stage action. Line 94 reveals the dynamic of

Antonio's antisemitism as it occurs. Antonio says, "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" (1.3. 94). Antonio is referring to Shylock who has just finished a teaching on Jacob's sheep (Genesis 30: 25–43) to support the validity of earning interest. I will be discussing that teaching in the chapter on Shylock.

The image of the devil citing scriptures is chilling. Antisemitism thrives in the play and moves ghostlike and indiscriminately from the mind-being of one character to that of another. The directness of Antonio's language of otherization reveals his ability to be direct within society's social norms. Antisemitism is the norm. Adelman in *Blood Relations*³⁸ and Shapiro in *Shakespeare and the Jews* emphasize Christian intolerance in early-modern England. Shapiro claims, "English character [by the late 16th century] could be defined by its need to exclude 'Jewishness.'"³⁹ Antonio in *Merchant* must repress his true self, but he can be horrifically antisemitic. Antisemitism, I argue, offers Antonio a weird freedom of speech and action, a freedom he relishes in a world of oppression.

The oppressive authority is represented in *Merchant* by the characters of Portia and the Duke. Portia has what everyone craves, limitless funds. Therefore, she is an authority in the mercantilist society. The authority of Portia is implemented in Act 4 and will be discussed. It is expressed directly in Act 5 when, at Portia's command, Antonio becomes Bassanio's "surety" (5.1. 254). The Duke asks Shylock to forgive part of the principal "that ha[s] of late so huddled on his [Antonio's] back, enow to press a royal merchant down, and pluck commission of his state" (4.1. 26–29). The Duke does not need to use intimate physical imagery to describe Antonio. He could simply say that Shylock has caused Antonio great stress. By using physical imagery that suggests Antonio's homoerotic inclinations, those same inclinations are debased. The Duke's language is a choice, and a demeaning one. While many characters are desecrated by

the Duke—he does call Shylock an “inhuman wretch” (4.1. 3)—the imagery referencing Antonio indicates a concealment of a seeming wretchedness too wretched to be spoken. The Duke’s description of Antonio precedes that of the social outsiders (Turks and Tartars) (4.1. 30–34). In one speech, the Duke otherizes the homosexual along with the pariahs of early-modern England: the Jew, the Turk, and the Tartar.

To encapsulate, Antonio in Act 1, Scene 3 is desperate to validate himself in a society that oppresses him. One way he can seemingly validate himself is through his wealth. He says, “I do expect return of three times the value of the bond” (1.3. 154–155). The violence of concealment and otherization haunts the play from the first act. In concealment, corrupt behaviors associated with mercantilism strangely fuse with Antonio’s seeming homoeroticism and spirituality. Therefore, the homoerotic to Antonio begins to seem corrupt as well. Antonio does not say that he wants to satisfy the sensual needs of his lover, or even of the man he loves. He carefully claims that he wants to supply “the ripe wants of his friend” (1.3. 59). Antonio cannot be direct, and his indirectness is self-debasing. By the end of Act 1, Scene 3, Antonio has agreed to sign a bond with Shylock. He will borrow three thousand ducats to front Bassanio but will not pay interest. Instead, if after three months the bond is not paid, he will give up a pound of his flesh to Shylock. The actual signing of the bond is oddly not indicated in the text. I contend that the theatrical invisibility of this crucial dramatic action validates and empowers all things invisible or in the ‘white space’ in a *Merchant* setting notably marked by materialistic motivations.

After this scene, Antonio is not on stage until Act 2, Scene 6. Still, he is present. For example, Launcelot addresses Bassanio as “your worship” (2.2. 128). Even if a common mode of address, Antonio is now one ‘worship’ above Lancelot’s ‘your worship’ since Antonio loans

‘your worship’ funds. Shylock claims he must “go [to dinner with Antonio] in hate” (2.5. 14). Antonio is an object of hatred and worship. Antonio is repressed, oppressed, and confusing his spiritual and homoerotic love with an obscure materialistic darkness. He is so repressed that he cannot think or express himself directly. Antonio is a passive figure. Antonio’s advance on his climactic path seems impossible if he is not to be pushed along on it. The most active behavior he displays is his antisemitism, which, even that, is driven by Shylock’s vehement imagery.

The end of Act 2, Scene 6 marks a shift. Antonio enters and announces to Gratiano, “No masque tonight, the wind is come about. / Bassanio presently will go abroad” (2.6. 65–66). Invisible since the end of Act 1 and defined by his passivity in that act, Antonio now appears and directly announces an immediate change that will influence all, including himself. A change in the weather, especially in an economy dependent on oceans and tides, is not small. Changes in weather interconnect with prophecy in biblical myths such as that of Noah and the flood (Genesis 6–8). The announcement of the change by Antonio, in its charting of uncontrollable elements, is arguably both mythic and prophetic. Shakespeare, I claim, with this announcement of natural change creates a surreal stage on which epiphanic transformation is possible.

The biblical prophet who announces changes of natural phenomena is Moses who opens the Red Sea so that the Israelites can cross (Exodus 14: 21). Moses disappears before descending from Mount Sinai and announcing a reconstruction of the community ethos. Antonio, having returned, is announcing a forward movement, one that Shakespeare is saying, or so I claim, can help to instigate as believed with Moses nothing short of biblical revelation (Exodus 21–24). In the Hebrew Bible, when the cloud of God lifts from the tabernacle, the Israelites are to move forward (Numbers 9: 17). Antonio seems to be announcing the lifting of the archetypal cloud. He is charting incomprehensible natural directions and dispatching them to the people. This direct

action by Antonio is a sign, this thesis suggests, that Shakespeare has decided that Antonio, by divine powers, and by his own choosing, can be direct and in his own way, prophetic.

Aligning a notorious antisemite with prophetic action is not easy. Shakespeare did include this scene in the play. It is brutally there. Antonio's antisemitism is clear in the enabling of Jessica's elopement (2.8. 6-11), to be analyzed in the chapter on her. Antonio's transformative powers can carry himself and the whole community beyond that same antisemitism. Shakespeare is possibly saying that only the antisemite finally can stop his own antisemitism.

Antonio's glory does not last long. Suddenly Antonio, in the words of Shylock, must "look to his bond" (3.1. 44) as he has "disgraced" Shylock, "hindered [him] half a million," and "laughed at [his] losses" (3.1. 48–51). It is sad and ironic that the once biblical Antonio is now locked into antisemitism by Shylock's same vocalized memory. Antonio is to blame for his own behavior. Shylock is partly to blame for the perpetuation of it. Finally, in equating himself to Antonio ("Hath not a Jew eyes?") (3.1. 47–65), Shylock assumes not only Antonio's humanity but the vengeful and nasty definition of Antonio that he, Shylock, has executed. Julia Lupton claims in *Thinking with Shakespeare* that Shylock's speech "pushes shock and pain into cry and question...in a stream of monosyllables unmediated by juridical or philosophical terminology."⁴⁰ Shylock's speech is a "livid emblem" and a "scab"⁴¹ of social humiliation that, in its power, not only becomes branded on Shylock. It becomes branded on Antonio as well. Antonio and Shylock become tangled together as both subjugators and subjugated in a perverse and dark synthesis of repressing and oppressive personal narratives.

After this moment, until Act 4, every reference to Antonio accents his misfortune. Tubal mentions Antonio's "ill luck" (3.1. 89). Salerio announces that Antonio has lost "the fleece" (3.2. 241), and Bassanio reads Antonio's note in which Antonio claims that his ships have all

“miscarried” (3.2. 310). The term ‘miscarry’ refers to a termination that is financial but also alludes to sexual congress and aborted procreation. Whether one is being stopped spiritually, sensually, or financially, termination is a theme in Antonio’s experience. This brings us to an in-depth examination of how anyone so oppressed, repressed, hidden, sad, confused, passive, indirect, and antisemitic can possibly approach an epiphanic moment and transform his behavior. It also raises the question of how we, the reader and the audience, can allow Antonio that transformation.

We need to be honest with ourselves about Antonio, though, and about the many antisemites that inhabit our real world outside of the play. When the *Merchant* character is limited to a symbol of antisemitism, we lose something precious. We lose the agency and the drive for the epiphany also illuminated by the same character. We lose the related community transformation or redemption, arguably the most significant goal of the Jewish people. Scholar Franz Rosenzweig claims, “Revelation towards redemption is the content of Judaism.”⁴² As atrociously as some people may act, I believe that if we do not allow even antisemites their transformation, community redemption, always present, becomes impossible. The epiphany is something that this world needs. It feels appropriate to illuminate the transformation of the repressed character of Antonio.

Antonio’s Repression and Transformation

Antonio, in the moment of his physical freedom (‘let the Christian go’), experiences an erotic and spiritual shock. His sudden unexpected freedom in Act 4 creates a realization that he might vaguely sense the spiritual and erotic climax for which he yearns but not in the present. In his

shock, he experiences an imprint in his memory of his climactic path. His agency moves in a climactic direction during the trial scene. He says, “Most heartily do I beseech this court to give the judgment” (4.1. 240–241). Life though, or the promise of it, cuts him off right before the proximate climax of prophetic death in which, according to Antonio, “Fortune [would] show herself more kind than is her custom” (4.1. 264).

Janet Adelman in *Blood Relations* partly explains the silence of Antonio in stating that “[Antonio has been] a little bit too willing to embrace the knife.”⁴³ Adelman discusses Antonio’s silence but does not fully explain it except through an exploration of Portia’s dominance. One gets the feeling from Adelman that Antonio is disappointed that his “narcissistic re-inception of the Christ story” will not, in fact, be fulfilled.⁴⁴ Adelman is illuminating the Christian narrative of disappointment as I have elucidated but is doing so through an understandable skepticism. In Adelman’s interpretation, the antisemite who wants to become Christ-like is a seeming ‘narcissistic’ absurdity. I have mentioned Lupton’s review of *Blood Relations* in the Introduction. Lupton says, “By insisting on the racialization of the Jews in Shakespeare’s drama, Adelman perhaps unintentionally devalues the theological and existential questions posed by Judaism as a religion.”⁴⁵ I agree with Lupton and suggest that the theological also can help to actively minimize that same ‘racialization’ and the associated antisemitism. It can also help us to understand Antonio.

One theological method of analysis is called *Pardes*. In *Pardes*, there are four hierarchical layers of interpretation, the *p’shat* (foundational), *remez* (added interpretation), *drash* (emotional), and *sod* (secret or mystical).⁴⁶ Adelman, this thesis suggests, establishes the foundation (*p’shat*) as well as an added interpretation (*remez*) through her close reading. Lupton includes the *p’shat* and points to Jewish theology, emphasizing the *drash* with the inclusion of

the *sod. Pardes* can be used to interpret Antonio's climactic path and transformation. Antonio's repression forces his desires to remain on an earthly plane or on a *p'shat* level. Antonio wants to reach for *sod* or the mystical and to demystify the unknown in real-world action. He says, "no masque tonight" (2.6. 64). While his comment contextually infers a planned masquerade, an expansive interpretation indicates Antonio's feeling that masks are not necessary at that moment. The mask serves to conceal love as well as the temporal. There is not a reason for that concealment, however, if love and the temporal are unified. What Antonio is implying is that divine love at that moment can become temporal, as proven with the conjoining of Jessica and Lorenzo in the plot. I will be examining this more in the chapter on Jessica. Antonio, if allowed to reach the *sod* level or the conjoining with a universal power, would see that his personal perceived restrictions are not restrictions in the larger world. He would possibly be able to fully enact the epiphany as virtuous behavior on earth. The insidious challenge for Antonio is that because of his personal restrictions, his path is continually obstructed. He wants his path to find that ultimate conjoining with a universal power. He says to the court, "Most heartily I do beseech the court to give the judgment" (4.1. 240–241). Antonio is asking to be sacrificed like Christ.

In Jewish thought, this greater or *sod* connection with God and community requires self-examination. Rabbi Arthur Green explains that "it is the inner life, the seat of both awareness and emotion, that is at the core of religion. Outward forms are there to nourish and give expression to that which lives within."⁴⁷ Green's description of the core of religion finds its antithesis in Antonio. Antonio's repression obstructs self-examination and his climactic path. This obstruction within is reflected in the outward form of antisemitism and hostility. Martin Orkin in "Which Is the Stranger Here?" infers a similar focus on the 'inner life'. Orkin borrows from Maurice Calbi when he claims that "the uncanny conjunction of hospitality and hostility that structures even

the most benevolent welcoming of the stranger from within' has obvious and stimulating relevance for *The Merchant of Venice*"⁴⁸ I agree with Orkin and suggest that his emphasis on the doubling of hospitality into hostility can be applied to Antonio. Orkin seems to want to create a conjunction of things traditionally dichotomous, hostility and hospitality, dark and light. The creation of a conjunction from a dichotomy is indicative of the synthesis emphasized by *Parades* within Kabbalistic constructs. The conjunction described by Orkin and the climactic path I have described are compatible if not synonymous because they both resonate with Jewish mysticism, which I argue gives a new reading of *Merchant*. At the *sod* level, hostility arguably transforms into hospitality.

One strange consequence of disallowing Antonio to continue on his climactic path towards crucifixion is that he will possibly be able, in the language of Orkin, to conjoin his hostility to hospitality. I argue that Antonio experiences a shock. In his shock, he is forced to look inward. He experiences an imprint of the path where he has been cut off. This vision of this imprint suggests that Antonio accesses a world that is more expansive and less restrictive than his own. It makes it easier for Antonio to show his love directly. After his shock, Antonio says to Bassanio, "Let his deservings and my love withal / Be valued against your wife's commandment" (4.1. 417–418). Antonio is telling Bassanio to give the ring to Balthazar, as per Balthazar's request. Antonio's love in this comment is expressed directly to Bassanio as a known fact. Antonio becomes less repressed and capable of directing his agency towards an attempted kindness on earth as seen with the giving of the ring. Antonio does not yet know the real Portia, the real wife of Bassanio, and figures that she will understand the gift. Antonio, in his love for Bassanio, figures that all people will understand gifts of love, or forgive them. Antonio had been approaching a Christ-like sacrificial death. Antonio instead accesses *sod* or universality through

an alternative means, almost sideways, through the imprint of his path, or the ‘event’. It is strange to connect the philosophy of Žižek with Jewish mysticism. I claim, however, that the ‘event’ in the language of Žižek, or the ‘effect that seems to exceed its causes’, points Antonio to his epiphany or to the *sod* of transformation.

When Antonio is cut off from his path, the imprint of the path is attainable not only because of his epiphany but also because of the phenomenon of a larger epiphanic reality. Scholar Moshe Idel in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* quotes from the 13th-century mystic Abulafia, “The particular and personal prophetic [faculty] will turn universal, permanent and everlasting like the essence of its cause and he and he will become one entity.”⁴⁹ Abulafia is describing a cyclical agency that is driven from the universal, through the human, then back to the universal. This return to the universal is what happens, I claim, during the ‘event’ that I am arguing is experienced by Antonio. Antonio receives a larger vision of his connection to the world. Creation, as described by scholar Gershom Scholem, is sparked in Kabbalah through concealment and repression.⁵⁰ God conceals himself in himself and the breaking-out of that repression is itself creation and universal transformation. According to Rabbi Luria, as expressed by Scholem, every being on earth experiences the resulting brokenness and realizations of repair. Epiphanies are then shared by all through the process of *tikkun olam*, or the healing of the world.⁵¹ Whether we are looking at a clear dichotomy between God and human such as in Lurianic Kabbalah or an ecstatic Kabbalah that defies constructs as in the writings of Abulafia, or at an ‘event’ that is the residue of a shock or a happening, the effect, I argue, is similar. A feeling of community transcendence is the ultimate outcome. Antonio’s vision, even if it almost happens, merges him with a larger reality that enables his agency to drive faster towards the temporal realization of that transcendence. This transcendence pierces linear time and includes

history and the future in the present. Antonio speaks of his present and past self as if he is eerily looking back from the future. He speaks of “Antonio’s end” (4.1 170). Antonio’s imprint of the climactic path can have an exponential effect beyond his own individual being. The exponential effect of this imprint, I argue, offers a new reading of *Merchant*. It also offers a new way to illuminate a system of relationships that equally includes everyone and everything. I believe that this system is a worthy result of a Shakespearean analysis.

This thesis claims that Antonio suffers a shock and a realization that his death will not, after all, be a glorious climax symbolized by his self-sacrifice. Antonio also receives a taste or an epiphany of a future climax which allows him to direct his agency towards a greater power. When asked what mercy he can “afford” Shylock (4.1. 375), Antonio does not insist that Shylock be killed like, for example, the witches of early-modern England. He does not demand that Shylock’s scriptures be thrown into the fire (an archetypal action of antisemitism as enacted centuries later by the Nazis). Shylock does not get tortured, despite as we have seen, Antonio’s reference to his own self-torture and repression. Antonio attempts mistakenly and in a misguided way to universalize Shylock into his, Antonio’s, own world. He requests that Shylock “become presently a Christian” (4.1. 384). Antonio can oddly only express himself through a religion that as discussed has not offered him egress beyond a stopped crucifixion. Antonio’s limitation is understandable. His religion is safe and what he logically knows at that moment. It is the only way he knows to include Shylock. This, of course, does not excuse Antonio or in any way lessen the pain of Shylock, which will be considered in the chapter on him. I argue that Antonio’s decision to convert Shylock is a misguided attempt to satisfy the epiphanic and loving agency that remains unsatisfied after his, Antonio’s, non-crucifixion. This agency drives the characters forward after the trial scene. Unfortunately, Antonio’s request for Shylock’s conversion is an

atrocious expression of that positive agency. It falls back into the very pattern of religion that has been discredited since the play has refused to climax with a reaffirmation of crucifixion as the Christian solution to life's difficulties.

I want to review Antonio's love for Bassanio. Antonio says to Bassanio, "my purse, my person, my extremest means, / Lie all unlocked for your occasions" (1.1. 138–139). Antonio is consenting to absolute penetration of body, mind, and soul as if his lover is God or an otherworldly power. While Antonio confuses human love with divine love and conceals both in metaphor, this does not make him strange or evil. Antonio's use of metaphor in *Merchant* to conceal his desires suggests analysis. Emmanuel Levinas describes in *Notes on Metaphor*,

the marvel of marvels of metaphor—that's the possibility of getting out of experience, thinking further than the givens of our world. What is it to get out of experience? To think God. In spite of the impossibility of total reflection. . . The force of the ontological argument. the suspicion of the beyond—metaphor. *Miracle*.⁵²

Levinas is saying that the extraction of an object out of its thingness into the obscurity imposed by metaphor aligns the object to an ultimate power. The abstraction aligns God, who is abstract, to the object. Antonio attempts to turn himself into a God-like human in Act 1, Scene 1 when he creates a metaphor,

I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano,
A stage, where every man must play a part,
And mine a sad one. (1.1. 77–79)

While I have analyzed this image previously as a sign of Antonio's repression, there is another possible interpretation. Antonio is 'holding' the world and observing it from a distance, like a god. The action of finding a connection between the world and a stage enables for Antonio an otherworldly experience. Antonio is reaching for something greater, some poetic and holy form

of expression that enables impossible connections. Through the miraculous enabling of impossible connections, he possibly hopes to raise the world above the same corruption that he must repress. However, I argue that in Levinas' theory of metaphor, the opposite of the miracle is also true. The metaphor can create a descent into a hellish darkness that is just as obscure as divine beauty. If obscurity is that which carries a metaphor to the miracle, that same obscurity can carry that same metaphor to darkness.

The external setting, this thesis claims, determines whether the metaphor leads a character to the miracle as quoted by Levinas or to darkness. If the character, for example, Antonio, is compelled to hide his true self from an oppressive society, the metaphor can reveal a powerlessness and a hellish otherization of the inner self. As discussed, this agency of self-loathing and self-otherization then spills into the loathing of Shylock.

Antonio's repressed desire for Bassanio is dark enough to be noticed by several characters. Salarino speaks of Antonio's eyes "big with tears" (2.8. 46) when seeing Bassanio leave on the ship towards Belmont. Drakakis hints at Antonio's painful suppression of the sexual turmoil which marks his animosity for the "breeding" of money.⁵³ I add that Antonio's comment "O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!" (1.3. 98) meant to describe Shylock reveals Antonio's same concealment. Not only does it take one to know one's "rotten[ness]" (1.3. 97), but also, for Antonio, it takes a verbal attack to painfully conceal his, Antonio's, own 'rotten[ness]'. Jonathan Dollimore suggests in "Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*" that early-modern England was characterized by a "suppression of sexuality" and an "authoritarian response" to "sexual license."⁵⁴ While Dollimore is referring to *Measure for Measure*, I claim that this same repression applies to Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Dollimore in *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* describes the perverse dynamic.⁵⁵ The perverse dynamic, according to Dollimore, is the “destabilizing, and brutal” action involved in what he calls, the paradoxical perverse.⁵⁶ The paradoxical perverse involves the rooting of the perverse—Dollimore’s language—in that which is authentic, thereby contradicting any truth or authenticity. Dollimore’s analysis of Shylock’s speech “Hath not a Jew eyes,” commonly seen as an “affirmation of man’s common humanity,” suddenly discloses as well “the terrifyingly mobile proximities and interconnections between human diversity...which facilitate the displacement and refiguring of Christian evil as Jewish evil.”⁵⁷ Shylock is not exposing an authentic foundation of common humanity, because the rooted darkness within that humanity, that of revenge, belies its (humanity’s) same authenticity, both in Christian and in Jewish culture. Dollimore, however, seems to be suggesting that Shylock is relaying the toxic situation that already exists while I am saying, in my earlier mention of Shylock’s speech, that Shylock exacerbates the situation. Shylock’s language exponentially activates the reality inferred by Dollimore. Organizationally, Shylock first understandably incriminates Antonio and then he perpetuates the definition of Antonio by personally appropriating all of Antonio’s characteristics, including Antonio’s repression.

This thesis claims that Antonio experiences two perversions. Dollimore claims that “the shattering effect of perversion is somehow related to the fact that its ‘error’ originates internally to just those things it threatens.”⁵⁸ What I believe he means by this is that the hurtful element of perversion is found at the core of that which is labeled by society as non-perverse. This thesis claims that the shattering effect becomes exponential when there are two perversions that are symbiotic in their inner escalation. Antonio’s erotic and spiritual desires in a mercantilist world, deep down, feel to him to be perverse. They build on each other and, in the intensity of their

concealment, almost become palpable and real. Antonio says to Bassanio, in reference to the questioning of Shylock,

You may as well use question with the wolf,
 Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb;
 You may as well forbid the mountain pines
 To wag their high tops and to make no noise
 When they are fretten with the gusts of heaven;
 You may as well do anything most hard
 As seek to soften that, than which what's harder? —
 His Jewish heart. (4.1. 72–79)

Antonio is expressing the impossibility of questioning natural phenomena. The wolf implies danger. The gusts of heaven imply God. Whether heavenly or frightening, this known imagery feels safe. Then, there is the abstract comment, ‘do anything most hard / As seek to soften that, than which what's harder?’ The safe and real world of natural images seems to have been betrayed by an imageless place. This place subjects its victims to ‘what's harder’ rather than to a concrete answer with what's ‘hardest’. The images in the monologue—the ewe bleating for the lamb, the pines wagging their high tops—contribute to a feeling that all of nature is connecting and disconnecting naturally. Beings are threatening, being threatened, being bent by the wind, experiencing movement. The beings are not in control. Something else is, something greater that cannot be ‘questioned’. The ‘hardness’ as mentioned in this context of natural movement also cannot be questioned. ‘Hardness’ infers the treacherous abstract that for Antonio could arguably indicate his treacherous sexual yearning as well as his fear of God. Antonio's repressed sexual being is understandably out of control, seeping into his language unintentionally and the text. The physical and the spiritual interconnect in this monologue until they reach a strange concealed sexual act, the dissatisfaction of which is then blamed on Shylock and his ‘Jewish heart’. Antonio is characteristically being indirect and metaphorical but now he is

desperate. The desperation, I think, can be seen in the strange grammatical construct, ‘Than which what’s harder’. Usually an eloquent speaker, Antonio is moving quickly and stumbling over his words. Antonio’s speech requires Bassanio to engage with him in an extreme and physicalized fashion before he, Antonio, is sacrificed.

In “How St Augustine Invented Sex” Greenblatt charts the path of what this thesis sees as dual perversions. He does not include the homoerotic. However, he does take the historicist analysis of the repression of heterosexual and spiritual desire to a whole new level,

And then, “stretching upward with a more fiery emotion” Augustine and Monica [his mother] ... felt themselves climbing higher and higher, through all the degrees of matter and through the heavenly spheres... to the region of their own souls and up toward the eternity that lies beyond time itself. And “while we were speaking and panting for it, with a thrust that required all the heart’s strength, we brushed against it slightly.”⁵⁹

Here, in Sarah Ruden’s translation of St Augustine’s confessions borrowed by Greenblatt,⁶⁰ language for the sexual is infused into the spiritual experience. The two experiences are not only compared, they are integrated. The desire that both Augustine and Monica, his mother, have for God becomes exponential in that they use the other’s intimacy with Him and with each other to climb closer to Him. Spiritual desire feeds their journey and offers both a glimpse of an ecstatic epiphany.

Antonio’s erotic love for Bassanio leads to the repression of it, which leads to Antonio’s grotesque antisemitic behavior. This same erotic love creates a map in Antonio’s mental being of love. It is our choice if we want to singularly condemn the antisemitic Antonio. We can also, if we choose, focus on the Antonio who experiences a shock and a vision and attempts, even if mistakenly, to apply that vision to the Jew Shylock. This thesis argues that Antonio’s

antisemitism is reflected in the resounding guilt of his society and therefore, in an aesthetic space beyond the play, in the society of our present era. No matter the guilt, however, we must continually reconsider how best to diminish such antisemitism. I claim that we can diminish antisemitism by negotiating symbiotic relationships during changing times and by finding potential transformation within all involved. The condemnation of Antonio is understandable but not what we need in a *Merchant* analysis today when times are changing rapidly, and transformation is necessary.

Conclusion

Antisemitism is one of the most terrifying problems facing our world today. It is so important that a reconsideration of how it is negotiated is required. As we have seen in the decades since the Holocaust, pointing a finger at antisemitism is not the way to eradicate it. The best way is through the theological constructs of the religion against which the hatred is aimed. I am attempting to introduce these constructs within an analysis of *The Merchant of Venice*. These constructs might be strange to those unfamiliar with Judaism except through a secular frame. I believe that Antonio is antisemitic and often detestable. In the present, there is nothing more horrible in the memory of the Holocaust than witnessing a member of one's own humiliated religion, such as Shylock, further humiliated on the stage by a controversial being such as Antonio.

However, this thesis examines *Merchant* through Jewish thought. Antisemitism, an element of Jewish thought, is not central to it. Revelation and redemption—and, in association, the epiphany—are. Secular analyses of antisemitism in *Merchant* are within the scope of Jewish

thought and sometimes brilliant. Despite the many antisemitic analyses of *Merchant*, however, global antisemitism is only getting worse. A constructive Jewish analysis such as this one, with its new reading of the play, is needed. Any Jewish analysis, to attempt authenticity, must at least include the Jewish theological path of redemption and the ‘white space,’ the epiphanic path, cemented in the Jewish experience for thousands of years.

We can look quickly at the Exodus, the pivotal story of the Torah. In Exodus 1-6 there are an abundance of Hebrew root-words used to express the bondage and otherization of the Israelites under Pharaoh. There is, among others, affliction (*ani*), cry (*tzakat*), and oppression (*lohazim*). This profusion of Hebrew root-words accents the expanse of pain suffered by the Israelites. However, the central agency of the Passover story of the Exodus is how the Jews find release from oppression, and today from the associated antisemitism, with a determination to march towards revelation and redemption. Pharaohs, and *Amalek* will always be present and must be remembered and negotiated, and sometimes unfortunately fought, but not as the center of the Jewish memory. That is the place the Jews have given to revelation and redemption.⁶¹ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks claims in a recent article on antisemitism, “Where [some] bring darkness, let us [help to] bring light.”⁶²

During the trial, Antonio is in the daunting proximity of his repression through persons of authority, Portia and the Duke, through his friend and lover Bassanio, and Shylock. The trial creates a human mayhem that, for a variety of reasons, not only “looks to” (3.1. 43) Antonio’s bond, but also ‘looks to’ his repression. A true vision by Antonio of his climactic and spiritual goal has become impossible given his personal restrictions. Death becomes the only way to show faith in God or Bassanio.

Antonio's epiphany does almost happen. It is driven by the shock of his non-death. Cut off from his climactic path, he defines himself no longer by the desire for God or Bassanio, nor as a symbol or as an archetype. He does not define himself by his repression. He receives an imprinted memory of the peak he has attained. At that peak, he sees that he is a limited human being within a community of like beings. His humanity is all he has left. This transforming epiphany is enacted in an odd and even vulgar manner. After the shock of his freedom ('let the Christian go') and sixty lines of silence, it is Antonio's wish to bring Shylock, the alien and aggressor, into his same community. He defines this community as Christian, but it could be defined as a fusion of all religions. Antonio's insistence on conversion is not intended as a nasty punishment for Shylock. It is an attempt, even if misguided, sanctimonious, and self-absorbed, to bring Shylock into what Antonio sees as his spiritual home. It arguably can be seen as Antonio's strange attempt at an apology to Shylock for having otherized Shylock atrociously in the past. Antonio is trying to transform that otherization into inclusion, even if it is not an inclusion that is healthy or reasonable. Antonio's epiphany is incomplete as seen in his inability to release himself from a dominant Christian world. The ultimate vision of humankind, as Shakespeare intends, or so I claim, is universal and inclusive, not dictated by one religion.

Antonio's potentiality can be further understood through Jacob's dream of the ladder in Genesis 28: 10–19. On this ladder, angels climb up and down. The angels' heavenly upward movement, this thesis suggests, suggests an epiphanic agency. The earthly downward movement suggests an agency of virtuosity. It is the same ladder, the same interconnectedness, and even the same angels climbing up and down. It is simply direction that discerns the epiphanic from virtuous movement. Since Antonio does not quite obtain his epiphany but is in continual motion towards it, he also does not become virtuous on earth, as seen in his request for Shylock's

conversion. Antonio is increasing his agency in both directions. Once he finds the top rung of the archetypal ladder, I believe he will be able to transfer that epiphanic agency continually to earth in the form of not only virtuous but prophetic behavior.

Antonio finishes the play with the line, “I am dumb” (5.1. 283). Textually, this statement can seem like an admittance by Antonio that he has not yet found a solution, including Shylock’s conversion, to the conflicts in the play. Antonio’s new shocked ‘dumb’ silence, I claim, can also offer a new imprint or an ‘event’ that continues to drive him forward to transformation. Even if the immediate cause of shock is that his “ships have come to road” (5.1. 287–288), this shock possibly reminds Antonio of his past related imprinted memory. There happen epiphanic possibilities, renewed agency, and continued potentiality. The play ends with a lingering hope that the pain caused by Antonio’s actions of antisemitism, in this transforming world, can find some resolve and forgiveness. Portia’s claim that the characters are not satisfied (“I am sure you are not satisfied”) (5.1. 296) indicates that resolve is possible, even for Antonio. This expansive satisfaction and forgiveness suggest a full community epiphany and a new paradigm of social, economic, and spiritual transformation. In this new paradigm, hate and violence are no longer central. This brings us to the next controversial character in this thesis, Shylock.

Notes

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15. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 28-29.
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58. Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 119–47.
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60. Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 121 –22
61. Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 121–22.

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Chapter Three

Shylock: The Imprint of the Path

Whether Shylock “shrivel[s] into nothingness” as states Stephen Greenblatt¹ or “flourish[es] with...little reference to *The Merchant of Venice*” as states John Gross,² he is a victim of a “murderous antisemitism.”³ There is antisemitism in *Merchant*. This antisemitism in Shakespeare’s play, and elsewhere, must be faced to potentially affect change. The question I ask is how to *direct* change once antisemitism has been faced, as it has been in *Merchant* criticism. This thesis argues that *Merchant* holds open an important reading of the play, one of human potentiality, even while dramatizing the cruder and more depressing materialist and antisemitic scenario. I agree with Kenneth Gross, that Shylock is “an atomic character, compact yet explosive”⁴ and add that Shylock’s ‘explosive’ agency points towards Jewish revelation. Gross includes Jewish scriptures in *Shylock Is Shakespeare*, but Shylock’s Jewish theological path of revelation seems to get obscured. Julia Lupton points out in her review of *Shylock Is Shakespeare* that Gross evokes a Shylock “whose very incompleteness on the stage deposits pockets of mystery that lead us to imagine, inhabit, and reanimate his ambiguous person.”⁵ Lupton claims, and I agree, that Gross’s poetic and inspired interpretation of Shylock allows critics to further inhabit and ‘reanimate’ Shylock’s ‘mystery’. This chapter aims to ‘reanimate’ and ‘inhabit’ Shylock on what I see as his climactic path.

Shylock’s climactic path is potentially similar to that of Antonio. Shylock, like Antonio, is cut off from his path and experiences a moment of transcendence caused by the related shock. He has an imprinted memory or a fleeting grasp of the spiritual peak achieved before the cut off. The imprinted memory can be likened to the ‘event’ in the language of Slavoj Žižek.⁶ Žižek

describes the ‘event’ as “the effect that seems to exceed its causes.”⁷ So too, the imprinted memory is the effect that seems to exceed the climactic path itself. Shylock projects a path of spiritual desire towards revelation that is frustrated but which leaves a trace of what fulfillment might be. Like Antonio, Shylock achieves his epiphany and simultaneously does not. While Antonio is on a path towards crucifixion and Shylock, towards revelation, the end goals do not matter as much as the possible shock at the cut off. This shock possibly directs both characters to the resulting epiphanic moment and a transformed society beyond violence.

Shylock cannot be singularly characterized as “a faithful adherent of Jewish sentiment” as argues Sidney Lee,⁸ nor as “a product” of a [unfair] history.⁹ He is not singularly a “scapegoat” (René Girard),¹⁰ nor a “monster” (Gerald Friedlander).¹¹ He is possibly all of these and more. He is “noble in conception” as states Charles Kensington Salaman (1882),¹² and a “man of information, a thinker” as states Wilhelm von Schlegel (1815).¹³ Shylock is “the kissing cousin” of Richard III but with “moral intelligence.”¹⁴ He is the villain of Charles Macklin at the Drury Lane (1741),¹⁵ the gentlemans of Edmund Kean at the same theater (1824),¹⁶ and the “Bible-read” sage played by Henry Irving at the Lyceum (1879).¹⁷ Shylock, we will see, realizes all of these portrayals as he negotiates his path. Since he is not behaviorally consistent—he is deceitful, noble, kind, and violent—he cannot be categorically defined. What helps to define him is the agency that drives him towards revelation and that results in a momentary transcendence.

This thesis agrees with Kiernan Ryan who suggests in “Shakespeare’s Inhumanity” that Shakespeare exposes in his plays a “pure, unconditioned potential of humankind to deliver itself from its own inhumanity.”¹⁸ This chapter will attempt to exemplify that potentiality in the character of Shylock. This thesis claims that Shakespeare in *Merchant* dramatically reveals an inhumane culture and yet he possibly indicates the way to humane behavior through the

epiphany. Shylock's epiphany begins to occur in Act 3, Scene 1. It gestates, we will see, within Shylock's being and accumulates agency in its gestation. The epiphanic moment is finally sensed by Shylock during the Act 4 trial scene.

This chapter will first examine Shylock's epiphany in Act 4. Then it will track Shylock dramatically, beginning with Act 1. Once again, tracking indicates an examination of the character's agency, speech, and behaviors in a linear manner within the drama. This analysis aims to focus on the agency of Shylock and how it is directed to that quintessential moment when Shylock finds himself in court, knife seemingly in hand. How he arrives at that inhumane and murderous moment is as revealing as the related epiphany.

Shylock's Epiphany in Act 4

Shylock's epiphany in Act 4 is suggested in his pause. Portia asks, "Why doth the Jew pause? Take thy forfeiture" (4.1. 331). Ken Jackson in "Shylock, the Knight of Faith?" partly explains Shylock's hesitation through the biblical patriarch Abraham who is "called [by God] to give death even though he knows it will cost him everything."¹⁹ I support Jackson's analysis and will expand upon it.

Before Shylock's hesitation, Portia, in the mask of Balthazar, announces that Shylock has won his "strange...suit" (4.1. 173). Portia, speaking for the court, "award[s]" Antonio's pound of flesh to Shylock (4.1. 296). Six lines later, her decision shifts. Portia demands, as per the law, that no "drop of Christian blood" (4.1. 302) be spilled or Shylock's "lands and goods" will be "confiscate" (4.1. 306–307). The pound of Antonio's flesh suddenly has a hefty price.

This is when Shylock asks a question that is easy to overlook given the fast advance of Portia's dramatic decisions.

Shylock asks, "Is that the law?" (4.1. 310)

Shylock's inquiry about the law is strange. Shylock, to Harold C. Goddard, is "legally precise."²⁰ It is strange that Shylock may have previously missed an important legal point. This thesis suggests that he has not missed it. He is possibly expressing a hope that the law might be something more. Shylock's question "Is that the law?" projects a desire for possible legal interpretations that may or may not be actual. Shylock's question can find a reference in the Talmud. Rabbah is ordered by Rav, the chief rabbi, to act with compassion towards workers. Rabbah repeats twice, "Is that the law?"²¹ Rabbah would know the law. Rabbah, in his repetition, is arguably accenting an agency of ultimate compassion in the law, in this case, directed towards the workers. Shylock's question also projects an agency towards an ultimate power of law that can seemingly fix anything with compassion. Shylock is possibly conjuring a divine power that might help him in his vulnerability. Portia avoids Shylock's question and encourages him to claim his bond in which case he will "die" as well as lose all he has (4.1. 320–328). This is when Shylock, 'awarded' the right to kill Antonio, hesitates, and experiences his potential epiphanic moment.

Shylock pauses because he is possibly realizing that he has not only lost the forfeiture. Shylock's God has not seemed to show up as Shylock would have liked. There is not a surrogate law or a surrogate sacrifice. There is not a ram miraculously stuck in a thicket as is the case with the ram of the biblical Abraham. Jacques Derrida intimates that Shylock could possibly symbolize the ram replacement. He claims that Shylock "delivers himself into the grasp of the Christian strategy, bound hand, and foot."²² This makes sense, we will see, given the atrocious

culmination of the trial in which Shylock loses everything that feels like life to him. In traditional Jewish thought, however, as expressed by Maimonides and explained by Jonathan Sacks, what matters in sacrifice is the intention, not the “precise form of its symbolic enactment.”²³ Sacks teaches that the ancient biblical sacrifice is realized in our hearts and minds through prayer. Sacrifice is a service of love.²⁴ By the early-modern era, even by the time of the 12th century Maimonides, animal sacrifice was already seen as archaic.²⁵ Shylock, though, does not become loving or prayerful. There is not any prayer happening here. Shylock does not start reciting liturgy or prostrating himself before God. He does not face his God. He leaves the situation. He says, “give me leave to go from hence” (4.1. 394). This thesis contends that Shylock does not transmute into the figurative ram because the figurative ram indicates prayer and Shylock does not pray. What Shylock knows is that he has been stopped. The seeming revelation associated with his sacrifice, the killing of Antonio, cannot happen. The reason why it cannot happen is not only because of Portia’s diligence. It is because Shylock’s escalating agency has been directed towards a sacrifice that defies prayer. Shylock’s sacrifice is dirty. There is something too grotesque about this sacrifice that blocks its very realization.

Jackson claims that the Abrahamic sacrifice indicates the concept of the Derridean “gift”²⁶ or giving without return. I add that the Talmud, as intimated in Sacks’ teaching, infers a sacrifice similar to the Derridean ‘gift’. Jackson’s analysis of sacrifice points to the Talmud, the center of Judaic thought. What the Talmud does not honor as a sacrifice is a seeming sacrifice made ineffective by a lack of the intention or the spirit associated with the ‘gift’ of prayer. The Talmud rarely supports the killing of a human, and never as a sacrifice for God. In the Talmud, we read,

A Sanhedrin [or judge] that puts a man to death once in seven years

is called a murderer. Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah says, “Or even once in 70 years.” Rabbi Akiba said, “If we had been in the Sanhedrin, no death sentence would ever have been passed”; Rabban...said: “If so, they would have multiplied murderers in Israel.”²⁷

While there can be many interpretations of this passage, the rabbis here are possibly portraying that one murder leads to many and that the death sentence, itself, is murder. Shylock’s quest to kill Antonio is non-Talmudic and not Jewish, even though he seems to think it is. He says, “by our holy Sabbath have I sworn / To have the due...of my bond” (4.1. 35). Shylock’s quest does not fit into the Abrahamic sacrifice but still, I argue, enables a trace of the Derridean gift for Shylock in his corrupt world. In *Merchant*, Shylock is appropriating the biblical agency of sacrifice to satisfy a personal vendetta. He is using the sacred sacrifice like legal tender to buy revenge and judgment. Shylock says, “The pound of flesh.../ Is dearly bought...I stand for judgment” (4.1. 98–102). In Judaism, a sacrifice cannot be bought, or at least should not be (Isaiah 1: 11–15). In *Merchant*, the strange sacrifice or crucifixion of Antonio has become a sacrifice eternally stigmatized by corruption and falsity, since this falsity is now fused to the human experience through the magic of the stage. Even if the Hebraic God is with Shylock, as claims Jackson (and I agree),²⁸ it is not to forward the agency of a seeming Abrahamic sacrifice or a crucifixion of Antonio. It is to circuitously enable Shylock a trace of a revelation beyond the sacrificial ritual now seemingly corrupted and butchered by Shylock and the harsh materialistic ethos of the present culture. Shylock’s false sacrifice is so non-biblical and insulting that his climactic path is stopped in an equally insulting manner. Portia says, “Thou shalt have justice more than thou desirest” (4.1. 312). In her own twisted way, Portia turns Shylock’s twisted sacrificial agency against him.

This is when Shylock, knife seemingly in hand, hesitates. His sacrifice has been prevented. His climactic path has been aborted. During his shock and hesitation, I claim, he experiences the ‘event’ as in the philosophy of Žižek or “the effect that seems to exceed its causes.”²⁹ He receives a trace, in the words of Lowell Gallagher, of an “excessiveness of grace [that] disrupts and alters the entire field of the given.”³⁰ Gallagher, we will see, refers to Gobbo. I add that Shylock also receives something like this ‘disruption’ in the experience of the ‘event’. He receives an imprinted memory of the path leading to his climax or revelation. Shylock’s sacrifice is frustrated, and he does not experience revelation in the Jewish sense. He still experiences a slight feeling of an ‘excessiveness of grace’ arguably connected to revelation. He receives an imprinted memory or a trace of the peak of the path that can get him there. Shylock cannot be the sacrifice and he cannot have one because he has corrupted the intention. There is nothing left of him but the imprinted memory of his almost-revelation. At that moment in the play, his “house” and his “life” (4.1. 373) are seemingly taken. Shylock approaches, in the words of Emmanuel Levinas, “the infinity of the absolute other...escaping ontology.”³¹ Shylock, thinking that he is stripped of everything, approaches a God possibly stripped of religion.

This reading of Shylock is not an end or a finalizing statement. The ordinary worldly drama of either the ordinary villain or the humiliated Jew, I suggest, is inhabited by this higher possibility of transcendence that the play keeps nudging us towards. Biblical revelation in Judaism does not create an end. Abraham Joshua Heschel claims, “The Bible [and its events such as revelation] are not an end but...a precedent.”³² Sacks agrees. He says that “the climax is not at the beginning or the end but at the center [of the human experience].”³³ I add that the stopped climax or stopped revelation is also possibly at the center and a precedent. It is the beginning of an epiphany that is continually happening. The stopped climax creates the shock that enables the

epiphany. The epiphany allows the stopped agency of revelation, we will see, to continue in the future and to be present in the past. We will now track Shylock's agency and climactic path within the drama leading to the trial scene.

Tracking Shylock: Before the Flight of Jessica

Shylock is such a huge character that before discussing his actions in the plot, I want to offer some thoughts on his seeming attitude towards his Jewishness. Shylock is potentially Shakespeare's attempt to portray not a religious but an assimilated Jew. James Shapiro intimates the presence of assimilated Jews in early-modern England as well as "*Conversos* [who were] ... basically Christian."³⁴ Jews of early-modern England negotiated Christian secular and Jewish religious communities. The *Schulhan Aruch* by Rabbi Yosef Karo (1563) states that "the law of the land is the law" or *dina d'malhuta dina*.³⁵ The question for centuries negotiated by Jews such as Shylock, Jews in exile, is arguably how to be religious and concurrently assimilated as good citizens into the law of the land or the local Christian community.

According to Lee, Shakespeare was trying to represent a Jew similar to the assimilated Rodriguez Lopez, the doctor convicted for poisoning Queen Elizabeth.³⁶ Lee claims that "no one living in London at the time could have been ignorant of Lopez's history and fate."³⁷ The phrase 'history and fate' points to the ambiguous question of Lopez's Jewish identity given his assimilation. Emma Smith in "Was Shylock Jewish?" hints at the assimilation of Lopez. She claims that despite the publicity of the trial at the time, there "was no evidence of [Lopez's] alleged Jewishness."³⁸ Shakespeare, according to Lee, had access to Lopez, a theater lover.³⁹ Shakespeare, this thesis suggests, would have perhaps known the assimilated Lopez enough to

reflect him in his portrayal of Shylock. Shakespeare also might have portrayed the assimilated Jew to find a dramatic balance between *The Ladies of London* by Robert Wilson (1592)⁴⁰ and *The Jew of Malta* by Christopher Marlowe (1590).⁴¹ In the first, Gerontius is an upstanding Jewish lender who pardons the borrower of money owed. In the second play, the Jewish Barabas is a scoundrel. Both characters, too extreme to be natural, are otherized through those same extremes. Israel Davis, the first editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, claims that Shylock in *Merchant* is portrayed as human as compared to the caricature of Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*.⁴² Shylock, Davis says, has human qualities such as fear, love, arrogance, and the need for companionship.

I contend that Shylock, to be accepted, attaches his identity to preconceived notions of the Jewish people that have been advanced by the Christians. Shylock attaches his identity to his culture and tribal victimhood more than to his religion. Shylock claims, “Cursed be my tribe if I forgive him” (1.3. 46–47). By creating strong emotional language around tribe rather than around his God, Shylock reveals his primary attachment to tribal victimhood, not to any greater power or ethical code. The curse in Judaism is a serious matter. There is a prohibition in Talmud against self-cursing.⁴³ By threatening to curse his tribe and himself, Shylock shows that he flounders in his expression of Jewish concepts, both theological and tribal. This does not mean that he is less Jewish. He is highly assimilated. He is a Jew mostly by culture, and less by religion.

I suggest that through Shylock, and his friend Tubal, Shakespeare is not expressing the covenantal but the pre-covenantal Hebraic experience. The names indicate the immediate progeny of Noah. Sh'loch is the grandson of Shem, the oldest son of Noah (Genesis 10:2 4). Tubal is the grandson of Noah through his middle son (Genesis 10: 2). In the Noahide myths, the covenant and revelation on Mount Sinai have not yet transpired. Moral agency is less developed. The Ten Commandments have not yet been revealed. There is a yearning for God, as

demonstrated in the Tower of Babel. The Tower, built to touch a seeming material God, is a catastrophe as God prevents its completion by creating multiple languages and blocking communication (Genesis 11: 8). The community building the tower seems to value the material over the spiritual in its attempt to materialize God. This Noahide interpretation of Shylock supports the suggestion that Shylock's loss during the trial is not completely caused by the antisemitism of the community, as vile as it is. Ultimately, Shylock's definitive loss is partly caused by his attachment to his materialistic culture, and to his victimhood. Shylock, plagued by antisemitism, helps to bring about the fall of his own legal and theological constructions. Shylock reduces his religion by materializing it. He understandably has difficulty negotiating the interpretative laws and rituals of a religion he has reduced. I will return to this.

Shylock is plagued by antisemitism. In *Merchant*, there evolves a seeming unending pejorative juxtaposition of Christian to Jew.⁴⁴ As I have mentioned in the Introduction, Shylock is called "the devil" (2.2. 23) more than once. Lorenzo describes Jessica as being "issue to a faithless Jew" (2.4 37). In Act 4, Scene 1, the Duke, the legal luminary of Venice, does not call Shylock by his name, rather 'the Jew'. The avoidance of Shylock's name throws all Jews into one crowded and vicious stereotype. Despite the antisemitism of *Merchant* characters, Shylock is not the most victimized character in *Merchant*. This character, I claim, is Gobbo. Gobbo's son disparages him, lies to him, and obstructs him in his blindness (2.2. 80–106). In the performance directed by Theodore Komisarjevsky at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1932, it is Gobbo, not Shylock, who is spat on, kicked, tripped, and pushed.⁴⁵ Gobbo's disappearance after Act 2, Scene 2, and the distance of his son likens him to Shylock who, shunned by his daughter, withdraws himself after the trial. While Shylock is ordered to subsequently convert, Gobbo is humiliated, in present stage time, in his disability and indigence by the corrupt community in

which Shylock takes part. Gobbo describes himself as “an honest, exceeding poor man, God be thanked, and well to live” (2.2. 47–48). Neither Antonio nor Shylock can be described as honest, exceedingly poor, thanking God, or well-living. Gobbo is remarkable in both his estrangement from the community and his extraordinary lack of attachment to this same estrangement.

Gobbo’s experience, we will soon see, dispels the precept that victimhood is a justifiable cause for vengeful behavior. I am not discussing the victimization of Gobbo to compare with that of Shylock. Gobbo exemplifies victimization without victimhood. Through Gobbo, we can see that victimization also must be dismissed as the ultimate barrier to the epiphany. A victim, as much as he suffers, can still find transcendence without seeking vengeance on his community for his unjust pain. Gobbo does not attach himself to either his victimization or to his gift of doves and his epiphany. He does not make himself seem more or less righteous because of his personal experiences. Gobbo, for example, does not say, “Your lordship, I paid fine ducats for these doves. I’m more important than you think.”

Gobbo’s lack of attachment to his gift allows it to be part of a greater consciousness. Once personal attachment is removed, the epiphany ceases to be personal. As represented by the doves, the epiphany presented by Gobbo is equally physical and real to all characters experiencing its presence. Further study of Gobbo can help to illuminate the potential epiphany of Shylock.

Gobbo, mostly blind, enters with a basket (2.2 28–30). He says after sixty lines that it is a gift for Shylock, Launcelot’s master (2.2 94). The gift itself remains a mystery. Launcelot redirects it to Bassanio (2.2 101–102). From the time the basket enters the stage to the time Gobbo blurts out “I have here a dish of doves” (2.2. 126) there are ninety lines and the entering and exiting of four characters. The epiphany of Gobbo, a minor character, is depicted by this one

authentic action of the gift of doves. As compared to the epiphanies of Antonio and Shylock, Gobbo's epiphany is not a glimpse of an imprint of the climactic path that is presently stopped. It is, I contend, the first inchoate moment of the climax on that same path.

In *Merchant*, this gift of doves that carries the agency of the epiphany is uncovered not within one spiritual/psychological and political being, but within the unified experience of a community ethos. If, as Marcel Mauss suggests, one can see the "gift's spirit as its unquantifiable surplus,"⁴⁶ then the epiphany is closely related to not only the sacrifice as I have already discussed. It is related to the archetypal gift. The gift, the sacrifice, and the epiphany are possibly interwoven in this symbol of the doves. Lowell Gallagher in "Waiting for Gobbo" takes the gift out of the hands of Gobbo and even outside of the play's "local frames of reference."⁴⁷ The doves, to Gallagher, "become lost in the action of the play and take on the spirit of their excess and their disappearance, thereby symbolizing a certain potentiality, one of 'no thing' and of grace."⁴⁸ The doves symbolize a fusion of Jean Luc Marion's idea of "saturated phenomena,"⁴⁹ that there is always more, with Derrida's concept of the gift, and the essence within a void.⁵⁰ This absolute epiphany, like the absolute sacrifice, is related to "the process through which the sheer excessiveness of grace disrupts and alters the entire field of the given."⁵¹

Since the doves are never received, the epiphany remains evasive, but not because of an abortion of Gobbo's climactic path. Gobbo's climactic path is never stopped. He is just moving along as best he can. We see this when he says to Bassanio, "And my suit is..." (2.2. 127). The sentence feels projected towards a distant alterity. Gobbo is interrupted by Launcelot but Gobbo still has his 'suit' or that agency of supplication, even if quieted. The problem is that no one, not even Gobbo, recognizes the climactic path or the gift of doves for its potentiality. The epiphany remains evasive because no one takes a moment to touch it, the gift, gently. No one bothers to

praise the gift or to see its delight. Shylock and Antonio both know this gift and epiphany and do not. They cannot relate to Gobbo's epiphany. It is too frightening for them, too real. The fact that Gobbo, mistreated because of his indigence, can elicit this important epiphany means that Shylock the Jew with his strong agency and his "strange...suit" (4.1. 173) can do the same.

Shylock is first defined in *Merchant* as a financial agent. Antonio, with ships at sea, tells Bassanio to "Go, presently enquire, and so will I, / Where money is, and I no question make / To have it of my trust, or for my sake" (1.1. 183–185). Shylock, soon to be visited for money, is defined from Scene 1 as 'where money is'. He is a focus of enquiry— 'go presently enquire'— and represents a reliable financial bargain. Shylock is otherized as the unknown lender, objectified as a place of money, and esteemed within the corrupt community.

Shylock is not within the Venetian community and not on the outside, but in a nowhere-land in between. He can be likened to Wragg of Matthew Arnold's 1864 essay "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" described by Terence Hawkes in "The *Heimlich* Manoeuvre."⁵² Wragg is a woman of the workhouse who unforgivably strangles her baby. Wragg, otherized and destitute, loses her moral agency. That moral agency is seemingly no longer hers possibly because she is debased by the same people who seem to call that moral agency theirs. If that moral agency is theirs and if she is 'strange,' that moral agency is also arguably 'strange'. Shylock, as well, stumbles between the 'strange' or the 'uncanny' and the 'intimate', never embraced within the closed community.⁵³ Shylock is *unheimlich* as borrowed from Freud. He feels a misdirected comfort within the alien community.⁵⁴ Shylock, at times of comfort, reveals his anger and his love. Shylock says, "this is kind I offer" (1.3. 138). This action of revealing makes him seem even more strange. The repressed Christian of Shakespeare's Venice reveals little. Antonio says, "I know not why I am so sad" (1.1. 1). The loan to Antonio and Antonio's

trust in Act 1, Scene 1 is blindingly attractive to Shylock. It offers Shylock human connection within the cold paradigm in which he is otherized. Shylock wants human warmth and expresses the value of such warmth. It is this same expression, however, that sadly otherizes him. He says, for example, “I would be friends with you and have your love” (1.3. 134).

The words immediately preceding Shylock’s first entrance in Act 1, Scene 3 are delivered by Portia. She expects her next wooer, Morocco, to have the “complexion of a devil” (1.2. 123–124). Shylock will soon be compared to a devil by Antonio who will claim, “the devil can cite scripture” (1.3. 94). The audience awaits the devil and the archetypal devil arrives twice, once for Portia, seemingly in the figure of Morocco, and once for Antonio, as Shylock. Portia mocks, “Whiles we shut the gate upon one wooer, another [Morocco] knocks on the door” (1.2. 128–129). The Belmont scene is finished. Shylock enters.

Shylock is generalized, otherized, objectified, alienated to an in-between place, and mocked. It is difficult to see any other interpretation of Shylock but that of the victim because our present world, I suggest, is one of violence and antisemitism. However, because he is trusted as a reliable financial backer, he is granted some respect and the hope of human connection before he even walks on the stage. This hope for human connection is important to Shylock. Shylock yearns to be accepted within the community and its ethos. He says to Antonio, “for my love, I pray you, wrong me not” (1.3. 166). Shylock is intimating that he sees ‘love’ and ‘wrong’ as does Antonio. He is using those words to communicate a seeming shared ethos. Shylock is habituated to fitting into the frame created by the community for him. He knowingly trades identity for belonging. Antonio says, “The Hebrew will turn Christian” (1.3. 174) after Shylock offers his “friendship” (1.3. 164). In this way, Shylock is like the “purchase’d slave / Which...you use in abject and in slavish parts, / Because [you] bought [him]” (4.1. 89–92). Shylock, I

contend, is bought. Not only is he dependent on the mercantilist economy (according to Drakakis),⁵⁵ he also seemingly needs Christian support because, by dealing with Christians, he might estrange himself from fellow Jews. Antonio has a circle of supporters (1.1). Shylock seems alone. He only has one friend, Tubal, despite the seeming presence of a “synagogue” (3.1. 118). Shylock behaves as necessary for the ‘payment’ of a seeming authenticated unauthentic friendship. He does not have to consider the loan to Antonio. He helps him, even if he must borrow from Tubal. The fact that Shylock is bought means that he attaches his identity to what is bought and sold, enslaved and un-enslaved, and victimized and non-victimized. He focuses on his “bargains” and his “well won thrift” (1.3. 46).

Shylock’s first line in Act 1, Scene 3 is “three thousand ducats” (1.3. 1). The words in this line are repeated (1.3. 3–10). Gross says that such repetition is a “stay against chaos.”⁵⁶ Shylock’s tendency for repetition presupposes and emphasizes a cognizance of the innate rhythm of the Jewish scriptures. One *shoresh* or root word can occur several times in three lines, lines chanted during prayer services. Shylock’s repetition reveals his presence on a climactic path seemingly towards revelation but misdirected towards victimhood. Shylock does not fail in repeating Jewish motifs and teachings. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov claims that a Jew, rather than speaking to others about how much he knows, speaks with God.⁵⁷ In my reading of Shylock, he seems to want to prove to himself that he attaches his identity faithfully to his God, rather than doing the work to attach it. He speaks of his “Jewish gabardine” (1.3. 108) but not of his Jewish prayer shawl, the fringes on which symbolize the covenant, the ethical laws, and revelation. Shylock speaks of an ancient grudge (1.3. 43) rather than of an ancient vow and a sacred nation (1.3. 44) rather than of sacred scriptures. In his 1950 article, “Shylock, Jacob and God’s Judgment,” Norman Nathan declares that Shylock never “prove[s] either by good deeds, charity,

mercy, or penitence that he is truly religious.”⁵⁸ Since this comment uses Christian terms, I will offer the Hebraic equivalent. Shylock does not offer *mitzvot* (good deeds), *tzedakah* (charity), *rachamim* (mercy), or *teshuvah* (return or repentance). These words are arguably cornerstones of the Jewish faith.⁵⁹ Nathan calls Shylock “an infidel...a grossly mistaken man brought to a realization of his errors.”⁶⁰ Nathan asks, “Does it matter to [Shylock] to desert his religion?”⁶¹ Nathan wrote his article on Shylock before the critical history focused singularly on antisemitism. Now that antisemitism in *Merchant* has been recorded, I believe that Nathan’s comment can open up *Merchant*. There is a middle ground that connects later *Merchant* apologies for Shylock, such as that of Coodin, to what I see as Nathan’s honest concerns.

This brings us to Shylock’s speech “Antonio is a good man” (1.3. 12–25). Shylock uses the *Pardes* construct to see if Antonio is trustworthy of a loan. *Pardes* is a construct for biblical interpretation, not for business predicaments. As discussed in the chapter on Antonio, *Pardes* begins with a *p’shat* foundational interpretation, then it builds to *remez*, to *drash*, and to *sod* (the metaphorical and mystical). When Shylock mentions “land rats and water rats, water thieves, and land thieves, I mean pirates” (1.3. 21–23), he enters the *sod* or mystical element. He aligns Antonio’s mercantilist expanse with metaphors of thievery indicating evil. There is an irrational omission in the frame of the whole speech. Shylock does not answer his own question regarding Antonio’s worthiness of a loan or “sufficiency” (1.3. 24). Shylock does not apply the analysis to his predicament. He does not bring his speech back down to earth or to the *p’shat*, an essential element of the *Pardes* analysis. ‘Land rats’ and ‘water rats’ must somehow be connected with ‘sufficiency’ but Shylock misses this step in his analysis. Shylock answers his question with, “I think I may take his bond” (1.3 24–25) but jumps from pirates to the answer without a rational connection.

Shylock's inability to express a logical path from evil pirates to good Antonio intimates the same nowhere-land in which he finds himself. Shylock, neither accepted nor not accepted, neither loved nor hated, identified by neither race nor religion, and neither Venetian nor non-Venetian, also cannot locate the other, in this case, Antonio. He logically cannot singularly transform his perception of the other and the other's changing location if his self-perspective switches so chaotically. If Antonio might act with kindness towards Shylock after a history of abuse, Shylock as he is now, I claim, would not be able to recognize this kindness.

Shylock's next line otherizes the Christian community. Shylock says, "Yes, to smell pork...I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you...but I will not eat with you" (1.3. 31–35). Shylock aggressively juxtaposes himself to the Christian to regain his own lost authenticity. His behavior is hypocritical. He is appropriating both the law and the Torah for his personal means. Judaism is not centered on otherization.⁶² Jewish thought is founded on the precept, love thy neighbor as thyself.⁶³ The dietary laws of the Jews (Leviticus 10–11) are spiritual and private. The emphasis of unholiness in the dietary laws is on certain foods and not on Christians, such as Antonio, who do not keep those same laws. It is the food itself that can be unholy. Here, Shylock is once again showing his confusion of theological concepts. Shylock's juxtaposition of himself to Antonio ('to buy pork') is an attempt to reveal himself as more righteous. Juxtaposition in *Merchant* often ridiculously suggests that the other is far from God, therefore 'I' am closer.

Shylock objectifies Antonio in Act 1, Scene 3. Shylock speaks about Antonio rather than to him. He says, "How like a fawning publican he looks" (1.3. 37). Shylock's emotional defense feels histrionic. It is not revealed that he is Jewish until line 53 in a description of Tubal, not himself. He says, "Tubal, a wealthy Hebrew of my tribe" (1.3. 53). The first impression of

Shylock is negative before we know of his Jewishness. The same can be said of Antonio.

Antonio's homoerotic characteristics are unknown. Shylock's Jewish faith is unknown. They are both portrayed as hurting and hurtful beings. Antonio often expresses his emotions passively. He says, "such a want-wit sadness makes of me" (1.1. 5). Shylock, we will see, expresses his emotions aggressively. Both behaviors are destructive.

This brings us to Shylock's teaching on Jacob and Laban (1.3. 67–85). I contend that in quoting the Hebrew Bible, Shylock is intimating his assimilation to the Christian community. Judaism is a rabbinic rather than a biblical tradition. A Christian will seemingly quote from the Bible. However, a Jew, before the advent of liberal Judaism, would likely quote the rabbis of Talmud. Shylock aligns Jacob's act of husbandry with usury. A contrary teaching is expressed by Rabbi Johonan ben Zakkai of the Talmud. Rabbi Johonan claims that God holds three keys not entrusted to any messenger, the key of rain, the key of birthing, and the key to the revival of the dead.⁶⁴ Therefore, not even Jacob has the key to birthing. It is "not in his [Jacob's] power" (1.3. 89), as says Antonio. John Astington in "The Pastoral in *The Merchant of Venice*" stresses the significance of sheep in early-modern England, "a rural Arcadia."⁶⁵ Sheep were at the heart of the English economy and the mythos. Shylock's decision to illuminate the sheep myth is pastoral and Christian. Shylock's midrashic (storytelling) tendency and aim to contribute to biblical exegesis is certainly Jewish. The Torah is seen as the synthesis of many interpretations.⁶⁶ The problem is that by excusing materialistic goals through a notoriously obscure passage, Shylock shows himself to be remarkably unlearned about the religion that he preaches, even if enthusiastic. Since he wants to quote from the Torah, he would be far better off pointing to passages that specifically refer to interest, such as Deuteronomy 20–21. His speech about Jacob is incongruous with the Talmud while being sensitive to the early-modern English sheep mythos.

What this says is that Shylock has partly discarded theological Judaism for the English culture, but he can sadly claim neither.

Act 1, Scene 3 ends when Shylock creates a forfeit of a pound of flesh should Antonio forsake his bond. This bond, discussed in most Venetian scenes, penetrates Belmont in Act 3, Scene 2 in the letter from Antonio to Bassanio (3.2. 314–320). While observed or discussed by Shylock, Portia, Antonio, Bassanio, and the Duke, the bond is never signed on the stage. The ambiguity of the bond defines it, not its supposed literal meaning. It is a bond with a “seal” (4.1. 39) signed in Venetian law. The Duke discusses its “strange, apparent cruelty” (4.1. 20) and Portia mentions its “strange nature” (4.1. 174). Yet the bond is not materialized. It is never read to the audience.

The bond has its own strange path. The bond comes to represent the continual seeking for its signature or materialization. It remains both immaterial and pursued. In *Merchant*, Antonio and Bassanio seek a bond and the related loan which they find in the character of Shylock. They are asked to find a notary who never materializes to ensure the bond. Shylock says, “meet me forthwith at the notary’s” (1.3. 168). The seeking of the completion of the bond is a theme in *Merchant* that transfers from the Christian to Shylock. This seeking or satisfaction is superficially transfigured by Shylock, we will see, to the seeking of God in Jewish covenantal thought. Whether God is to be materialized, acquired, notarized, examined, held in forfeit, enforced, or not enforced, such manipulation is exercised by those, certainly Shylock, who attach themselves to a misdirected religious identity and, for Shylock, victimhood. Whether one believes in a universal power or not, this bond is not God and God is not this specific bond. It is a bond never fully attained and imitates the agency but not the content of the covenant.

The two bonds, the civil bond, and the Jewish covenant are easily confused in *Merchant*. Shakespeare is saying, in effect, that the inhumanity of this specific civil bond between Antonio and Shylock is a barrier to religious covenantal behavior. It is the responsibility of these characters already involved in the seeking of this civil bond to continue seeking for a just completion of it. It is concurrently their responsibility to seek to satisfy the completion of an authentic bond with some quintessential supernal power, even if this is essentially an ethical commitment. The ability of each character to seek for this covenantal bond is dependent on how each character treats and perceives the other in civil action. The seeking of the covenantal bond requires continued work in civility. When Shylock repeats, “Let him look to his bond” in Act 3, Scene 1, this seeking of the satisfaction of the civil bond feels covenantal and liturgical in its repetition. This repetition creates a behavioral excuse. It makes it seem that the civil bond, which is not humane in that it potentially calls for a pound of a man’s flesh, is covenantal and requires the same religious focus. The irony is implicit because the civil bond, in its punishment of murder, diametrically opposes covenantal behavior as seen in the commandment, thou shalt not kill (Exodus 20: 13).

In Act 2, Scene 5, Shylock goes home to his daughter and servant Launcelot. Launcelot is confused about antisemitism. He says, “I am a Jew if I serve the Jew any longer” (2.2. 105). After the scene with Antonio, Shylock needs assurance of friendship from all members of the non-Jewish community alike. Shylock, hurt that Launcelot is leaving, degrades him. He says,

The patch is kind enough, but a huge feeder,
Snail-slow in profit, and he sleeps by day
More than the wildcat. (2.5. 44–46)

Rejected by the non-Jewish community, Shylock is possibly frightened and possessive of all that is his, including Jessica. He tells Jessica not to “thrust [her] head into the public street” (2.5. 31). The end of Act 2 increasingly reveals a damaged and mocked Shylock. He is the “devil [who] cite[s] scriptures” (1.3. 94), the “cutthroat dog” (1.3. 107) who professes to dream of “money bags” (2.5. 18), and the father who will soon have a “daughter, lost” (2.5. 5). Shylock refers to “Christian fools with varnished faces” (2.5. 32) and hates Antonio for “he is a Christian...and brings down the rate of usance...in Venice” (1.3. 38–41). Shylock identifies himself by his tribe. Tubal is a “wealthy Hebrew of my tribe” (1.3. 53). Jacob, the patriarch, is connected to usury (1.3. 67–92) and not to covenant or revelation (1.3. 67–92). Abraham is called by his pre-covenant name, Abram, twice (1.3. 69, 156). Shylock seldom refers to the patriarchs through their intimacy with the Hebrew God. In Genesis 28: 16, Jacob claims that “God was in this place, but I did not know it.” Abraham receives several promises from God of great abundance and fertility (Genesis 17). Shylock does not mention those theological covenantal passages, rather those that are based on victimhood and nation. Later, in Act 4, I suggest that he refers to his bond as a *hoq* or a statute. In Jewish law, there are a few specific ordinances (*huquim*) that do not need any rationale beyond the supernal order. Shylock says, “I give no reason [to claim a pound of Antonio’s flesh] and I will not” (4.1. 59). In Jewish law, only a *hoq* does not need a rationale behind it. Shylock not only focuses on tribal passages in the Hebrew Bible, he continually flounders around in Jewish theology. He swears by Shabbat (4.1. 35) when a Jew does not swear by but honors Shabbat.⁶⁷ He says he has an “oath in heaven” (4.1. 224) when an oath in the Talmud, as compared to a vow, is specifically between two humans on earth with God as a witness. He seemingly confuses the Jewish *shevuah* (oath) with the *neder* (vow).⁶⁸ He belittles masquerades when the Jewish holiday of Purim has been celebrated with

masquerades since the 15th century. Shylock turns Judaism upside down. It is almost as if an expert in Jewish thought was advising Shakespeare on the creation of a Jew who could be as hypocritical as Antonio, the Christian. Shylock's blundering in Jewish theology can be compared to Gobbo and Launcelot's blundering in the English language. Gobbo, for example, says Launcelot has a great "infection" (2.2. 117) when he possibly means intention. These characters try to look large through religion or language and, in so doing, create confusion. This could make them all equally endearing but, as we see with Launcelot's antisemitism (2.2. 1–29), potentially dangerous. Shylock, we will see, uses this confusion to support his violent quest.

In the Introduction, I claim that some critics attempt to fit Judaism into Shylock rather than fitting Shylock into Judaism. I understand the need to defend the Jewish religion through Shylock. There is a psychological hold that the play has on us. Many of us feel victimized as does Shylock because we are all arguably a part of Shylock's suffering. Shylock's confusion does not make him any less Jewish. It makes him even more pitiful, especially considering his enthusiasm. His misunderstanding of Jewish concepts possibly results from the historic and horrific persecution of his people. Persecution causes Shylock to focus myopically on survival in a materialistic culture. Persecution points to Shylock's attachment to victimhood and his confusion around some of the central teachings of Judaism. Confusion, however, does not excuse Shylock, or any Jew, from his accountability to humanity.⁶⁹ Persecution and confusion do not excuse violence to the other. Finally, because Shylock has great confusion, he also has great potential, as I will show, to be a *baal teshuvah*, one who turns toward God.⁷⁰ During most of *Merchant*, Shylock is losing his grasp on his religion and his God and it is exactly this loss that later realizes his partial transformation. This thesis in part takes on the responsibility to attempt to accelerate Shylock's transformation not only on the stage but expansively off the stage as

well. Dramatically, if Shylock, along with Antonio, were already turned towards an all-powerful being, the plot would have nowhere to go in this play that arguably pivots on religious conflict. There would not be any conflict or a dramatic plot if Shylock and Antonio were already peaceful and spiritual beings.

Shylock's theological comment, "by Jacob's staff, I swear" (2.5. 35) differs from his tribal comments. It is a strange line. Jacob's staff is mentioned once in the Hebrew Bible in Genesis 32:11. Jacob claims that with his staff he passed over the Jordan. It could be argued that Shylock is confusing Jacob with Moses since the staff of Moses is far more celebrated. Even if so, there is something beautiful about this moment of confusion. The 12th-century scholar Rashi says that "[Jacob] placed his staff into the Jordan and the Jordan split."⁷¹ Centuries of Jews have arguably used Rashi commentary for most biblical interpretation.⁷² Rashi knowingly aligns the staff of Jacob with the better-known staff of Moses used to split the Red Sea. Shylock's mention of Jacob's staff evokes the miracles of God enacted by Moses. Shylock vocally takes on the staff as he prepares to meet with Christians for dinner. Even if Shylock confuses Jacob with Moses, he is still taking on a sacred staff. Divine intimacy, symbolized by a sacred staff, temporarily replaces victimhood in Shylock's mind.

Shylock, by intimating the staff, is paralleling Antonio's potential for transformation in Act 2, Scene 6. Antonio says, "the wind is come about" (2.6. 65). Shylock says, "by Jacob's staff" (2.5. 35). Both characters reveal potentiality. Shylock seems to hold a concealed knowledge of a Judaism beyond race and pain, a Judaism in which covert miracles happen in the personal past, present, and future. By dimly recognizing prophetic power as symbolized in the biblical staff, Shylock creates the possibility of his own patriarchal transformation.

As with Antonio in Act 2, Shylock's agency of transformation does not last long. Shylock, even if he feels a hopeful connection with a supernal power, sadly cannot escape his understandable but destructive attachment to victimhood.

Tracking Shylock: After the Flight of Jessica

At the outset of Act 3, Scene 1, Jessica has left Shylock. Shylock is understandably devastated. I will elaborate on Jessica in the chapter on her. In Act 2, Scene 8, Shylock is said to repeatedly cry, "O, my ducats! O, my daughter!" (2.8. 15–19). In Act 3, Scene 1, after being cruelly designated as a devil (3.1. 19), Shylock says to Salanio, "You knew, none so well, none so well as you, of my daughter's flight" (3.1. 22–23). Shylock is increasingly repeating himself. Repetition intimates Shylock's need to access the profound rhythms and textures of his ancient culture. Repetition and the associated rhythm point to the significant Aramaic prayer *Mourner's Kaddish* recited to honor the dead.⁷³ I have explained the purpose of *Kaddish* in a response to Stephen Greenblatt in the Introduction. A central line of *Kaddish* sounds like this:

*Yitbarach v'yit shabach v'yitpoar v'yitroman v'yitnasay, v'yit hadar
v'yit'aleh v'yit halal, sh'may d'kudshah, baruch hu.*⁷⁴

In English, "Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, honored elevated, and lauded be the Name of the holy one, blessed be he." Many Jews relate to this prayer through the haunting repetition of the reflexive intensive tense (the prefix *yit*). This rhythm reveals a projection towards a possible intimacy with a greater being. I argue that Shylock is attempting to conjure the *Mourner's Kaddish* as if the prayer can rectify him later after visualizing Jessica as dead. He is using repetition to remind himself of the prayer, and, therefore, to find comfort. The repetition feels like a misuse of prayer-like communications or agreements with God. In a weird way,

Shylock seems to be soliciting God with his repetition to excuse his developing anger not only at Jessica and at the Christians but even at God, Himself.

I argue that the devastation caused by Jessica's escape threatens the covenantal paradigm as it is perceived by Shylock. In this paradigm, if he follows the mitzvot or the law, he is blessed. Confused, Shylock feels he follows the law and is cursed. He says, "Thou torturest me" (3.1.109). Shylock, through his prayer-like repetition, shows that he needs a supernal power. However, he is losing faith that his God will be there for him. Shylock later says to Tubal, "I know not what's spent in the search" (3.1.83). He is textually referring to ducats, but he is possibly referring to his spiritual self or soul. Shylock still has agency on his climactic path even if the covenantal relationship with God seems to be breaking. He must replace the covenant with something else. I suggest that he replaces the covenant with victimhood. If the covenant, as broken, can no longer connect Shylock to God, victimhood with its intense emphasis on tribe seems to him like it can. Shylock's climactic path, we will see, becomes more and more defined by that which it is not. It is not attached to the covenant. He taps into the climactic agency and knowingly applies it to victimhood, the corrupt community, and anything but the covenant. I claim that there happens a strange symbiosis of those 'anythings'. Tribal identity, corruption, victimhood, and the Venetian community begin to fuse by the mere fact that they are or seem non-covenantal. Acting corruptly like the Venetian Christians or acting corruptly Jewish become equivalent in Shylock's mind. He soon says, "the villainy you teach me, I will execute" (3.1.64).

What we witness with increasing intensity in Act 3, Scene 1 is Shylock's chaotic expression of what he sees as the excruciating slow breakage of his covenantal paradigm. The way he speaks seems to be an attempt to somehow negotiate the broken pieces of his sacred covenant. Shylock repeats "Let him look to his bond" (3.1.43). This line hauntingly resonates

with Leviticus 26 and the continual strange assurance in the face of surmounting horrors that God will remember the covenant. “Let him look to his bond” resonates with “I will remember my covenant” (Leviticus 26:42) but creates a challenge as if God has forgotten to remember. Shylock refers to Antonio as ‘him’ but does not mention Antonio’s name in all of Act 3, Scene 1. It is as if Shylock is referring to Antonio and something more. In previous acts, Shylock has called to the patriarchs. Now, Shylock is possibly confusing a call to the patriarchs with Antonio as if Antonio can strangely reinstate the sacred bond or covenant that is in the process of breaking. Shylock’s comment ‘let him look’ suggests an odd and eerie moment, excessively pitiful. It reveals that there is more happening here than simply a civil dispute. This unknowing placement of divine agency onto Antonio arguably allows Antonio a power that he has not had previously. Antonio says with humility soon after, “He seeks my life: His reason well I know” (3.3. 21). As we have seen in the chapter on him, Antonio appropriates the Christ image during the trial with less humility. It could be said that Antonio takes the hint of the Christ image not only from his community but also from Shylock the Jew.

This brings us to Shylock’s “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech (3.1. 48–66). While the breaking covenant has been suggested, now the breaking is established. Shylock first creates a list of Antonio’s abuses. Antonio has “disgraced [him]” and has “hindered [him] half a million” (3.1. 49–50). He has scorned and thwarted him (3.1. 48–53). All abuses are aligned with tribal instincts and a mercantilist identity. Shylock speaks about bargains, gains, losses, and nation. He does not mention the scriptures or a supernal power. Since Antonio is strangely assuming the agency of the patriarchs, I argue that Shylock is speaking to those patriarchs and their collective power in his mental being. Shylock is not only expressing his angst at Antonio; he is conjuring his God in Antonio to express his anger at Him. It is seemingly God as well as Antonio who has

otherized Shylock, who has scorned Shylock and taken his daughter. It is God who, to Shylock, is breaking the covenant. The beings of the Christians allow Shylock his voice of fury and retribution against something huge, something frustratingly concealed that includes these characters but also expands beyond them. The agency in this speech is so dramatic and extreme that it must point to a being even more dramatic and extreme. Rhythmically, it builds like Jewish liturgy. The build-up of descriptors such as “hands, organs, senses, affections, passions” (3.1. 54) reflects the build-up of descriptors of God in Jewish prayers, for example, “faithful, beloved, cherished,...and beautiful.”⁷⁵ The language detailing human attributes reflects morning prayers in which the Jews often mention human attributes in gratitude.⁷⁶ In the Hebrew Bible, when the Israelites suffer such as when the spies are killed by the Canaanites, the Canaanites are not seen as responsible. God is responsible (Numbers 11: 45). God has the power as “sealed” on Yom Kippur and as recited in the prayer, the *Unetanah Tokef* (in English, “We Give Power”), over “who shall live and who shall die...who by water and who by fire, who by sword and who by wild beast, who by famine and who by thirst...who shall be debased and who exalted.”⁷⁷ Shylock’s speech (“Hath not a Jew eyes?”) claims that he is sadly debased and inwardly broken. It is as if the haunting Yom Kippur predictions torment him. Shylock’s speech is possibly his horrified response to a God who has not ‘sealed’ him in the divine books as he would like. It is a declaration of Shylock’s Jewishness in the face of those who abuse him. However, and I mean this kindly, the list of God’s awesome and devastating actions on Yom Kippur does not include “who by daughter playing with Christians.” Shylock’s loss, as disastrous as it is, is not the ultimate disaster but somewhere in the nowhere-land of pain.

This nowhere-land of pain points us once again to Wragg in “The *Heimlich* Maneouvre.” Wragg, Hawkes claims, is not only painfully seen as “strange” but is a “boundary marker...the

‘outside’, the ‘inferior’, and the uncanny. Wragg...marks the spot where the *heimlich* is defined by the fact that the *unheimlich* appears.”⁷⁸ Shylock is also a boundary-marker. Shylock marks one boundary which delineates several dichotomies. There is the dichotomy of the Christian corrupt community and his Jewish tribal corrupt community. There is also the dichotomy of Jewish tribe/victimhood and Jewish spirituality as identity. A dichotomy exists between the breaking Jewish covenant and the associated revelation. Finally, there is the boundary between civil bond and covenant. These dichotomies are singularly or collectively not the same, yet for Shylock, who now stands on the one boundary separating them all, they are the same. The dichotomies are all strangely unified in their dichotomous natures. There is one boundary and Shylock stands on it.

Structurally, this speech (‘Hath not a Jew eyes?’) accents this position of Shylock. Antonio’s character is aligned with the corrupt Christian community and the civil bond. The question, “What is his reason?” and the short resounding answer, “I am a Jew” (3.1. 53) mark the boundary where Shylock stands. There follows Shylock’s description of self and community (“if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?”) (3.1. 60), of physical being (“If you prick us, do we not bleed?”) (3.1. 58), and of covenant and spirituality (“Hath not a Jew...senses, affections, passions?”) (3.1. 53–54). The phrase ‘I am a Jew’ is the dialogic boundary marker that symbolizes Shylock. It delineates all dichotomies, Christian and Jew, Judaism as tribe and Judaism as a spiritual path, covenant, and revelation, and civil bond and covenant. That phrase ‘I am a Jew’ is itself a tribal statement. The statement feels like a hex to keep away the *unheimlich* possibilities, those that may emphasize Shylock’s strangeness.

The boundary also marks Shylock’s relationship with God. The boundary between Shylock and God is collapsing. In this speech, everything is becoming polarized or collapsing

together. In my analysis, the victimizing Christians blur with an almighty power. Shylock does not mention Antonio's name or the name of any Christian in the whole scene, thereby strangely blurring the 'you' of the Christian with the you of God, and the civil bond with the covenant. Shylock gives the Christians the power to "prick" and cause the shedding of blood, to "poison" and cause death, and to "wrong" and cause shame (3.1. 58-60). It is only God in the Torah who has the power to shed blood or cause death and shame. God sheds blood in the ordered attack on the Midianites (Numbers 31). He poisons when he orders Moses to throw the ground-up gilded calf into the drinking water (Exodus 32: 20), and he causes shame arguably when Korach is swallowed by the earth (Numbers 17: 32). By accusing the Christians of doing what he knows God has done, Shylock and his God are becoming polarized. The sanctity of human flesh, biblically created in God's image, is now meat without a soul in its ability to "bait fish" (3.1. 48). In Shylock's speech, man becomes meat and God is soul.

Jackson suggests the collapse of religious passion and desire into the secular in Act 4.⁷⁹ I agree with Jackson but propose that it happens in Act 3 and during this speech. Shylock, in his pain, collapses the dichotomy between victimizer and victim. He says, "If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that" (3.1. 60–61). He completely inverts the *heimlich*, as referenced by Hawkes, to the *unheimlich*. Victimhood for Shylock now becomes his human authenticity and his spirituality. Victimhood, as expressed in Shylock's dialogue, equates the victimizer to the victimized. The strange has become the norm.

Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech is more than a painful call for a mutual humanity. This speech is the moment, I claim, when Shylock, in the language of Stephen Greenblatt, "shrivels into nothingness."⁸⁰ Greenblatt indicates Shylock's horrific oppression in Act 4. I am referring to Shylock's breaking covenant in Act 3. Whether Shylock feels

“disgraced” (3.1. 49), “hindered” (3.1. 49), “scorned” (3.1. 51), or “thwarted” (3.1. 51) by God or by Antonio, he demonstrates acute desperation. Shylock delivers up all of himself, “hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions” (3.1. 53-54), including the “food” he eats, the “weapons” he uses, his blood, his joy, and even his death (3.1. 55–59). His poetry is evocative but lacks restraint. It is as if he is poetically turning himself into a humiliated sacrifice at the moment in stage time. Shylock’s speech implies a final attempt to appease his God and cross all boundaries through personal sacrifice before he decides to sacrifice the other. The trial scene, I have discussed, partly revolves around Shylock’s attempt to sacrifice Antonio. Completely dependent on a tribal god that has not been present for him, Shylock does not understand that a divine presence is arguably possible in Judaism with a miraculous recognition of faith, an unspeakable, non-materialistic intimacy. Shylock’s understandable misunderstanding accents his possible misconception of the ancient covenant and his religious heritage. Judaism, when reduced to a literal interpretation of sacrifice and covenant without faith and flexibility, becomes strangely, I contend, apocalyptic. Shylock says, “The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction” (3.1. 64–66).

In the language of Jonathan Dollimore, Shylock’s authentic self has been usurped by a “perverse dynamic.” The ‘perverse dynamic’, to Dollimore and as discussed in the chapter on Antonio, is the “violent, destabilizing, and brutal” action involved in what Dollimore describes as the rooting of the perverse in that which is true and authentic, thereby contradicting any truth or authenticity.⁸¹ I suggest that Shylock’s attachment to victimization becomes normalized within his authentic self and his corruption becomes normalized within his victimhood. The result is the appropriation by Shylock of any spiritual or covenantal paradigm to validate his new identity. This new identity seems to reflect his quintessential self. It seems real. It seems to

reflect true Judaism. It is an identity in which a seemingly spiritual corruption is embedded within a seemingly spiritual victimhood. Shylock begins to actively and knowingly build his identity even more on destruction and victimhood. He obsessively reproduces that identity in speech and action. If there is anything quintessential or authentic left within the reproductions of self in Shylock's mind, it is in that which is concealed and unsaid.

By 'reproduces', I am referring to the philosophy of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin envisions a day in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility* in which the human defines himself no longer by authenticity but by how well the self can be reproduced.⁸² He claims that it is impossible to reproduce art or self and to keep its quintessence because the center of our being is affected. Our center is not only who we are genealogically, religiously, culturally, erotically, spiritually, joyfully, and painfully. It is who we are as cemented in the inchoate centers of our art and being.

Shylock increasingly reproduces his tribal identity through animal imagery. He speaks of "sheep" (1.3. 67), "dogs" (1.3. 107), "curs" (1.3. 114), "monkeys" (3.1. 111), "asses" (4.1. 90), "viands" (4.1. 96), "pigs" (4.1. 54), and "cats" (4.1. 55). The reproducibility of this imagery escalates in Acts 3 and 4. There is something rough and strange about this seeming unending imagistic call to beings or organs alone biblically unfit for the covenant. His language, in repeating acts of antisemitism, builds upon itself and disallows an attachment to an identity other than antisemitism. Shylock, in his reproduction of animal imagery, becomes the uncivilized rough being that he claims he is not. In the philosophy of Benjamin, this continuum causes violence through the loss of the aura of self.⁸³ Before the trial scene even begins, this thesis claims that Shylock has become animalized by a dynamic over which he does have some control. He relinquishes control, though, and excuses his lack of restraint through his victimhood.

This brings us to lines 74 to 75 in Act 3. Tubal has arrived with news that Shylock's ducats and gem are gone and that the whereabouts of Jessica is unknown. Tubal says, "I often came where I did hear of her but cannot find her" (3.1. 74–75). Such a description of Jessica, to Shylock, aligns her with the unknown and the dead. Suffering, Shylock responds,

I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear;
would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin. No news
of them? Why so? And I know not what's spent in the search. Why thou
loss upon loss! The thief gone with so much, and so much to find the
thief, and no satisfaction, no revenge, nor no ill luck stirring but what
lights o' my shoulders, no sighs but o' my breathing, no tears but o' my shedding.
(3.1. 80–88)

Shylock, viewing his daughter as both alive and symbolically dead, is in agonizing pain. He has just collapsed dichotomies in his previous speech. Craving certainty, he settles the life/death paradigm of Jessica by collapsing that dichotomy as well. He pictures her death. Figuratively, Shylock pulls the plug. Jessica is left dead in his mind. While this is a negative action on the part of Shylock, I suggest that it can also be freeing for Jessica. Žižek speaks of being "unplugged" from "social substance."⁸⁴ Jessica has 'unplugged' herself by leaving her father's house. Since she is *seen* by Shylock as so 'unplugged' she is dead, she is, I suggest, about as 'unplugged' from oppressive norms as she can get. This state of being, to Žižek, and I agree, can be positive. It is sad for Shylock though. I will discuss Jessica in the chapter on her. Shylock, in his anger, sees Jessica as the victimizer and curses her as he has cursed Antonio and God. Shylock has regrets. His words become unleashed and reflect racing thoughts. Words learn from speech, building on the imagery to seemingly validate both. Driven by panic, he moves quickly from 'no news of them' to 'the thief gone', to his own emptiness— 'I know not what's spent'—and then to a vision of something immaterial, and frightening. There is a lack of specificity in the word 'gone'. The generality of the word 'thief' points beyond Jessica's physical body. The 'thief'

might be real, otherworldly, or both. Language points to the sublime. The ‘ill-luck that lights o’my shoulders’ hints that there must be something ephemeral, even ghostly, following or within him.

Jessica, once at home, once receiving his blessing, once material, is now immaterial. To find her, Shylock must release his attachment to the material. This release means his release from victimhood and corruption. It means refiguring the covenant on his climactic path. Shylock is suddenly on the climactic path of covenant and close to an intimate and biblical recognition of his God. This recognition requires great depth of soul. We witness this depth when he says, “no sighs but o’my breathing, no tears but o’my shedding” (3.1. 87–88). This line literally indicates that Shylock only recognizes his own pain. I want to offer a new interpretation. Shylock’s breathing is connected to sighs. The breathing that belongs to him is within a world of universal sighs, those beyond possession (‘no sighs’). Shylock’s human ‘shedding’, that which belongs to him, is connected to universal tears, those also beyond possession (‘no tears’). The negation universalizes the object. It is as if at this moment, Shylock is close to figuring something remarkable about his self-definition, not as a victim, but as a solitary being within a shared universe of meaning. He is realizing a personal intimacy with an otherworldly community, an intimacy which, I claim, could radically transform his behavior. Shylock has shifted to a covenantal focus from victimhood and is close to a small revelation.

Tubal stops Shylock. He reminds him of his victimization. He says, “Other men have ill luck too” (3.1. 89–90). Tubal appropriates the authentic moment by cementing the definition of Shylock as an angry victim. Shylock’s transcendence in Act 3 is stopped by a call to revenge. Shylock says, “What, what, what? Ill luck? Ill luck?” (3.1. 90). Shylock now has a single-minded focus. He must act quickly and delegate responsibilities. He says, “Go Tubal...go Tubal...go

good Tubal” (3.1. 113–118). Shylock’s epiphany gets buried under victimization and revenge. Shylock’s epiphany is, therefore, delayed.

This does not mean that transformation is impossible. Dollimore expresses the possibility of transformation in a paper from the Radical Mischief conference (2018). He refers to “something precious” and says that “sometimes shared meaning can transcend antagonism in ways which are different from compromise.”⁸⁵ This thesis examines this potential transformation through the epiphany in *Merchant* as it occurs to Shylock and many of the characters. I claim, as well, that hints of transformation can be discerned within the language chosen by Shakespeare. In Act 1 Scene 3, Shylock says, “sufferance is the badge of all our tribe” (1.3 106). Sufferance seems to mean *suffering*. Shylock seems to identify with victimhood. ‘Sufferance’ in Shakespeare’s works, though, can have a dual meaning indicating both persecution and piety. In *Henry V*, Hal refers to the ceremonial sufferance of kings and gods as a sort of piety. He says, “What kind of god art thou, that suffer’st more / Of mortal griefs than do thy worshippers?” (4.1. 250).⁸⁶ In his use of ‘suffer’st’ Hal is not speaking of victimization, rather of compassion for his soldiers during a time of war. Hal himself is displaying the personal freedom necessary to be able to choose compassion. Hal is being a free moral agent. This same word in the mouth of Shylock can indicate his potentiality. Shylock’s comment (‘sufferance is the badge’) could be interpreted as “Being a free moral agent is the badge of all our tribe.” It is Shakespeare’s remarkable action, I claim, to intimate transformation within a single word of dialogue.

Transformation is also woven into Shylock’s dialogue through visuals of the snake. Both the ‘perhaps’ and the snake, John D. Caputo claims, are prone to quick disappearance.⁸⁷ To review, the slinking and snake-like action of Lorenzo, I claim in Chapter Three, while causing Lorenzo’s epiphany to be just out of reach, creates a constant state of transformation, a reach for

an epiphany not attainable in the future if already attained in the present. Caputo's image is Messianic and borrows from Derrida who seems to be reflecting Jewish structures when he speaks of an "alterity that cannot be anticipated" in *Spectres of Marx*.⁸⁸ In this construct of the 'perhaps', the alterity-in-waiting becomes alterity itself. The beauty of the 'perhaps' becomes close to real. Imagining that beauty is that beauty. Structures and material things in time deteriorate. Desire remains present throughout the centuries. Nothing material, I add to Caputo and Derrida—not death, nor life—has power over the desire of humanity to know and really feel love with profound sensuality and spiritual honesty on earth. The 'perhaps', in its snake-like materiality and immateriality, creates safety and validation for those seeking a supernal being as well as the supernal in each other.

In *Merchant*, Shylock refers to the other and the self often with snake-like attributes. Shylock asks Bassanio in reference to Antonio, "Would'st thou have a serpent sting thee twice?" (4.1. 68). Shylock claims that he has tears that "shed" (3.1. 87–88) thereby attributing to himself reptilian mannerisms of survival and healing. In Act 1, Shylock refers to "water rats" as compared to "land rats" (1.3. 21–22), implying perhaps slimy things of the ocean, the first beings created by the biblical God (Genesis 1: 20). Shylock's reference to the staff of Jacob can be aligned to the staff of Moses which does in the Hebrew Bible turn into a snake before the eyes of the Pharaoh (Exodus 7: 10). Snakes and slimy things seemingly abound in *Merchant* and in scenes that include Shylock indicating, I claim, community corruption, creation, healing, and the 'perhaps' as in the philosophy of Caputo. Snakes, in general, hide and this is what I suggest they do in *Merchant*. They slip in and out of the dialogue. Even when Shylock clings to his identity of victimhood and Antonio to his antisemitism, the snakes seem to be buried in the poetic language. They indicate a story within the story of *Merchant*, something more than that which we find in a

literal or textual interpretation. They possibly indicate the changing soul of humankind as well as humankind's fleeting realizations of that change. The snake unfolds a charged eternal desire for a seeming impossible sensual and otherworldly love, a love for which the corrupt characters of *Merchant* must transform. This charged desire can be gleaned from the many questions Shakespeare packs into Shylock's eighteen-line speech on Jewishness, 'Hath not a Jew eyes?'. Shylock's constant questioning arguably reflects a gnawing desire for respect and also for the epiphany of human and supernal love. Ultimately, this charged desire is so woven into the dialogue of the play that the epiphany, I believe, is almost impossible to ignore.

I want to return to the trial scene and the moment of Shylock's hesitation. Shylock's decision not to kill Antonio to save his own life is the obvious reaction to his predicament. Shylock says, "Give me my principal, and let me go" (4.1. 332). It is human, in most cases, to want to stay alive. There is a deeper reason for Shylock's decision not to kill Antonio. The stopped sacrifice indicates that there was something wrong with the action itself. At that moment of hesitation, I think, Shylock has realized that his God's absence in providing a ram in the thicket implies, to Shylock, that his God is not supporting his vengeful goal. A true sacrifice by Shylock in *Merchant*, in Jewish thought, would be forgiveness and in this case, of the bond.⁸⁹ It is not the divine law that has the ultimate hold on Shylock, as in Jackson's analysis. What occupies Shylock is the divine law through the frame of victimhood, which is not divine at all. We can almost see Shylock that moment of his hesitation, finally envisioning the humiliating, visceral, and disgusting reality of his goal, as well as a quick epiphany of the seeming God that he thought would support it. His religion, he is potentially realizing, has been made dangerously close to impossible through the corruption of it. This corruption has been perpetrated by himself and by Antonio, among others. Shylock is possibly realizing that he, not his God, has broken his

own covenantal paradigm. This does not mean that the contents of religion are ‘emptied out’. They remain. An absolute power remains. The agency, we will see, remains to seek that power.

The non-sacrifice of Antonio becomes, like the presentation of the doves of Gobbo, “the process through which the sheer excessiveness of grace disrupts and alters the entire field of the given.”⁹⁰ In both cases, beings thought to be irrelevant or soon to be irrelevant, dead, become central and excessive in either their surprising materiality (Antonio) or surprising immateriality (the doves). The action(s), therefore, instigated by Shylock’s epiphany, little by little, expand beyond his personal growth and become gifted to the characters on the stage. Shylock, after interring his epiphany in Act 3 to funnel his agency against Antonio, now comes close to that epiphany and strangely saves Antonio’s life. This epiphany, of course, is a possibility, one which the play reserves for itself even while dramatizing the plot within the text. It is a possibility reinforced by suggestive language and behaviors, a possibility that is difficult to see, but still important in benighted worlds such as that of *Merchant*.

At the end of the trial, Shylock says, “I am content” (4.1. 390). He is closing a terrible situation but is also indicating a need for that contentment that is both present and not present like the epiphany. It could be seen as curious that Shylock voices his contentment after the seemingly cruel request that Shylock “become a Christian” (4.1. 384). I argue that something feels both unsettled and possible about that ‘becom[ing]’. Antonio’s request for conversion is in the place of possibility. The word ‘must’ is not used by Antonio or even ‘will’. Antonio’s grammatical construct feels biblical, such as ‘thy will be done’, indicating a potentiality cemented through a ‘can’ rather than an imperative. The conversion is a court decision projected in the subjunctive without a ‘how’ or a ‘when’. A date is not set. Clergy are not called. This is a ‘becom[ing]’ that feels as if it is left dangling. Neither the law nor the conversion feels actual.

They both seem to strangely project conversions beyond conversions and laws beyond laws. This needs more explanation. I want to return to Shylock's speech, "Hath not a Jew eyes?" Lupton claims in *Thinking with Shakespeare* that Shylock's question, "If you prick us, do we not bleed?" (3.1. 58) is a "scab" of social humiliation.⁹¹ I agree and add, as I have claimed in the chapter on Antonio, that the repressed Antonio and Shylock become coagulated together as both subjugators and subjugated in a perverse and dark synthesis of repressing and oppressive personal narratives. I argue that Shylock and Antonio can possibly invert themselves or "continually turn into one another" like a "Möbius strip," as Gross describes Shylock in *Shylock is Shakespeare*.⁹² Antonio and Shylock can transform from a "livid emblem" as claims Lupton of Shylock to, in the language of Thomas Carlyle, an "emblem[s] of the Godlike"⁹³ and, I add, an emblem beyond religion. Carlyle does not speak of Shylock. I am borrowing his language to express Shylock's potential synthesis with Antonio.

This transformative synthesis can happen through the epiphany. I have expanded on Shylock's comment, "Is that the law?" (4.1. 311). I have pointed out that Shylock could be seeking 'to fix' the law with compassion. Shylock's question projects a desire for possible legal interpretations that may or may not be actual. I have shown how Shylock's question can, in Jewish thought, indicate a desired projection towards repair. Because Antonio's conversion of Shylock feels distant, cruel, and itself needing to be fixed, I suggest that the conversion is a 'becom[ing]' projected beyond Christianity. As discussed in the chapter on Antonio, 'Christian' is the word Antonio uses to imply inclusiveness into his, Antonio's, spiritual home. Christian and Jewish tropes, though, have not brought satisfaction to the characters. In *Merchant*, I suggest, Christianity cannot support a crucifixion so it logically cannot support a Christian conversion. The conversion in *Merchant* possibly intimates that everyone is converted not to Christianity but

a new paradigm inclusive of and beyond religion. The laws and conversions of Jews and Christians are not ‘that’ law, as inquired by Shylock earlier, or even ‘that’ conversion as requested by Antonio. ‘That’ law and ‘that’ conversion have been projected beyond actuality to a feeling of ‘becom[ing]’ or possibility. This Christian play by a Christian playwright sets up a virtual crucifixion as a dramatic climax—as well as a virtual revelation—and then frustrates and goes beyond both. Law and conversion, not what they seem to be, are to be rediscovered by those who have been almost stripped of religion through their own corruption. Religion now comes second to the epiphany itself and the resulting expansive social, spiritual, and ethical paradigm. This expansive agency, we will see, resonates during Act 5 and offers hope for Shylock’s synthesis with not only Venice but the whole seafaring world.

The epiphanic synthesis of all characters is the thematic ending of *Merchant*. Shylock goes home after the trial. He is in the process of a transformation even if he cannot yet touch his epiphany gently or delight in it. Shylock potentially accepts and projects a universal conversion to kindness and a new law of compassion. He needs the other to enact his potentiality. He also needs to take responsibility for his transformation and to make it real in the present day. The wicked deed Shylock has attempted is now transformed into an unknown and unseen ‘deed’ that symbolizes an inheritance for Lorenzo and Jessica (4.1. 384). This new deed is not defined by specific details, only by “the other half [of Shylock’s goods]” (4.1. 379). The non-specificity of a new ‘deed’ opens it up to interpretation. This new ‘deed’ might include a new paradigm and a new vision of an all-inclusive ‘gift’, perhaps of love. I contend that this new ‘deed’ indicates that Shylock, even if out of sight and off the stage for the remainder of the play, is a required future signatory of a larger expansive agreement. This agreement points to Shylock’s involvement in something more, even covenantal, a continual creation of the ‘gift’, even at his death.

“Send the deed after me,” Shylock says, “And I will sign it” (4.1. 392–393).

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Chapter Four

Jessica: The Courage of the ‘Gift’

Jessica is often degraded in *Merchant* criticism. Horace Howard Furness states that she seeks relief from her “Jewish disabilities.”¹ John Drakakis sees the “difficult” Jessica as the agent of Shylock’s conversion.² Literally, in *Merchant*, Jessica’s departure arguably leads to Shylock’s anger, to Shylock’s quest for ‘judgment’, to Portia’s ‘justice’, and to the decree of conversion imposed on Shylock. However, the text does not end with that victimizing decree. There is an Act 5 after Act 4. I offer that Shakespeare possibly includes an act 5 to nudge us towards the potentiality of a trace of light in a benighted world. Act 5, I claim, and we will see, is when Jessica conceivably has her epiphany.

Julia Lupton suggests that “[despite] the bad rap [Jessica gets] from contemporary critics...she is...courageous and iconoclastic.”³ This suggestion can further illuminate Jessica if linked to Lupton’s claim in *Citizen-Saints*, “the saint has become the nostalgic afterimage of a lost exceptionality forever eclipsed by the normative routine of citizenship.”⁴ Lupton is saying, I believe, that the uniqueness of transcendent desire has not only been overpowered by the materialist requirements of present citizenship but has become an ‘afterimage’. I suggest that the courage and iconoclasm by which Lupton describes Jessica concretize her ‘afterimage’ and fashion her ‘exceptional’ epiphany, the subject of this thesis.

Jessica potentially has her epiphany or the inception of it in Act 5. Lorenzo and Jessica sit under the “bright” moon at night (5.1. 1). Lorenzo suggests that Jessica if she “looks” (5.1. 58) might almost “hear” the “harmony...in immortal souls” (5.1. 62). Jessica is intrigued by the “floor of heaven” (5.1. 58) described by Lorenzo. She excitedly imagines that they romantically

hear the “choiring” (5.1. 62) together. Lorenzo is possibly expressing what he has learned from a past epiphany. In the chapters on Antonio and Shylock, I explain how each character, in my reading of the play, receives an imprinted memory of a climactic path that has been cut off. The imprinted memory can be likened to the ‘event’ or “the effect that seems to exceed its causes.”⁵ Jessica’s epiphany potentially begins to happen the moment when Lorenzo is reflecting on his past ‘event’. She is realizing that the greater their hearing of the supernal, the greater their loving synthesis. When Lorenzo claims that “we cannot hear it” (5.1. 65), Jessica is disappointed. Lorenzo, in Jessica’s mind, seems to be pontificating on the epiphany more than experiencing it. Lorenzo, in the modern sense, is ‘mansplaining’. He is acting as if he knows more because he is a man. Not only is Lorenzo outrageously assuming a knowledge of the proficiency of senses that are hers (‘we cannot hear it’), he is revealing his present partial deafness. ‘Hearing’, in this thesis, alludes to aural abilities as well as to perceptions shared between humans and a greater power. Jessica fears that Lorenzo is allowing the warped and artificial ‘muddy vestures of decay’ to be an agent of his deafness. In so doing, the ‘decay’ might prevent him from honoring his divine love as poeticized in his dialogue. Lorenzo redirects his focus from the music of the spheres to popular music of the era and Jessica, instead of smiling agreeingly, says “I am never merry when I hear sweet music” (5.1. 69). Jessica wants to embrace the ultimate heavenly sound that Lorenzo describes, not the music he runs to when he is sadly near deaf. Jessica is then silent for 430 lines in her drive to hear the heavenly sound that can seemingly stimulate “touches of sweet harmony” (5.1. 57) and love. She has faith that Lorenzo might one day find delight in her “sweet soul” (5.1. 49) and merge with her in a place of transcendence. She knows he will because, she thinks, he already has. She conceivably figures that Lorenzo could not speak so elegantly of the supernal if he had not previously known it in some way. First, though, Jessica

must silently process what we can see as a preliminary call to the transcendent. She must carefully negotiate her expanding senses in her earthly setting.

I believe that the focus on Jessica's epiphany offers a distinctive and significant spiritual possibility in a play that is normally read in reductively materialist terms. While Jessica's behavior can be questionable, a deeper understanding of her potentiality can help to illuminate *The Merchant of Venice* in ways that can be constructive in our world today.

This chapter will first focus on Jessica's courage and rebellion and how they fashion her developing epiphany in Act 5. I will then track Jessica's epiphanic drive within the dramatic narrative to further examine her transformation.

Jessica's Epiphany

Jessica's epiphany, I argue, is connected to the spirit of the 'gift' symbolized by the doves in Act 2, Scene 2 described by Lowell Gallagher. The spirit of the 'gift', to Gallagher, "crucially transcends [the gift's normative] material conditions."⁶ In Act 2, Scene 2, Gobbo brings the doves on stage as a 'gift'. The scene ends with the 'gifting' still in process. No one has accepted the 'gift' or offered gratitude. Characters enter and exit. Only the doves remain constant and present but seemingly unseen. Textually, the doves are not assigned an exit before Jessica enters to begin Scene 3. Jessica, likewise, is constant and present and, we will see, unseen. Her father and Launcelot enter and exit the house (2.3. 2.5) where she spends much of her "tedious" time (2.3. 3). Jessica, when she enters to begin Scene 3, possibly connects with the still present spirit of the doves and becomes the next vessel of the spirit of the 'gift' in *Merchant*. Jessica is later described as having "wings" (3.1. 25) indicating that she acts as if she shares traits, physical and

beyond, with doves. Only after Jessica is said to have ‘flown’ does Shylock embark on his arguably devastating “Hath not a Jew’s eyes?” speech. With Jessica’s spirit gone, Shylock is left broken.

Jessica is a unique daughter. In *Merchant*, she is described as ethereal (2.6. 53–58) and “damned” (3.1. 29) as well as a “girl” (2.5. 15) and a “boy” (2.6. 40). Her very being, I argue, prophetically denies dichotomies and rises above them. Gallagher describes the ‘gift’ as “the process through which the sheer excessiveness of grace disrupts and alters the entire field of the given.”⁷ Jessica ‘alters the field of the given’ continually through her synthesis of dichotomous images and her courage. Lorenzo not only describes her as “wise, fair and true” (2.6. 57). He questions “if [he] can judge...her” (2.6. 54) and “if. . .[his] eyes be true” (2.6. 55). Lorenzo, in accenting his humanity, is conceivably recognizing Jessica’s supernal, and possibly prophetic, qualities. Earlier, Jessica describes her “shames,” possibly her costume of a boy, as “too light” (2.6. 43). While ‘light’ is conventionally read as ‘easy’, I believe that ‘light’ in this speech, literally means light. The mentioned candle (2.6. 41) has light-giving ability. If Jessica’s dark shames are light, her essence beyond shame might be remarkably brilliant.

Jessica’s spirit of the ‘gift’ is suggested as soon as she walks on stage. In her opening apology and gift of a ducat to Launcelot (2.3. 14), she offers a flow of humility to the other. Jessica’s growing potentiality, we will see, influences her to reach to the unknown no matter the consequences. Since the unknown is abstract, dim boundaries of named abstractions become blurred in Jessica’s mind. She confuses her love for her God with her love for a dream Lorenzo. She describes Lorenzo as “thy new master’s guest” (2.3. 6), giving him a biblical resonance. In the Hebrew Bible, angels disguised as guests visit Abraham (Genesis 18: 1–2). Jessica is not only intuitive. She is driven to act in ways beyond her control or understanding. She searches

within her soul for answers. She asks, “What heinous sin is it in me, to be ashamed to be my father’s child?” (2.3. 16–17).

Jessica’s courage in *The Merchant of Venice* is indicated by her ability to carry light. She is literally designated as a “torchbearer” (2.4. 42), sorely needed, as claimed by Gratiano, to “prepar[e]” for a masquerade (2.4. 4). The lit torch, a plot point, also references spiritual themes. As explored in the chapter on Lorenzo, Shakespeare sometimes uses light to infer supernal powers. Romeo claims that Juliet teaches “the torches to burn bright” (1.4. 157–158).⁸ Romeo sees that Juliet exemplifies an awesome radiance. Just as Romeo sees Juliet’s supernal light, Lorenzo sees that of Jessica in *Merchant*. He says of Jessica’s love letter,

I know the hand; in faith, ‘tis a fair hand,
And whiter than the paper it writ on
Is the fair hand that writ. (2.4. 13–15)

While the image of white hands can indicate a racist attempt to transform Jessica into a Christian,⁹ Lorenzo, in this comment, is also subtly linking his lover’s hand and writing, to the hand and writing of God. Shakespeare, through Lorenzo, could be nodding to religious art of the medieval ages. The 12th-century Basilica di San Clemente al Laterano in Rome, for example, symbolizes God as a white hand placed above the cross.¹⁰ There is also the famous hand of God in the Sistine ceiling. And Jessica, as discussed, is already associated with illumination and light. By saying that the hand wrote on paper, Lorenzo implies the Ten Commandments crafted by the finger of the biblical God on the tablets (Deuteronomy 10: 4). I am not saying that the speech does not feel racist today. I am saying that yes, the color white is symbolic of oppression, and yet there is possibly more happening here than what we rightly see as colonialist. The speech resonates with biblical symbols, tuning us into what I describe as its epiphanic purpose. It is

impossible to be both racist and spiritual, but it is possible, I argue, to grow away from racism towards an inclusive love. Shakespeare's intention is conceivably to show that Lorenzo, despite what he calls his "muddy vesture of decay" (5.1. 64) increasingly sees Jessica's potential holiness.

Jessica is alienated. She is to Venetian society "issue to a faithless Jew" (2.4. 27) and to her father simply "my girl" (2.5.15). She is not "my girl, my gold, my fortune, my felicity" (2.1. 49)¹¹ as Barabas calls Abigail in Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.¹² Neither gold, fortune, felicity, not even biblically named as is Abigail, Jessica is ordered as is Launcelot the servant (1.1. 171) to "look to [Shylock's] house" (2.5. 16). It is, in this, as if she is strangely seen by her father as servant girl.

Jessica is alienated in a male social order where men proudly, and absurdly, negotiate "merchandise" (1.1. 44), "great debts" (1.1. 128), "the news on the Rialto" (3.1. 34), "what Jacob did" (3.1. 73), and "an equal pound of...fair flesh" (3.1. 145–146). Her isolation and boredom, I suggest, contribute to her fertile imagination. She, her "father's child" (2.3 17), connects her "strife" (2.3. 20) to the mythic and fantasy images of a "merry devil" (2.3. 2), a "secret" letter (2.3. 7), a romantic "promise" (2.3. 20), and the "pretty follies" of herself and her lover (2.6. 38). The isolated Jessica might unknowingly act in ways that could contribute to her otherization. She says to her beloved, "I'll swear that I do know your tongue" (2.6 27). While 'tongue' means language, the word has sensual connotations. Jessica is not forward. There is a certain shyness on her part not to have thrown "casket[s]" (2.6. 34) to Lorenzo weeks earlier. It is kind of Lorenzo not to reflect on 'tongue', accent the word's ambiguity, and scold Jessica for her wording. 'Tongue' possibly reveals the brave sensual imaginings that Jessica in isolation has of Lorenzo. There is something clumsy but sweet in Jessica's word choice that Lorenzo seems to honor. He

says, “[She shall be] placed in my constant soul” (2.6. 56). Jessica’s isolation can also be seen in her only speech at Belmont. She gives an account of her father’s plans with Tubal and Chus (3.2. 283–289). She degrades her father while Portia, the mistress of Belmont, sets the norm by allowing the idolization of her father by Nerissa (1.2. 26–27). No one seems to know how to respond to Jessica’s speech, so the characters kindly do not.

Rebellion serves to oddly both exacerbate and assuage Jessica’s otherization. Once described by Lorenzo as “issue to a faithless Jew” (2.4. 37), after leaving her father she is said to have “[stolen] from [him]” (5.1. 15). Such inescapable otherization, this thesis claims, leads to her radical and individuated search for a spiritual/earthly/sexual sanctuary. Stephen Greenblatt in *Shakespeare’s Freedom* explains that otherized characters, deprived of human intimacy, explore “outside of society’s forced limitations.”¹³ Ewan Fernie in *Shakespeare for Freedom* further emphasizes an escalating drive among the highly otherized to find intimacy with and guidance from dream or mythic figures.¹⁴ Fernie references John Moriarty’s analysis of *King Lear*, which claims that “we have become unaccommodated, alienated and unhoused not just in evacuated creation but even in our own minds.”¹⁵

I argue that Jessica seeks desperately for, and rebels for, a creation resonant with meaning. Lorenzo, the Christian, is her dream figure with the offer of sanctuary. She says, “I shall become a Christian” (2.3. 81). Even while projecting her agency into the future, she is, however, defined—Shakespeare is saying, or so I claim—not by Judaism or Christianity, but by that unhoused agency between that fantasy of Venetian Christian perfection and the present “hell” (2.3. 2) in which she feels she lives.

Drakakis, in describing Jessica's rebellion, says, "In Derridean terms, Jessica is a kind of *pharmakon*, an ambivalent figure [who symbolizes] 'the medium in which opposites are opposed...[She] reverses [those opposites] or makes one side cross over into the other.'"¹⁶

Drakakis is seeing the *pharmakon* as the medium between temporal constructs, not between the inner and the outer as primarily explored by Derrida in "Plato's Pharmacy."¹⁷ I add that Jessica's medium as a *pharmakon* is conceivably not only between places but between her inner spiritual and external temporal agency. For the cure of the world, she needs to learn to cross not only between Christian and Jewish constructs, and between inner and outer worlds, she needs to negotiate the 'gap' between worlds and constructs. Moriarty, as shared by Fernie, portrays the otherized character of Poor Tom in *King Lear* as horrifically alienated and a seeker of meaning: he is "part bogeyman, part martyr" and "prophet."¹⁸ Fernie, while mentioning Cordelia, demonstrates otherization primarily through the filth and apocalyptic poetry of the male being Poor Tom. The female Jessica, on the contrary, seems, in comparison, bejeweled and acclimated: she speaks of the "gold and jewels she is furnished with" (2.4. 21). And yet, I argue that Jessica is even more alienated than Poor Tom. She would never act like him. There is for Poor Tom, as we see in *King Lear*, an outlet. For Jessica, though, there could never be an outlet to such homeless fury. There is, I would like to suggest, a reason for this. Severe uncivilized behavior in 16th-century England marked the irrevocable collapse of a female character into eternal exclusion. For example, the being of Pocahontas, as described by Paul Brown and as discussed in the chapter on Lorenzo, is not seen as destitute or mad but as 'savage'. The attempt to 'introduce' her to civilization kills her as "a nine days wonder."¹⁹ Jessica, before she has her epiphany, cannot authentically show her soul as do Pocahontas and Poor Tom, the one represented by her 'savagery', the other by his wild vagrancy. This is because she intuits that,

like Pocahontas, as expressed by Brown, her re-introduction to civilization would either kill her or alienate her even more. This thesis claims in the chapter on Lorenzo that Lorenzo does not usher on Jessica's death as Rolfe does that of Pocahontas. Lorenzo does not go to the extreme of Rolfe who uses Christianity for subjugation. Jessica, as an assimilated Jew and a vulnerable woman, never goes to the extreme of the native Pocahontas in self-expression. Jessica, from the start, is fairly assimilated from without and raw within. While the blood/manners dichotomy she mentions— "I am a daughter to his blood, / I am not to his manners" (2.3 18)—infers a Jewish/Christian conflict, I suggest that the dichotomy itself is deeper and goes beyond religious connotation. It creates in Jessica a tormenting alienation from not only society but her true self. She does not have the luxury as does Poor Tom to be crazily authentic. Jessica's rebellion and flight to Lorenzo parallel Poor Tom's destitution as the display of her overpowering epiphanic agency. Just as the alienated Poor Tom must overwhelmingly become destitute to search for meaning, Jessica must rebel to do the same. Jessica's rebellion and flight from her father indicate her potentiality to experience an intense intimacy with her epiphanic moment. It is magical and prophetic but is also marked by an innocence tinged with rough traces of yearning.

Lupton in *Thinking with Shakespeare* indicates this roughness by suggesting that some, like Caliban in *The Tempest*, are further isolated in their lack of acculturation.²⁰ Jessica is possibly untrained in her religion. When Launcelot calls her "pagan" (2.3. 11), she does not correct him by reciting biblical lines that discern Judaism from paganism (Deuteronomy 12: 4). I have already discussed Jessica's use of the word 'tongue' in 2.6 and her unfortunate speech about her father at Belmont. She is, like Caliban, unsocialized, and uneducated, a wild child in the sense of Locke as described by Lupton.²¹ Jessica, therefore, is not taken seriously. She is referred to as a "daughter" (3.1. 23), "no Jew" (2.6. 52), a "Jewess" (2.5. 41), and the guardian of the house

(2.5. 10–17), as examples. She is rarely seen for herself or her potentiality. Her reaction is to struggle in a search for greater meaning. The meaning she seeks is indicated by a figurative light. In Act 2, Jessica accepts the position of light-bearer (2.6. 41). In the Hebrew Bible, Moses descends from Mount Sinai with such light (Exodus 31) that he must hide his face. Jessica does not descend from Mount Sinai: she absconds from her father's house with a torch. She is not motivated by an exterior God, but by an inner agency. Her action is still prophetic in that she is bringing light from one place to another. Her challenge is that her behavior lacks an ethos. We will see that she also has a 'muddy vesture of decay' as described by Lorenzo but cannot see it herself. This 'decay' is not her rebellious behavior. It is partly indicated by her inability to see God in the face of her abusive father.

Jessica and Shylock live in Venice one hundred years after the Spanish Expulsion, almost as temporally proximate as is the Holocaust in today's world. I contend that both Shylock and Jessica can be elucidated, by analogy, through Holocaust studies. Children within Jewish families, or within many families that have directly or indirectly been victimized by the Holocaust, know, as Helen Epstein in *Children of the Holocaust* claims, "the effects of systematic dehumanization...transmitted from one generation to the next within severe disturbances in the parent-child relationship."²² There is, I suggest, a powerfully-felt imperative within some children like Jessica, as they mature, to reject the abuse indicated by these 'disturbances'. This rejection leads to otherization from within the family. Some offspring, in daring to reject the accepted norms of abuse, norms attached to tragic events, must somehow renegotiate Judaism and their spirituality. These children, certainly the women in a patriarchal society, are often blamed, disowned, and scorned for their subversive actions. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica is blamed not only by her father but by some modern post-Holocaust critics.

John Gross, comparing Jessica to fictional daughters who demonstrate compassion, asserts “from Jessica, there is nothing.”²³

Abuse and alienation conceivably lead to Jessica’s rebellion and nurture her light. A cycle is possibly created in which rebellion, alienation, and light sustain each other within Jessica’s being and empower her epiphany. Her rebellious actions increase exponentially. She sends a letter to her lover (2.3. 7), lies to her father (2.5. 44), steals from her father (2.6. 33–34), steals more from her father (2.6. 49), leaves her father to join a group of Christians (2.6. 58), possibly spends some of her father’s ducats irresponsibly (3.1. 107–108), and distressingly does not stand by him when he falls. Jessica’s ‘gifting’ also seems to increase exponentially. The ducat she gifts her servant (2.3. 4) arguably realizes the delivery of her “love” letter (2.4. 15), the deepening of her loving “thoughts” of Lorenzo (2.6. 33), and the carrying of a bright torch towards the loving freedom for which they both yearn. She arguably wants to merge the spirit of the ‘gift’ she carries in her soul with a greater external power, anything to be non-persecuted and non-abused, and one day non-material and invisible in an ethereal sense. She says, “I am glad ‘tis night, you do not look on me” (2.6. 35). Her supernal agency enables and cements her faith in Lorenzo even if their conversations become hurtful. After she ‘alters the field of the given’ by jumping off the balcony to Lorenzo, they hurriedly exit. Antonio enters and has, what I have described in the chapter on him, his transcendent moment (2.6. 64). Just as Jessica partially receives the spirit of the ‘gift’ from the doves of Gobbo, I argue that Jessica might unintentionally leave behind some of the ‘gifting’ spirit to be felt by Antonio. In *Merchant*, transference and exchange are central themes. Objects or beings of exchange such as slaves (4.1. 89), spices (1.1. 32), and silks (1.1. 33) are not only discussed, they arguably permeate the dialogue and are realized in the plot. Antonio willingly exchanges his life for his friend’s loan.

These normalized materialistic exchanges potentially suggest even greater exchange within the characters' mental beings. There is a conceivable possibility that there is a subtle transference of the spirit of the 'gift' from character to character. The transference of something abstract and beautiful is possibly the attempt at an inversion, offered by Shakespeare, of the corrupt and normative transactions within a materialistic world. It can be said that the characters are so obsessed with materialistic exchange that they naturally exchange and transfer the spirit of the 'gift' as well.

I want to focus on Jessica's epiphany and how it begins to transform. Jessica's expansive silence of 430 lines in Act 5 allows for expansive interpretation. This thesis suggests the possibility that she has become the embodiment of an unbearable ecstasy, unbearable because the nascent epiphany isolates her even from herself. It is as if the epiphany is in one place and the rest of her, at some other pole of being. She does not know how to realize the epiphany within her very real social and physical humanity. Therefore, she does not speak. The otherworldly power, to her, feels too great to negotiate. Žižek speaks of the 'gap' caused by perspective and physical being.²⁴ Jessica experiences a 'gap' influenced by an otherworldly power. Her vision of her God is not blocked by her being. Rather, her vision of her being becomes blocked by her God and her divine perspective. What she is in the process of experiencing in the language of Žižek is "a transformative exchange with the world."²⁵ Žižek does not speak of Jessica. I am using his language to describe her. Jessica has shifted her base from the physical to the transcendent, but in so doing she has blind spots, similar perhaps to Lorenzo's partial deafness. Jessica says, "but love is blind" (2.6. 37). This line could mean that she does not fully see Lorenzo because her love for him prevents her from seeing herself or from seeing period. Lorenzo's deafness is, as he himself says, caused by the 'muddy vesture of decay'. Jessica's blind spots are caused by her

heavenly, epiphanic, and loving experience. Something presently remains unseen for Jessica on earth and unheard for Lorenzo in 'heaven'. Their inter-faith coupling, I argue, can possibly enable both characters full sensual knowledge of each other, a knowledge that is so intimate and glorious that this knowledge is otherworldly. Lorenzo, in his potential to once again hear the full supernal 'harmony', even if it takes time, can potentially hear Jessica's true inner sound. Being heard, Jessica, as is human, can hear herself better and better focus on his needs and her truth on earth. She can epiphanically visualize them both standing at the sacred 'gap' between the transcendent and the temporal. As the potential *pharmakon*, Jessica knows that this 'gap' is not ultimately Christian or Jewish. It is beyond religion. Lorenzo claims that "the sweet wind [can] gently kiss the trees" and not make any noise (5.1. 2–3). The characters can potentially synthesize with a magical elegance and an "excessiveness of grace"²⁶ within this noiseless moment, or 'gap' of gentleness, between the wind and the trees. They can synthesize the divine with the temporal and the sacred with the benighted setting. They show, in their patient and brave approach to each other, that they can potentially "mark the music" (5.1. 88) for the other characters in *Merchant*.

Tracking Jessica: A Dramatic Analysis

We possibly first experience Jessica before she enters the stage. She is one character's lover and another's daughter, but she has a singular presence. Her invisible presence or 'afterimage' conceivably resonates even when she is not there. In Jewish mysticism, this 'afterimage' is likened to the *reshimu*. In Exodus 33, God passes by Moses, but Moses can only see what follows or the *reshimu* described as "the revelatory face of divine withdrawal."²⁷

Jewish mysticism applies the *reshimu* only to God. I add, as does Emmanuel Levinas, that the *reshimu* can be applied to the faces of all beings equally. Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* claims, “[t]he face [is] a source from which all meaning appears.”²⁸ Walter Benjamin in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility” refers to the similar ‘aura’ and applies it to literary works as well as to art and beings.²⁹ This ‘aura’, we will see, further indicates the spirit of the Derridean ‘gift’ as described by Gallagher. Whether we are naming this essence a *reshimu*, an ‘aura’, or a spirit of the ‘gift’, both it and Jessica are “beyond what can be seen or put into words.”³⁰ When Jessica becomes silent in Act 5, she possibly leaves behind an exquisite trace of the self or a vacuum. When a play is finished and the stage is empty, the feeling of the characters remains in the mental being of the audience. It would make sense that this same feeling would enter the mental beings of characters on the stage as they experience long periods of silence and exits. Jessica is a character who transmits such a feeling. I suggest that the essence of Jessica, or the spirit of the ‘gift’ in her being, is especially distinct.

It is difficult to show or prove this spirit or essence because it is abstract. The traditional and singular materialist analysis of *Merchant* can seem far more convincing. And yet, we presently live in world of both material things and abstract concepts and it feels natural to seek an associated balance in *Merchant* criticism. I believe that the way certain characters act sometimes can be in response to the ‘gifting’ spirit of the other. In Act 1, Scene 1, Lorenzo kindly helps Bassanio to find Antonio, his possible lover. Lorenzo, entranced by Jessica, helps lovers to meet. Lorenzo possibly feels Jessica’s essence of ‘gifting’ in his being even if she is not there. We know that Lorenzo is already involved with Jessica: later, he recognizes her through her handwriting. He says, ‘I know the hand, in faith’. Jessica’s past meetings with Lorenzo have arguably left a *reshimu* that penetrates Lorenzo’s soul. Shylock does not recognize the essence of

Jessica and keeps her confined through this non-recognition. At the end of Act 1, Scene 3, Shylock says that he must “see to [his] house, left in the fearful guard of an unthrifty knave” (1.3. 170–172). The knave Launcelot, the audience will see, is not alone. Jessica is in the house as well. She is, I have claimed, unmentioned and ‘unhoused’ by Shylock before she even walks on the stage. Protected or ignored to nothingness, Jessica, before she is even present, is defined by Shylock’s omission. Her essence seems to be overlooked by Shylock.

Once on the stage, she has a visible presence, but this omission sadly continues. Her first words to Launcelot are an apology. She says, “I am sorry thou wilt leave my father so” (2.3. 1). The apology is an act of humility and self-effacement. It is as if she is apologizing for all of the actions of her father. She is taking accountability for the omission of her soul and self as well as for the dissatisfaction of the servant. In doing so, she places peace above herself. This is a kind action even if her first comment is on a withdrawal that prefigures her own.

Lorenzo, or the dream of him, helps Jessica to feel strong. At the end of Act 2, Scene 3, Jessica says, “O’ Lorenzo” (2.3. 19) as if speaking to his imagined being. She possibly believes that since her Jewish father overlooks her, the Christian Lorenzo will appreciate her inner self. She does send Lorenzo a “secret” letter (2.3. 7). Jessica’s intuition is correct when it comes to Lorenzo, but not because he is a Venetian Christian. She seems to know intuitively that she and Lorenzo can each find their unique freedom and transcendence only in their loving synthesis. That synthesis she describes as “Christian” (2.3. 21). However, as I argue in the chapter on Antonio, the word Christian, in the mercantilist economy of Shakespeare’s Venice, begins to indicate a kindness beyond religion.

This brings us to Act 2, Scene 5. Here, Jessica is first a side attraction. Shylock speaks to Launcelot and calls for Jessica intermittently. There is something haunting in Shylock’s calling,

a strange expectation that Jessica will be not only a daughter but a crutch. Shylock complains to her, “There is some ill a-brewing towards my rest” (2.5. 17). Jessica, it seems, is expected to show support, rather than Shylock supporting Jessica. It can be inferred that Shylock is nervous about the approaching dinner with the Christians. The question arises concerning the frequency of Shylock’s humiliation and his pressure on Jessica. Jessica, to Shylock, seems to be a servant, a crutch, or a therapist, and the perfect *betulah*. The *betulah* or virgin is a subject in the Talmud and is interpreted in the *Mishneh Torah* by the 12th-century Maimonides.³¹ An unmarried woman in the Talmud is expected to be a *betulah*. Shylock understandably keeps Jessica hidden. He orders her not to “thrust thy head into the stalwart street” (2.5. 31). I think Shylock loves Jessica. He expresses his love, though, without considering what might be best for her as a significant and solitary being.

Jessica’s epiphanic yearning reveals itself in the joyous domestic escape in Act 2, Scene 6. She thinks carefully about her love. She questions, “and my love indeed / For who love I so much?” (2.6. 29–30). She conceivably has inherited a feeling of victimhood from Shylock. She refers to her “shames” as “an office of discovery” (2.6. 43). Her ‘shames’ suggest her indoctrination as a woman and her partial attachment to victimhood. Jessica can escape her father but to seek a way beyond indoctrination she must ‘alter the entire field of the given’.³² Jessica, in love with Lorenzo, receives the ‘torchlight’ and with it can adventure towards synthesis with him. In her non-mention of Lorenzo’s friends, she might conceivably fear them. Jessica would seemingly rather negotiate an antisemitic community than define herself through victimhood. She would rather transform herself among those who hate her people than be burdened with hating the haters. She, vibrantly and unknowingly, brings her Jewish spiritual roots with her as she leaps into Christianity. She says, “for lovers cannot see” (2.6. 37). She does

not have a full vision of herself and her Jewish heritage, nor Lorenzo and his Christian faith. She sees that he is kind to her and that is all the faith she conceivably feels she needs. He says, “wise, fair and true, she shall be placed in my constant soul” (2.6. 57).

Drakakis claims that, given the Belmont metaphor in the play, the casket of jewels thrown by Jessica symbolizes Shylock’s meaning, “Jessica is caught in the act of undoing her father’s meaning as she appropriates...his material wealth.”³³ In this way, Jessica is killing her father. I argue that Jessica, who does not see a jewel filled casket as a symbol of life, is simply grabbing what she feels she needs to survive. There might be ten caskets and she is taking one. After Lorenzo and Jessica run away, we soon hear the reports of Jessica’s flagrant adventure from Tubal (3.1. 107). Jessica and Lorenzo, according to Tubal, leave Venice for the distant Genoa (3.1. 72). Then, they seemingly party like mad, return to Venice, meet up with Salerio, and arrive on a ship at Belmont (3.2. 217) all in the time it takes Bassanio to arrive at Belmont on his ship from Venice and choose from the caskets. I have discussed Act 3, Scene 1 in the chapter on Shylock. I suggest that Tubal is just as corrupt as other characters and has his personal goals in antagonizing Shylock with stories of Jessica. We do not know where Lorenzo and Jessica go on their gondola before they arrive at Belmont. Given the tight schedule, they conceivably just stay in Venice. This would mean that Tubal is lying about Genoa and possibly about other things as well.

Jessica, possibly made to look worse than she is, is understandably far from perfect. In Act 2, Scene 8, Shylock’s reported cry “my daughter! O, my ducats” (2.8. 15) poetically portrays Jessica’s inability to extricate herself from the word ducats. Jessica might own ducats but is possibly also owned by them. Shakespeare is saying, I believe, that Jessica’s reality and identity are defined not only by her physical freedom but also by the cost of it. Her name seems to have

become linked in the mind of the other with something as petty, and potentially corrupt, as ducats.

Materialistic issues continue at Belmont. Conceivably, Jessica's spirit of the 'gift' must now come second to the flaunting of gifts by Portia. Portia says in reference to Shylock, "Pay him six thousand" (3.2. 298). Even Launcelot understands that Belmont is possibly as corrupt as Venice. He says, in Jessica's words, "in converting Jews to Christians, you raise the price of pork" (3.5. 31–32). The word 'conversion' feels like a currency exchange, equating those who profess a religion with legal tender. Jessica tries to negotiate that same corruption. She speaks of "two gods [who] play some heavenly match and on the wager lay two earthly women" (3.5 65–66). Jessica possibly imagines this myth because she sees herself between identities, between religions, and between God and earth. The doubling of the gods and the women enables Jessica to be both witness and observer. Jessica creates situations that require her objectivity and distance, including her silence in Act 5 so that she can fashion her identity away from the hurtful corruption of the setting. Her flight from her house has introduced new unexpected complications in her growth towards 'gifting' and epiphanic transcendence. Her loving synthesis with Lorenzo feels threatened by an emphasis on the materialization of a similar love. Portia says to Bassanio, "Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear" (3.2. 312). Lorenzo seems to be conditioned by the pretenses of the normative culture. He tells Portia she has "godlike amity" (3.4. 3). This could be the comment that projects Jessica into her myth about two gods. She might see that grand riches have temporarily impressed her lover.

Jessica's isolation at Belmont leads to a strange romantic tension with Lorenzo. Lorenzo opens Act 5, Scene 1 with "the moon shines bright" (5.1. 1). The words "in such a night" (5.1. 1) launch each lover into descriptions of failure and humiliation as revealed and cemented by the

characters of ancient myths. Dido (5.1. 9–12) is heartbroken. Thisbe (5.1. 6–9) is frightened. Jessica and Lorenzo express their reservations through myth and guardedly hint that the other is partly responsible for any negative fallout. The repetition of ‘in such a night’, almost liturgical, escalates the tension. The dialogue intensifies from the “stealing” of ducats (5.1. 15) to the “steal[ing]” of souls (5.1. 19). While the poetry can be seen as romantic, it is conceivable that Shakespeare is showing the toxic and competitive repartee that can become commonplace among intimates within a vastly materialistic culture. Just as the love for God can sour within superficial or oppressive frameworks, so can the love for the other. In *Merchant*, after the visitation of two messengers, it is Lorenzo who redirects the toxic conversation. Portia is said to be returning and it seems appropriate to “go in and expect [her] coming” (5.1. 49). However, Lorenzo asks, “why should we go in?” (5.1. 50). Staying out as compared to ‘going in’ indicates that both Jessica and Lorenzo want to keep trying to access the ultimate interfaith transformation in the expansive mental and physical space outside of the expectations of the Belmont community. Despite the corruption “creeping” (5.1. 56) into their words, Lorenzo manages to exquisitely cycle the old conversation into “patens of bright gold” (5.1. 60). Lorenzo, though, cannot ward off the ‘muddy vesture of decay’. He leads Jessica to the supernal and, in her mind, lands her in decay. After Jessica’s comment, ‘I am never merry’, Lorenzo charges into a lecture on music that strangely fuses the earlier dark dialogue to his epiphanic path to his escalating sensual desire. While suggesting that Jessica might not have music in her “self” (5.1. 83), he poetically describes a “wild and wanton herd” (5.1. 71) which at a hint of sound makes a “mutual stand” (5.1. 77). Lorenzo has just called in popular gaudy music. It is unclear if he is rhapsodizing about the popular music and the associated ‘muddy vestures’ or about the ‘touches of sweet harmony’. Jessica fears being among that which is confused by Lorenzo. She fears being part supernal and

part corrupt, even if that state of being is unavoidable. Corruption, to Jessica, implies victimhood. I have explained the connection of victimhood to corruption in the Introduction. Victimhood in the past has hurt Jessica. When she leaves Shylock, she says, “You [have] a daughter, lost” (2.5. 55). Jessica, in response to Lorenzo’s lecture, withdraws into silence. She sees in him an attachment to corruption through his ‘muddy vestures’. She knows that Lorenzo can possibly see her ‘divine face’ and hear the divine music. Her action is radical because she is deciding to wait silently for Lorenzo. Her love is deep. As discussed, a vision of her temporal self has been blocked by her divine perspective. Her silence is an act of faith that Lorenzo will soon hear her and relearn the ‘harmonies’. Then, they can eternally move independently and synthesized towards ‘the concord of sweet sounds’ Lorenzo describes so beautifully.

Both Lorenzo and Jessica allow their epiphanic agency to overcome tribal abuse, corruption, and pointed judgments that typify Shakespeare’s Venice. Their ability to merge in a cross-faith solution leads the other characters in the play as they move towards a similar conjoining away from the solutions of crucifixion and revelation. Shakespeare, through this couple, is demonstrating a master plan of epiphanic unification. Here, after all, are two characters who intensely feel the necessity of their conjoining because of love for a supernal deity as seen in their delight for each other. Their love breaches the boundaries of a limited credal solution.

Conclusion

Jessica can be likened somewhat to the prophet Abraham. Jessica sees Lorenzo’s popular gaudy song from a celestial perspective just as Abraham is shown the stars in Genesis 15: 5. Jewish midrash of the Hebrew Bible (Gen. Rabbah 44: 12) states that Abraham is shown the stars from above. Jessica sees human music from above, from the possible ‘floor’ of heaven as described by

Lorenzo, and not from below. Jessica rejects audible music in favor of the inaudible, supernal harmonies Lorenzo has gestured her toward. Jessica's comment 'I am never merry' questions Lorenzo's choice to block out the heavenly harmony to which he has so sweetly guided her. Therefore, Jessica's response is in complete defiance of anything to do with a humanity which, as she has seen, cannot think its way to the heavenly and stay there, a humanity stuck in violence and corruption. This view of Jessica grounds her as beyond a given and conventional identity, a single religious confession, or a mercantilist community. Jessica's vocal defiance of all things not heavenly is a call to all alienated women in all cultures and myths to dare to do the same.

Jessica can be further understood if we look at Isabella in *Measure for Measure* and the Greek character of Antigone, mythic sisters in the criticism of Lupton.³⁴ I add that Jessica is a sister as well. Jessica does not similarly have a brother needing a defense but like the biblical Abraham and these two female characters, Jessica does "instate the exception in relation to the norm, the saint in relation to the citizen."³⁵ Jessica breaks away from the named constructs within her community in which Shylock arguably almost "brutalizes her capacity for social imagining...and for creative interaction."³⁶ I claim that Jessica, like the Isabella and Antigone examined by Lupton, refuses a world that confines her to an oppressive fashioning of her being. She uses defiance and her final silence in Act 5 as a "willful de-affiliation"³⁷ from not only the self-aggrandizing characters of *Merchant* but also a feigned spirituality. Lorenzo says at the end of the play, "Dear ladies, you drop manna in the way of starved people" (5.1. 293–294). As we have seen, no one seems to be starving. The biblical term manna seems to be more connected to pretense than gratitude. This pretense of religion and religious concepts is what the corrupt *Merchant* society seems to praise. Jessica's de-affiliation from religious pretense through her patient silence is, I argue, the "cut or interval around which a new modality...can emerge."³⁸

Antigone and Isabella, to Lupton, are interested in a new “political modality.”³⁹ Jessica would argue that we hear the ‘choiring’ of the angels first, then we authentically refigure the social and political paradigm. Jessica conceivably mentions the myth of Thisbe (5.1. 8–10) because she sees an unnamable destruction threatening her romance with Lorenzo, a destruction that even she cannot redirect. It is Lorenzo, with his deep memory of epiphanic joy, who redirects the moment toward a heavenly hymn he cannot presently hear. Jessica might be temporarily alone in her long silence in Act 5 but through it, she “brings forth, illuminates and suspends” a “spectacle” of an “agreement in reserve.”⁴⁰ This agreement is one of kindness, respect, and civility. Shakespeare, through Jessica, reinvents romance. Jessica couples with Lorenzo in their mutual and singular mental being so that they can refashion and realize a radically transformed and freeing agreement from a celestial perspective. Lorenzo hands the torch to Jessica and helps Jessica to see. Jessica, with her silence, helps Lorenzo to hear. The “radical singularity”⁴¹ of Jessica’s silence points to a synthesis of Lorenzo’s and Jessica’s mental beings with an ecstasy and a wholeness rarely figured in non-radical minds. By non-radical I am referring to those who refuse to alter ‘the entire field of the given’ when that altering is the only way to true love.

The reason why Jessica is never merry when she hears sweet music is that Lorenzo has helped to reveal a place where she can “hear the angel sing” from a breathtaking alienated and transformed perspective (5.1. 59–88). This perspective is so alone, sublime, awesome, and frightful that it is beyond Judaism, Christianity, and Lorenzo’s expectations. Jessica’s prophetic potential means that she, in the continual experience of her epiphany, will return with Lorenzo to enlighten and heal the community. By keeping Jessica silent, Shakespeare is possibly allowing her to lead the audience beyond a nameable identity, a violent culture, and all political solutions to an otherworldly vision. Shakespeare, through Jessica, is indicating a figurative interconnection

of faiths based not on the constructs but the spiritual substance. Jessica needs the Christian vision of Lorenzo, his agency, and his kindness. Lorenzo, likewise, needs the ancient spiritual tradition of the Jewish people and Jessica's honest transcendence. Strangely, I suggest that if the 'muddy vestures of decay' could be discarded, the two lovers could synthesize into one glorious being who—borrowed from Sonnet 130—might “walk[s], tread[s] on the ground.”⁴² Shakespeare in this sonnet references the narrator's lover. In *Merchant*, Shakespeare shows that love enables two kindred characters with different 'vestures' of religion to walk as one on earth. Shakespeare, I contend, is fusing the religions, not to demonstrate the superiority of either or to show a way to cooperation, but to create an astonishing new paradigm. In this paradigm, love is the beauty we know in each other, in our forward vision, and in the supernal force toward which we march.

In Act 2, Jessica is leaving one world and shielding or gilding herself with ducats to adventure a transcendent path with Lorenzo. As Jessica suggests, she must first safeguard her father's house. She speaks with eternal promise to all who gaze in her direction waiting for her approach, “I will make fast the doors and gild myself / With some more ducats, and be with you straight” (2.6 50–51).

Notes

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1. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Horace Howard Furness (New York: New Variorum Edition, 1964), footnote 2.4. 55–56.
 2. John Drakakis, “Jessica,” in “*The Merchant of Venice*”: *New Critical Essays*, ed. John W. Mahon and Ellen Macleod Mahon (London: Routledge, 2002), 145.
 3. Julia Reinhard Lupton, email, October 8, 2018.
 4. Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1.
 5. Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey through a Concept* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014), 5.
 6. Lowell Gallagher, “Waiting for Gobbo,” in *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. Ewan Fernie (London: Routledge, 2005), 77.
 7. Gallagher, “Waiting,” 81.
 8. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Oxford Shakespeare, ed. Jill Levenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
 9. David Sterling Brown, “White Hands: Gesturing toward Shakespeare’s ‘Other Race Plays,’” paper presented at Shakespeare Association of America conference, Washington, DC (April 17–20, 2019).
 10. Basilica San Clemente, accessed February 20, 2020, <http://basilicasanclemente.com/eng/index.php/history/basilica>.
 11. Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, ed. James R. Siemon (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002).
 13. Drakakis, “Jessica,” 146.
 14. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespeare’s Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 5–12.
 15. Ewan Fernie, *Shakespeare for Freedom: Why the Plays Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 245–48.
 16. Drakakis, “Jessica,” 154.

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17. Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 103, http://www.occt.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/derrida_platos_pharmacy.pdf,
18. Fernie, *Shakespeare*, 248.
19. John Brown, "'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine': *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism," in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 50.
20. Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 187–219.
21. Lupton, *Thinking*, 187–200.
22. Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust* (New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, 1979), 338.
23. John Gross, *Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy* (New York: Touchstone Press, 1992), 75.
24. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 209.
25. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 209.
26. Gallagher, "Waiting," 75–80.
27. Eli Rubin, "Absent Presence: The Revelatory Face (*reshimu*) of Divine Withdrawal," Chabad.org, accessed. October 28, 2018, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3004920/jewish/Absent-Presence.htm.
28. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Philosophical Series 24, trans. Alphonzo Lingis (Duquesne University Press, 1967), 297.
29. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 223.
30. Lowell Gallagher, "Waiting for Gobbo," in *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. Ewan Fernie, (London: Routledge, 2005), 77.
31. The Torah and the Talmud, if interpreted literally, notoriously otherize women. The intention of Talmudic tractates on women is, arguably and often, the protection of women, a worthwhile goal. However, if the Talmud is read literally there can be conflicts with our present ethos. Maimonides, a great philosopher of Jewish thought, offers a literal interpretation of Talmudic tractates concerning women. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Sefer Nashim: Naarah*

Betulah, trans. Eliyahu Tuger, Chabad.org,
https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/960634/jewish/Naarah-Betulah-Chapter-One.htm#footnote33a960634.

32. Gallagher, “Waiting,” 75–80.
33. Drakakis, “Jessica,” 156.
34. Lupton, “Citizens,” 127.
35. Lupton, “Citizens,” 127.
36. Lupton, “Citizens,” 139.
37. Lupton, “Citizens,” 144.
38. Lupton, “Citizens,” 143.
39. Lupton, “Citizens,” 140.
40. Lupton, “Citizens,” 140.
41. Lupton, “Citizens,” 140.
42. William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets*, ed. John Kerrigan (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 130.

Chapter Five

Portia: Love or Pretense

This thesis claims that Portia is possibly the ultimate sorceress of Shakespearean drama. She seems to be a conjuror of distant utopias (“draw the curtains”) (2.7. 78),¹ of pain (“I have too grieved a heart”) (2.7. 76), and of ravishment (“[She is] an angel in a golden bed”) (2.7. 58). Portia arguably is a charmer of men, drawing beings to her with bizarre power. Not only does Morocco expose his roots to win her in the game of caskets (he says, “Mislike me not for my complexion”) (2.1. 1), critics magnify her. As states Henry Norman Hudson (19th-century), Portia has the “dignity of a sage...of beautiful nature [and of] art.”² Dramatist Oscar Wilde croons to her in his poem “Portia” when he says, “Take my heart, it is thy due.”³

What I am saying is that this play, teeming with nastiness, is shadowed by a possible ‘mystical’ meaning that is suggested, insistently, in the language and actions of its characters. Portia uses her mystical agency to free herself from a deadly setting. She is a “living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father” (1.2. 23–24). Portia must oversee a “lottery [of suitors] which [her father] hath devised” (1.2. 28) and seemingly cannot mentally put her father to rest until this lottery is determined. She says, “the brain may devise laws for the blood but a hot temper leaps o’er a cold decree” (1.2. 17–18). Portia’s hot temper indicates a desire to leap not only ‘o’er’ the ‘cold’ decree, possibly of chastity, but her father’s ‘cold’ corpse. Portia feels she can partly influence the casket game. She says to Morocco, “but if my father had not...hedged me, by his wit” (2.1. 17–18) then “yourself [would stand] as fair [as other suitors] for my affection” (2.1. 20–22). Portia, in mentioning her ‘affection’, is already possibly considering its power.

The only way for Portia to possibly find the “right” (1.2. 31) suitor and to depose her father’s ghost is to negotiate the dichotomy of life and death. Her fantastical agency, she seems to believe, can draw men to her, and the more the better. The more power and godlike centrality she acquires, the sooner she will seemingly attract a man she “rightly” loves (2.1. 31). Portia is possibly on a climactic path like that of Antonio, but her desired climax is not perfection with God. It is perfection with self. She desires to be central in her community or even glorified. The analogical equivalent to this self-glorification, in our present ethos, is something like entrepreneurial, filmic, and sexual stardom. A modern Portia might aspire to be the CEO of a multibillion-dollar company or to be ‘instafamous’ on social media with thousands of viewers. The problem is that, regardless of Portia’s drive, her central status is continually lacking. This possibly frustrates her. In her mind, she is not central or visited enough. She cannot “choose one [of the suitors] nor refuse none” (1.2. 22) because in her mind she does not yet have that glorious power.

Portia’s epiphany transpires when her climactic path towards her stardom is proven ironic and cut off. Like the discussed experiences of Antonio and Shylock, the cutting off of her path creates a shock and the shock indicates a moment of realization. That moment potentially happens during the ring debacle of Acts 4 and 5. In Act 4, Bassanio passes Portia’s ring “of this fair mansion” (3.2. 168) to herself in the masked image of the lawyer Balthazar. The ring never to be “give[n] away” (3.2. 172) ironically goes to Balthazar and her mask, but not to Portia. This is where Portia’s climactic path is cut off. Portia’s mask, and symbolically her false self, receives the ring. Portia ironically loses her hard-won adoration to the fictional mask of Balthazar. During the trial, Portia witnesses the arguably true love between Antonio and Bassanio, a love I have described in the chapter on Antonio and possibly intrinsic to the plot of *Merchant*. Portia

begins to suspect that centrality is not required for meaningful love. True love, Shakespeare is saying or so I claim, can seem peripheral in materialistic cultures. Concurrently, that same true love can be more powerful than the pretense typified as love within those same cultures. Portia's climactic path is not only cut off. She experiences a faint spark of understanding that true love belies self-importance. The offering of the ring to Balthazar is so shocking to Portia that she says, "that cannot be" (4.2. 8). Her climactic path collapses but, as I will show in this chapter, her agency keeps driving onward towards the physical, emotional, and spiritual fulfillment for which she yearns.

There are more than a hundred lines dedicated to this ring debacle. The settling of it occurs when Antonio is appointed as Bassanio's "surety" (5.1. 254). With Antonio as the vassal of Bassanio, who in turn is obligated to Portia, Portia can seemingly become the heart of the universe once again. She says about her courtroom victory, "You are all amaz'd" (5.1. 266) intimating that all characters are focused on her. The ring conflict creates a question, a troubling one for Portia. It has possibly revealed the non-centrality of a true soulful Portia while centralizing her queen-like image in court. She wants everyone to be amazed by *her*, who she really is, not who she pretends to be. Her goal, however, is difficult to achieve. In Portia's world, the materialistic culture is all-consuming. Not only is wealth measured in Belmont by things that can be held. Love is, we will see, measured by the things, or words, that can be held in speech. In *Merchant*. Jessica rebels against this corruption of love and the associated 'muddy vesture of decay' (5.1, 69). Lorenzo remembers supernal love and expresses his memory as a present epiphany (5.1. 54–65). Antonio keeps love simple and distinct from materialistic impulses even in his negation of it (1.1. 45–46). Portia and Bassanio love quantitatively even if they speak against that quantification. To Portia, until her epiphanic experience, love is like a march of

victory towards analogical stardom. To Bassanio, love is like a wise investment. I argue that love to them is sometimes a material thing and sometimes a divine encounter. They remain mostly focused on pretense and interpellated in their materialistic culture until the episode with the rings.

This is a new interpretation of Portia. Whether Portia is delightful or despicable, Shakespeare increasingly reveals her desire to be the center of attention. It is in the text. In Portia's first scene, she mentions 'I' or 'me' approximately 35 times (1. 2). On becoming central, she strangely believes she will be loved in truth and free to love as well. Her drive towards this love and centrality is cut off by her same self-deifying impulse. Her agency does not just stop. Like the agency of Shylock and Antonio, her agency continues. Just as, I claim, Judaism fails Shylock and Christianity fails Antonio, self-glorification fails Portia in the achievement of climactic and absolute love.

This chapter explores Portia's drive for a central status, her magnetic agency, and her strange and frustrating epiphanic advance. I argue that Portia's drive for love is so powerful that it results in her almost transcendence in Act 3. This moment of almost transcendence for Portia can possibly instruct those likewise stuck in materialistic constructs. Just as those who are otherized wrestle with Shylock, I claim that those who are materialistic, in America or elsewhere, wrestle with Portia. Portia's almost transcendence in Act 3 reveals her potentiality.

Portia: Her Centrality

Portia's drive to be the center of attention is deep-rooted in her character and the plot of *Merchant*. The bond would not be signed to become forfeit if Bassanio did not borrow from

Antonio who borrows from Shylock, who borrows from Tubal so that Bassanio can woo Portia. The forfeiture of the bond and the fate of Antonio are crucial to the plot. Portia is not central to the dramatic question, but irritatingly near central.

The dramatic question is presented by Antonio in the first line of the play, “I know not why I am so sad” (1.1. 1). Antonio must find a way to mitigate his sadness. Bassanio enters with the aid of friends and says, “In Belmont, there is a lady richly left” (1.1. 161). This thesis contends that Antonio, who begins the scene so sad, loans money to the Portia-chasing Bassanio in part to quell his, Antonio’s, same sadness. Antonio becomes a willing third party in the romance. He says, “do but say what I should do” (1.1. 158). In the chapter on him, I have discussed Antonio’s homoerotic tendencies. If Antonio cannot have Bassanio to himself, he settles as an invisible financial partner in Bassanio’s romance with Portia. Portia, unknowingly, is in a relationship with Antonio as soon as she commits to her beloved Bassanio. That circumstance is not only kinky but degrading. Portia is possibly objectified by men from the beginning of the play. A pawn in her father’s game as well as in that of Antonio and Bassanio, Portia cannot be central in her own mental being. Strangely, she is controlled and defined by men, but she wants to be in their limelight even more. She believes in a strange centrality in which she will be superficially adored. She drives herself myopically towards that centrality as if it can assure love and freedom. She says, “draw the curtain” (2.9. 83). It is as if the quicker the curtain is drawn, and the sooner the past suitor is dismissed, the sooner her true love will appear. She is in a precarious position. Her self-objectification, she believes, can enable her analogical celebrity status that in turn can empower her freedom from the same materialistic culture. Her soul is desperate for that freedom. She says she is not a “great divine” (1.2. 14–15) indicating that becoming the center of attention as a ‘great divine’ is within her inner narrative. Her

reasoning, though, is ultimately skewed. She is stigmatized and wants her stigmatization to stop but not because she is hurt by it. She wants her stigmatization to stop, we will see, so she can be the most valued and central item in a materialistic world. The dead, unknown suitors, unknown relationships, a subjugating patriarchy, too much money, her gnawing virginity, and a vastly impossible supernal abstraction, which draws men to it instead of to her, accentuate her stigmatization and dislodgement from her setting. Portia's vexation at her peripheral status is vital to this analysis.

I claim that Portia's drive is possibly revealed in her opening line. She says, "my little body is wary of this great world" (1.2. 1–2). She speaks of herself under the seeming weight of the world. She does not say, "There is a great world and I feel small next to it." Nerissa's response rightly pegs Portia's agitation on both her, Portia's, opulence, and her virginity by claiming, "they are as sick that surfeit with too much as they that starve with nothing" (1.2. 5–6). The proximity to the epicenter of Portia's world (with money), Nerissa is saying, is equivalent to her distance from it (with men). Here, the greatly peripheral is equated to the least peripheral. In both cases, Portia is stigmatized and, therefore, 'sick'. Portia's centrality is, from the first scene, gently challenged by Nerissa. Portia is not centrally placed under the weight of the world but either too close or too far from it. Later Portia bemoans her peripheral status. She says, "O, these naughty times / Put bars between the owners and their rights" (3.2. 18–19). She confusedly wants to be a 'right' of Bassanio. She seemingly, and strangely, feels she can be central while objectified because, for Portia, the way to freedom is through objectification. The only way to be central, to Portia, is to be an object even if behind 'bars'.

John Drakakis indicates an "oppressed" Portia who is an "object...to be 'chosen' in man's attempt to outwit destiny."⁴ Drakakis is seemingly saying that Portia is abused. I add that

Portia does not see this objectification as abuse. She welcomes it because objectification is required, she believes, to be the center of everyone's attention. Through Portia, Shakespeare seems to be prefiguring the gross commodification of women that might occur in materialistic cultures, a commodification that has led to all kinds of present problems such as anorexia, bulimia, and suicide. Portia quantifies herself to Bassanio, saying that she is "divided" like a thing. She says, "One half of me is yours, the other half yours" (3.2. 16). She strips herself to a foundation of things and numbers with the goal to be beloved. She readily damages everyone in her orbit who might cross her materialistic goals. After giving herself to Bassanio "In sum of something: which to term in gross, / Is an unlesioned girl" (3.2. 158–159), she says that if Bassanio loses her ring, it will "presage the ruin of [his] love" (3.2. 173). By revealing Portia's love for Bassanio and her subsequent threat, Shakespeare, I argue, is demonstrating the confusion between love and things in materialistic cultures. This confusion might seem obvious to present audiences, materialist or not, but is strangely not realized by the characters interpellated into Shakespeare's materialist Venice.

Portia's need and drive to be the nexus of her universe is intense. It is so intense that she taps into her sexual and bewitching agency to achieve that ultimate distinction.

I will first discuss her sexuality. During the casket scenes, a woman "whose sunny locks / Hang on her temples like the golden fleece" (1.1. 169–170) witnesses the seeming arousing desire of a man who has "hopes" and "deservings" (2.9. 56) in his consumed attempt to win her. If he chooses correctly, he can open and explore Portia as he has opened the caskets. She says, "If you choose that, then I am yours withal" (2.7. 12). If his 'foreplay' is good enough, she is his reward. Such 'foreplay' promises the possibility of carnal knowledge, not love-making, but casual sex. The characters speak of large groups of people. Portia speaks of the County Palatine

as “twenty husbands” (1.2. 59–60). Portia mentions the Dardanian wives: notice the plural (3.2. 58). Bassanio describes Portia’s hair as having “entrap[ped] the hearts of men” (3.2. 122). This thesis suggests that true romantic love is unique, not a dialogic orgy. The plurality of love in the Belmont scenes, I suggest, can reduce intimacy. Portia wants each suitor, such as Morocco and Arragon, to stop rhapsodizing and to choose a casket quickly. She says, “There, take it, prince” (2.7. 61). Meanwhile, if Morocco focuses on love (“in love I do deserve”) (2.7. 34), Arragon on social status (he will not be “rank[ed]...with the barbarous multitudes”) (2.9. 32), and Bassanio on pretense (“ornament is but the guiled shore / To a most dangerous sea”) (3.2. 97–98), it can be concluded that neither love nor status excite Portia. Pretense, I claim, is her aphrodisiac and her thrill. When Bassanio claims that his love is “mingled” with “treason,” she rightly feels “mistrust” that he will not be authentic (3.2. 27–32). This ‘mistrust’, though, attracts Portia. Portia’s world has always been false in that it has been quantified and materialized. Bassanio’s falsity is comforting to her. It reminds her of her father’s home. Such validation of falsity by Bassanio, I argue, arouses her. Since erotic love is sexual, the pretense of erotic love is also arguably sexual to those who are habituated to falsity and pretense. While awaiting Bassanio, Portia’s words convey near orgasm. She says, “O, love, be moderate; allay thy ecstasy /...For fear I surfeit” (3.2. 110–114). Outrageously, not only is Portia experiencing foreplay with one suitor after the next, her father has enabled her near-sexual climax with possibly the most pretentious supplicant.

Portia’s character is not unusual in our present setting. Portia symbolizes the self-objectified abused woman who feels comforted and validated by that same objectification. Shakespeare’s Portia, I believe, points to the women who voted for Donald Trump, known for his objectification of women, in 2016, and who might unfortunately repeat themselves in 2020.

Bassanio and Portia struggle to access a true love which, until the debacle with the rings, cannot for the most part be realized. Their true love is possibly too raw and deep to be expressed openly in a culture that prefers materialist pretense to the truth. There is something, I suggest, frightfully surface and cold in their declarations in Act 3. In his speech from 3.2, 114-148, Bassanio's love is expressed in the language of finance and commerce. Bassanio speaks of "the summary of [his] fortune" (3.2. 130) and mentions "substance" twice (3.2. 127-129). Portia's earlier 'surfeit' is immediately quelled by Bassanio's designation of her semblance as her "counterfeit" (3.2. 115). Shakespeare is saying, I suggest, as with Jessica and Lorenzo that love, in a materialistic setting, is often materialized for access. Bassanio materializes himself. He makes himself look valuable, I claim, through his 'mansplaining'. He lectures Portia saying, "the world is still deceived with ornament" (3.2. 74). This is a direct and grounded comment. The irony is that he is making himself into an ornament through ornamental language. He begins his speech with, "So may the outward shows be at least themselves" (3.2. 73). While his words have depth, he acts superficially omniscient, 'so may'. If his love for Portia seems real, when he mentions her "snaky golden locks" (3.2. 92) he is refiguring Portia into something strangely reptilian. In the chapter on Lorenzo, I claim that Lorenzo otherizes Jessica so he can seem wiser and more spiritual. Bassanio wants to seem grander than Portia. If Portia is reptilian, then Bassanio, in comparison, has seeming integrity even if his ducats are not his but borrowed. Bassanio's speech (3.2. 73-107) indicates a pretense of non-pretense. Only those who are the most pretentious can successfully pretend they are not pretentious. This doubling of pretense leads to the correct choice of the lead casket but also of a surface sexuality. Love without depth, or love as ornament, leads to love-making as ornament as well. Portia, like Jessica, is not taken seriously. There is perhaps a reason for such show, besides the materialistic culture. Portia and

Bassanio are never alone. Their love is defined as that which everybody knows. They are striving relentlessly to prove their hearts to an audience. I will return to this.

Portia uses fantastical powers as well as her sexuality to achieve star status. This thesis contends that Portia uses her magnetism, as do the witches of *Macbeth*, to be released from her clear stigmatization. The witches allure Macbeth increasingly to the intolerable so that they themselves can be seemingly replaced on, and freed from, the intolerable edges of society. On these edges, the witches are precariously hovering (“Hover through the fog and filthy air”) (1.1. 10–11).⁵ The witches of *Macbeth* use chants and portents to transfigure a world that has stigmatized and condemned them. They form their concoctions from bodily parts appropriated from those also otherized. In their incantations they conjure,

Liver of blaspheming Jew,
Gall of goat, and slips of yew
Silvered in the moon’s eclipse,
Nose of Turk and Tartar’s lips. (4.1. 26–29)

The witches not only commingle organs in their cauldron. They name each body part to legitimize and organize the outlandish commingling into now even more otherized, disfigured beings. These witches are seeming hags and invaders, specimens from the fringe of society and of the most unwelcome otherness. As stated, the goal of the witches is arguably to create disfigured beings who might replace them, the witches, and free them from the cruel societal underworld. This scapegoating, described by René Girard, “transforms the disruptive force of mimetic rivalry...to prevent a return of the crisis.”⁶ Those experiencing envy disrupt the world so that the horrific results of that same envy will end. In the case of the witches, the ‘crisis’, this thesis claims, is that of their painful stigmatization. The ‘mimetic rivalry’ is the desire of the

witches to be like Macbeth, and the arguable desire of Macbeth to have the power of the witches. They each want what the other has.

I suggest that beings do not have to be in the underworld to take part in such despairing actions, incantations, and scapegoating. Portia is arguably just as desperate as the witches of *Macbeth* in her peripheral rank. Whether delightful or despicable, she takes part in personal incantations. She conjures the souls of the living and the dead with the help of Nerissa, such as her dead father (1.2. 24), a Neapolitan Prince (1.2. 37), a County Palatine (1.2. 43), and the Baron of England (1.2. 63) to intermix in a weird linguistic concoction. The descriptions of the suitors advance with such speed that they merge in Portia's dialogue. It is as if she is creating a verbal and mental cauldron. The "horse" of the Neapolitan prince (1.2. 39) strangely merges in Portia's speech with the "round hose" of Falconbridge (1.2. 70), the "beast[ly]" ways of the Duke of Saxony (1.2. 84), and the "soldier" who once "accompanied" the Marquis of Montferrat (1.2. 108–109). With the seeming nonchalance of the witches of *Macbeth*, Portia tosses details of men into her speech and mixes them excitedly. She synthesizes these male parts not only in her mental being but in that of the audience. Men mentioned and symbolized by countries or counties are blended in a larger subconscious. Portia condemns men with such imagery ("God made him, and therefore let him pass as a man") (1.2. 53–54) that she disfigures them and, given their resultant powerlessness, dominates and lures them to her. She carries an unrelenting magnetism transmitted through the compelling synthesizing of imagery within her language. She attracts her ingredients, the suitors, towards her with seemingly endless rhetoric, as prompted by Nerissa's inquiries (as ordered), "what say you?" (1.2. 62), "what think you?" (1.2. 73), "how say you?" (1.2. 51), and "how like you?" (1.2. 79).

The result of Portia's narrational and imagistic mix is arguably similar to that of the witches in *Macbeth*. Reality is seemingly transformed by the vocalized interpenetration of molecules between man and thing. Portia's words can create an imagined world that is startlingly real in our minds. For example, "I had rather be married to a death's head with a bone in his mouth" (1.2. 48–49) conjures a death's head and a bone fused weirdly with the suitor, the County Palatine. This new strange being merges with the Neapolitan's mother who "played false with a smith" (1.2. 41). We have death's heads, horses, and newborns all dismembered and mutated together. Another character who manages this same effect is Poor Tom in *King Lear*. Poor Tom blends in his imagery "the swimming frog, the toad, the wall gnewt and the water" all which he "eats" (3.4. 125–127).⁷ Poor Tom is insane in that he intermixes these beings, or so he says, within his organs. It is as if, in swallowing these chaotic images and mashing them all together, he cannot choose when to regurgitate them. His body just extricates them naturally, wildly, and openly in the form of speech. Later he says, "croak not, black angel" (3.6. 31), once again alluding to the 'toad' and a mentioned "fiend" (3.6. 29). Poor Tom does conjure "mastiff, greyhound and mongrel grim" (3.6. 65–66) from the outer world to fight the 'fiend'. The 'fiend', however, in its synthesis with the 'toad' ('croak not, black angel'), seems to be among the images he feels are intermixed in his being. Therefore, some fiend within Poor Tom struggles against the strange 'mastiff' on the outside. Poor Tom speaks as if the imagery once regurgitated will weirdly be logical to everyone. Portia chooses her vocabulary carefully and keeps her imagistic mix outside of her body, as do the witches with the cauldron. Portia, like the witches, and unlike Poor Tom, is not emotionally invested in the results of her concoctions. She seems entertained ("How now, what news?") (1.2. 117). The witches in *Macbeth* also seem unmoved

by the destruction caused. Portia and the witches are seemingly motivated singularly by their goal to cement their power, despite the pain and hardships they engender.

At the start of the play, Portia is unchosen and, I claim, forsaken, hovering in the abstract spaces between all that is given and “hazard[ed]” (2.9. 20), “what many men desire” (2.9. 23), and as much as many men “deserve” (2.9. 35). She is nowhere. She is strangely in a seeming nowhere-land like Shylock in this analysis, and like Wragg, as described in “The *Heimlich* Maneuvre” by Terence Hawkes.⁸ While Wragg’s response to her despondent state is murder, Shylock’s response is attempted murder, and Portia’s response is pretense and self-glorification, which, I suggest, can be likened to the rejection of the authentic self or suicide. However, this nowhere-land strangely symbolizes not only painful stigmatization. It can lead to sanctity. God, to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, also hovers in the abstract spaces between hazarded, desired, and deserved by humankind. In *God in Search of Man*, Heschel says, “Life consists of endless opportunities to sanctify the profane [and]...to redeem the power of God from the chain of potentialities.”⁹ Opportunity implies ‘hazarded’ and ‘desired’. Potentiality implies ‘deserved’. There is a path to sanctity beyond this limbo of potentialities and it is, to Heschel, through the mitzvot, or ‘good deeds’. These good deeds are “spiritual ends or points of eternity in the flux of temporality.”¹⁰ Heschel likens ‘good deeds’ to a phenomenology of moments that pierce through time. Slavoj Žižek in *Organs without Bodies* also speaks of “moments of eternity in time.”¹¹ While Heschel and Žižek are both concerned with moments of eternity breaking through time, they disagree on how this breakage occurs. Žižek indicates revolutionary action.¹² Heschel explores the revolutionary action of the ‘good deed’. Žižek might say that revolution is a ‘good deed’ but I disagree that absolute destruction is required for change. Portia, like the Judeo-Christian God, is alone but, unlike her God, she ignores the finer actions, those which I claim

and as claimed by Jacques Derrida and Augustine, bring meaning to life.¹³ Derrida in “Rogues: Two Essays on Reason” claims that we must be “responsible guardians of the heritage of transcendental idealism.”¹⁴ Even if we are not actively taking part in ‘good deeds’ or mitzvot, Derrida calls on his reader to be a guardian of the mental state that seemingly can, itself, enable those same ‘good deeds’. Portia works continually in a bewitching manner to free herself but, possibly led astray by her father, does not realize that a behavior of kindness is necessary to actualize that freedom. For example, she speaks of mercy to Shylock (“The quality of mercy is not strained”) (4.1. 181) but does not actuate mercy (“He shall have merely justice, and his bond”) (4.1. 336). Because she does not act on her great speech, the words still retain their greatness, but she becomes even less holy in her hypocrisy and less trusted.

Besides using the powers of sexuality and magnetism to centralize herself, Portia also uses childhood training. For example, her comment “Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?” (4.1. 170) is more than a literal question. To Kiernan Ryan, Portia’s inquiry “foregrounds the dissolution of difference on which the trial scene is bent”¹⁵ It also, I add, demonstrates that Portia wishes to exalt herself above both men. Distance can distort perspective. By showing a confusion of physical details associated with Jews in an antisemitic culture, Portia’s goal could be to reveal that she is from a distant, or a heavenly place. As a woman, even disguised, and as a student of the law, she needs to prove her worthiness after having been “commend[ed]” (4.1 142) to the Duke. I would like to believe that her question is *only* a lesson on equality and inclusion transmitted by Shakespeare through Portia. I claim though that through Portia, Shakespeare reveals that pretense, in this case a pretense of holy distance, incapacitates even the finest of ideals. Portia’s celebrated monologue about mercy (“The quality of mercy is not strained”) (4.1. 180) suggests that she knows what to say about mercy and says it beautifully. She says, “We do

pray for mercy, / And that same prayer teaches us to all render / The deeds of mercy” (4.1. 196–198). She then negates her speech when she says to Shylock, ‘thou shalt have nothing but the forfeiture” (4.1. 339). She is, this thesis contends, parroting. She is parroting as children might do during a verbal exam. She describes mercy well, but she seems to see mercy as an object, not a belief. When God’s mercy does not convince Shylock, she turns to the next convincing object. She says, “Is he not able to discharge the money?” (4.1. 204).

Portia’s unflagging, unrelenting, hypnotic, and driven agency for a central role in her universe can be further explored if we track her drive in the plot.

Tracking Portia: A Dramatic Analysis

An analysis of Portia within the plot of *Merchant* might best begin with the invisible suitors. The invisible suitors refer to those in Act 1, Scene 2 who are ‘over-name[d]’ but never seen, for example, the Neapolitan Prince (1.2. 37). Portia uses her magnetic drive and imagination to seemingly lure the suitors to Belmont, suitors such as the fool who can only “talk of his horse” (1.2. 39), and the “vile” sponge who is “a little better than a beast” (1.2. 82-84). Portia does not speak of suitors who have positive attributes such as kindness or intelligence. She chooses to focus on their “dumb-show” (1.2. 68). Portia’s imagery is so vivid, we will soon see, it is as if her words form the suitors, sight unseen.

Before further discussion of the invisible suitors, it is reasonable to assess the importance of Belmont in the overall plot of *Merchant*. Kenneth Gross states that the Belmont and the Venetian plots are reflective.¹⁶ Portia and Shylock both want something material. They also “challenge[s] the idea of limits or accounting...[evoking] the possibility of linking a worldly

economy to something transcendental.”¹⁷ I agree with Gross that the quantitative dialogue of Portia, and Shylock borders on the transcendental. Portia speaks of limitless “sounds” (3.2. 51), “subjects” (3.2. 49), and herself twenty times “trebled” as well as “a thousand times more fair” (3.2. 153–154). The limitlessness indicates an otherworldliness even if the focus is material. However, any transcendence only applies if the world at large is not hurt by lingering materialism. Portia is so desperate for centrality that she overlooks the pain she causes. Morocco’s first words to Portia, “Mislike me not for my complexion” (2.1. 1) are possibly a defense from a previous insult by Portia. Portia’s need for centrality is exemplified in her great confession of love for Bassanio. She references herself 18 times and Bassanio half as much (3.2. 149–174). It seems odd that, in a confession of love, Portia talks about herself more than about the loved being.

The Belmont plot continually encroaches on the Venetian plot. Of the first nine scenes (Act 1, Scene 1 to Act 2, Scene 6) only two occur in Belmont. Of the remaining eight scenes before the trial (Act 2, Scene 7 to Act 3, Scene 5), five take place at Belmont and only three in Venice. It is an interesting structure, one that suggests a flip in focus from Venice to Belmont. I suggest that Belmont is foregrounded by Venice until Act 5 when the plots synthesize. One reason why Belmont is continually in the background is the outrageous bond of a pound of flesh. It is a ludicrous agreement that rightfully becomes the focal point of the play. Another reason that Belmont is foregrounded by Venice is Portia’s behavior. In her materialization of self, even if the cultural norm, she concurrently loses touch with her heart. The more masks and pretenses she acquires, whether that of the “little body” (1.2. 1), the “teach[er]” (1.2. 15), Diana (1.2. 102), or Balthazar (4.1), the more her heart is concealed. In comparison, and as will be continually discussed, Shylock and Antonio become increasingly revealed during the trial scene. The

agencies of the two plots seem to move in opposing directions. Shakespeare is possibly indicating, by giving dominance to the Venetian plot, a focus away from the pretenses of religion and self, and superficial love, towards inner truth. In Act 5, we will see, the convergence of plots at Belmont creates a new intensity and stripping of pretense in the symbolism of the rings. Until the ring debacle, Portia possibly feels her soul and true love only through the materialization of the self. She says to Bassanio, “Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours / Is now converted” (3.2. 166–167). The word ‘converted’ indicates a material, not a spiritual, exchange. Even if the Belmont scenes multiply as the play progresses, Portia, the mistress of Belmont, becomes increasingly lost even to herself.

Portia strangely attempts to access the abstract, and the nothingness of God, soul, and love, through materialization. She feels, I believe, that her (and her father’s) ability to control material beings will enable the centrality she needs. “Renowned suitors” (1.1. 169) in *Merchant* are seemingly daring dangerous adventures to access Portia through “[her] father’s imposition” (1.2. 99). Portia’s magnetism and the adventures of the suitors are so extreme that the caskets can be compared to the Ark of the Covenant. Referred to as the Ark of the Testimony (Exodus 25:16), the Israelites are told by God to place in the ark the *aydut* or testimony that He *will* give them. Note the future tense. The testimony is seen as the Ten Commandments. What makes this request confusing is that it occurs after the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. The contents of the ark are, therefore, both known and unknown.¹⁸ The caskets of *Merchant* and the biblical ark can be compared not only because they are boxes with intriguing, and unsure, contents. They are sought after and fantasized about. They are pivotal to their singular myths. Every scene at Belmont until the trial revolves around the caskets. Rabbinic dialogue arguably partly concerns the contents of the ark. Just as the ark contains possibly more than the stone

tablets on which are carved the Ten Commandments, the lead casket in *Merchant* might contain more than Portia's 'counterfeit'. Shakespeare is possibly saying that Portia is much more than the material contents of one of the caskets.

This juxtaposition of the Ark of the Testimony to the caskets is possibly Shakespeare's attempt to interrelate the abstract with the real. The weaving of the abstract with the real leads this thesis to a possible suggestion. I want to entertain a potential theory on the invisible suitors that seems rational in this analysis. Perhaps these suitors, detailed by Portia, do not exist. I think it is interesting to explore a situation in which the suitors are described by Portia and encouraged by Nerissa as figments of Portia's imagination. The bewitching and fantastical Portia has possibly decided to create these suitors in her mind to cement her centrality and her magnetism at least to herself, with the help of her loyal servants, before the real suitors arrive.

Simon Palfrey points out in *Shakespeare in Parts* that Act 1, Scene 2 is the only scene where Portia speaks in prose, rather than poetry.¹⁹ I suggest that Portia's imaginings in this scene are discerned from the real through the literary structure. The narrational descriptions suggest that the invisible suitors are different in form from the physical suitors with their poetic dialogue. The suitors are first described in Act 1, Scene 1 by Bassanio as coming from the "wide world" blown in by the "four winds" (1.1. 167–168). Portia's forehead is referenced as "temples" and her riches likened to the "golden fleece" (1.1. 170). The end of Act 1, Scene 1 might introduce the agency for Act 1, Scene 2. Belmont and Venice are two different places. Portia and Bassanio are represented in two different scenes. Theater, though, offers an invisible connection from scene to scene cemented in the witnessing of the audience. Just as Jessica, as we have seen, can possibly transmit and receive agency and essence, so can Portia. The myth of suitors described by Bassanio in Act 1, Scene 1 is possibly in part sensed by Portia and expanded upon by her in

Scene 2. While suitors are seeking Portia, both Bassanio and Portia possibly exaggerate the popularity of the myth. Bassanio's report of the myth to Antonio is strangely in the present tense. Bassanio says, "In Belmont is a lady richly left" (1.1. 161) and "Nor is the wide world ignorant of her wealth" (1.1. 167). The only way Bassanio could have heard about this myth, however, is through human circulation which is unreliable. I suggest that Bassanio uses the strong present tense to dispel any possible doubts of his claim. Bassanio has a "warranty" to "unburden all [his] plots and purposes" and to pay back his debt (1.1. 132–134). Bassanio needs a big myth for a big loan to hopefully pay off a bigger debt. It seems reasonable that the real suitors later adventure from Mediterranean cultures, such as Morocco, Iberia, and Venice. When Portia enters the stage, the real suitors, in this analysis, have not yet arrived. Portia is weary and tired of waiting for them. She is "weary of this great world" (1.2. 2). She, I suggest, might sense the essence of Bassanio's myth and create invisible suitors in her mind. She understands the power of story, as we all might in the present culture. Portia creates the story so the story can create more of itself, so suitors do finally appear, such as, finally, Bassanio. Portia and Bassanio's love—and they do, we will see, love each other—is partly created by mutual fantasies that overcome boundaries of scene structure, place, and time. That which is invisible, such as the first invisible suitors, sets the stage for invisible concepts, such as true love beneath love's pretense.

Many suitors, if real, would possibly communicate among themselves. Bassanio seemingly finds out about the suitors through human circulation. I question why the many suitors would keep choosing the same wrong caskets if their contents were already somehow known. If Bassanio has heard about the suitors through human circulation, the suitors would hear about the 'right' and the 'wrong' caskets through circulation as well. It makes sense in Shakespeare's plot that Morocco would choose the wrong casket, as does Arragon. Their mistakes possibly deliver

the lead casket to Bassanio. It is within the realm of possibility that Bassanio has conferred with these suitors en route. If Bassanio has not bribed them, Gratiano, who wants his “liver” to “heat with wine” (1.1. 81), might possibly jump at the opportunity. Moroccan, Iberian, and Venetian ships may have passed in the night. Bassanio’s speech in Act 3 (before he makes his choice) alludes to the contents of the gold and silver caskets. He speaks of “cowards” with “false” hearts (3.2. 83–84) and a “skull” as well as a “sepulcher” (3.2. 96). He hints at the “carrion death” (2.7. 63) found in the gold casket and the “fools head” found in the silver (2.9. 74). Bassanio is not bright enough to figure the lead casket on his own. He is so dense that in Act 4 he gives away the ring just promised to him by his wealthy wife despite the effort involved in winning her. Bassanio is bright enough to express poetry around his ‘choice’, I contend, but not to choose the lead casket through his own logic. We first meet Bassanio in Act 1 soon after he has “disabled his estate” through his own fault (1.1. 123). He sees a way out of debt through wealthy women but not through his mercantilist ingenuity (1.1. 161). He is not introduced by Shakespeare as particularly capable. Even if Bassanio figures the lead casket on his own, with the help from Portia, to be discussed, the earlier choosing of the wrong caskets (by Morocco and Arragon) builds dramatic tension. The invisible suitors are potentially necessary to the plot as ghosts or dream-men who centralize Portia and stand up to the ghost of her dead father.

It might feel strange, concerning the invisible suitors, that the servants follow Portia’s lead. Nerissa is continually submitting herself to Portia’s desires. Portia asks Nerissa to “over-name” the suitors (1.2. 34). ‘Over-name’ in Shakespeare is only found in the *Merchant* text. “Over-view” (4.3. 172), however, in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* evokes “a king...transformed to a gnat” (4.3. 163) and a “profound Solomon...tune[ing] a jig” (4.3. 165).²⁰ The imagery of Berowne’s ‘over-view’ arguably parallels the imagery of the ‘over-naming’ in *Merchant*. When

Shakespeare places the word ‘over’ before a verb, he is potentially accenting surreal and bizarre fantasies within the exercises of the mind.

The invisibility of the suitors cements what I see as Shakespeare’s theme of the spiritual and the otherworldly. There is something abstract and unknown about all of us that strangely can define us more than things. The invisible suitors remain alive beyond Portia’s descriptions. They seem to demand to be further portrayed. There is something about them not described, something eternal that ironically foregrounds the vivid details of Portia’s possible reveries. Jean-Luc Marion in “The Saturated Phenomenon” speaks of the beingness implicit in that which is invisible. Invisibility “establishes the terms of possibility taken in itself.”²¹ Invisibility would not be necessary if visibility were not possible. I suggest that the invisibility of the invisible suitors synthesizes with the invisible contents of the Ark of the Covenant and the *Merchant* caskets. This same invisibility possibly, and beautifully, synthesizes all of humanity in the eternal beyond anyone’s ‘counterfeit’. Material contents within even the lead casket are not, and can never be, for Portia or anyone, the ultimate find.

Morocco is the first suitor who is temporal enough to walk on the stage. There seems to be a line-up of suitors that reflects levels of temporality from the invisible to the ornamental. In a play in which the central characters are not assigned a style of dress, it is strange that Morocco is assigned white for his wardrobe (2.1 1). Shakespeare may have chosen white for aesthetic reasons. Shakespeare, like his contemporary, the artist George Gower, possibly wanted to ‘light’ up his subject. J. W Goodison in “George Gower, Serjeant Painter to Queen Elizabeth” claims that Gower would use white for spiritual accent. He claims, “The heads (of Gower’s clientele) stand out (from the white collars or ruffs) as if lit by a beam of strong light.”²² Sir Thomas Kytson in Gower’s 1573 portrait is not exactly Morocco of *Merchant*. I argue, however, that the

artistic effect in that portrait, and other portraits of the era, may have influenced Shakespeare's choice of white for Morocco. I am not referring to a political white, such as that of colonialism, but to an artistic white used to accentuate the supernal. Shakespeare possibly wanted Morocco to be partially, and continually, defined and cemented by his white wardrobe and the reflection or the 'beam of strong light'.

Before exploring Morocco further, this thesis will first acknowledge an article by Islam Issa, "Certainly the Muslim is 'the very devil incarnation': Islamophobia and *The Merchant of Venice*." In Issa's article, antisemitism towards Shylock is aligned with current Islamophobia.²³ Issa's major contribution is the synthesis of racial/religious hatred. Given this synthesis, each being can become active and driven in the negotiation of a world beyond hatred and, as per the title of this thesis, beyond violence. This world, as in *Loving Justice, Living Shakespeare*, by Regina Schwartz, is a world of love. Schwartz writes, "Shakespeare was...attuned to the troubles that plague contractual thinking [when] contractual thinking is called upon to govern both justice and love."²⁴

What we are looking at, as described by Anya Topolski in "Good Jew, Bad Jew" is a systemic problem.²⁵ Topolski claims that the European 'minority management' of Islam today is historically like that of the Jew.²⁶ 'Minority management' is based on Catholic theological intercession or "the intervention primarily of Christ, and secondly of the Blessed Virgin and the angels and saints, on behalf of men."²⁷ The political transformation of such intercession, as borrowed from Hannah Arendt, refers to the organization by European governments of political/financial representatives from within, for example, Jewish communities. *Shtadlanut* (as it is called) has been in place since the Middle Ages.²⁸ The replacement of the 'nation-state' by the military-industrial complex dictates that these intercessory positions, this thesis claims, are

now financial-political. Jewish ‘parvenus’ today are possibly respected judges on the US Supreme Court and investment brokers. *Shtadlanut* creates conflict within the Jewish people as some Jews, those who assimilate and compete for lucrative positions, are seen as ‘good’ or successful, and the others are seen as ‘pariahs’.²⁹ The pariah, according to Hannah Arendt, is a “bold spirit who trie[s] to make the emancipation of Jews *as Jews* to the ranks of humanity, rather than a permit to ape the gentiles.”³⁰ This thesis contends that the ‘apeing’ is no longer of the gentiles but those who support the present dominant corrupt infrastructure. I suggest that present society is not run by Christians necessarily, but by those who are the most successfully corrupt. We are no longer looking at a Christian/non-Christian dichotomy. We are looking at a corrupt/non-corrupt dichotomy, a construct that allows religions to interrelate but negotiates a different battle altogether. The ‘pariah’, in his stand against corruption, hatred, and hypocrisy, in this thesis, is seen as good.

This portrayal of the Shylock-experience as the Muslim experience by Issa excludes the integrity of the ‘pariah’. Shylock, as already discussed, uses and is used by the dominant Christian culture and is, therefore, a ‘parvenu’. While I sympathize with Shylock, any politicization of sympathy towards the symbolic Shylock, in other words towards the one who kowtows as representative to the corruption, only contributes to the atrocious ‘minority management’ and the related persecution. Antisemitism is a Christian concept. When Jews attach themselves completely to antisemitism and victimhood, they are for the most part being ‘parvenus’. I will be getting back to this. The Muslim people, Topolski contends, have not suffered from minority management until the present because they have only recently assimilated in large numbers in western countries. Topolski indicates that the European governments presently use such *Shtadlanut* tactics to create conflict within Muslim communities, as has been

done with the Jew. In the creation of ‘parvenus’, the governments create factions that weaken the Muslim culture. In reference to the Jewish people, the “conscious pariah is the minority...who refused...[between the wars]...to be controlled by the ruling powers, and who chose the only alternative which was exile—both from their own people and from the authorities.”³¹

Alienation from one’s own people is arguably the most difficult exile faced by the Jewish ‘pariah’. Rabbis such as Abraham Joshua Heschel and Arthur Green and philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin, I argue, negotiate the path of the ‘pariah’. In her forward to Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Marie-Louis Mallet questions,

whether what calls itself human has the right rigorously to attribute to man...to himself...what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the pure, rigorous, indivisible concept, as such, of that attribution.³²

In questioning ‘the right’ of man to claim the integrity refused to the animal, Mallet is championing the attributes of the ‘pariah’. The alienation of the ‘pariah’ is so monumentally large that it can be compared to the alienation of the beast. Kenneth Gross in *Shylock Is Shakespeare* claims that Shakespeare not only supports the pariah but relates to him (“*I whet my knife, my penknife, on my soul*”).³³ Julia Lupton in *Citizen-Saints* negotiates that path of the ‘pariah’ in her discussion of Benjamin (“Benjamin discovers the figure of the tyrant-martyr, at once sovereign and saint”).³⁴ Stephen Greenblatt gives credence to the Shakespearean ‘pariah’ in *Shakespeare’s Freedom* when he claims, “Shakespeare establishes and explores the boundaries that hedge about the claims of the absolute.”³⁵ Shakespeare, as does the ‘pariah’, explores boundaries. The ‘parvenu’ is romanticized and understandably defended in academia because he usually represents his otherized religion. I contend that any wish today to identify with or support a ‘parvenu’ as if against racism is confusedly, even if understandably, based on a destructive idea

of assimilation. This idea of assimilation ironically indicates the confluence of success with the capitalism and corruption of a flamboyant, colonizing, racist, and sometimes fascist nation. Defending a ‘parvenu’ validates that same confluence as well as the related violence many scholars seem to oppose. Drakakis rightly defends Shylock as the victim of “intolerant racism.”³⁶ Drakakis also accents the corruption of Shakespeare’s Venice. He quotes John Gillies, who calls the Venice of Elizabethan thought “self-consciously imperial” and the “marketplace of the world.”³⁷ Since Shylock assimilates to this corrupt Venice as a ‘parvenu’, the defense of Shylock also logically defends the rancid materialistic ethos which Drakakis decries. What is strange to me is that Drakakis in his criticism bravely defends human rights and concurrently defends the Jewish ‘parvenu’ in the person of Shylock. What Drakakis seems to be saying is that it does not matter if Shylock is a ‘parvenu’ or a ‘pariah’: he is Jewish. What I am saying is that it matters very much. In the present day, there is a huge difference between Bernie Sanders, for example, and Marc Zuckerberg. The first arguably defends humankind in his socialist political platform and the second, regardless of intention, uses humankind for materialistic means. Both men are Jewish. In defending the ‘parvenu’, even if the ‘parvenu’ is humiliated, one defends the corruption and the violence to which the ‘parvenu’ assimilates.

Portia, in this analysis, is a ‘parvenu’. She follows the system created by her father, that of the caskets so that she can secure her world from her father’s ghost. To do that, she follows the rules of the patriarchy and attempts freedom and love through centrality. She endeavors to be the central focus of everyone in her orbit. Portia, in Act 1, Scene 2, says what she wants (“to follow mine own teaching”) (1.2. 16–17), what she prefers (“a death’s head”) (1.2. 49), who she could forgive (the suitor who “despises” her) (1.2. 60), and who she would avoid (“a sponge”) (1.2. 94). By allowing herself to be, and by cementing herself as, the central figure of every

setting she enters, she is the perfect trophy, the exact thing created by her father. The materialization of self, I argue, is the action of a ‘parvenu’ in a materialistic society.

Morocco is a ‘pariah’. Morocco is the first suitor who breaks through the dramatic boundary from invisibility to being. Through his presence, he seems to defy Portia’s game of ‘over-naming’. At the end of Act 1 Scene 2, Morocco receives the same, for lack of a better word, blurb as applied to previous suitors, “If I could bid the fifth welcome with so good heart as I can bid the other four farewell, I should be glad of his approach” (1.2. 122–124). He then is given approximately 140 lines in Act 2, Scenes 1 and 7, far more than the silence awarded to the invisible and silent suitors.

Morocco is the first suitor to ‘break through’ because he is gifted with an enthusiasm for true love as well as an ancient vision of divinity. Morocco says, “let us make incision for your love” (2.1. 6). Morocco asks permission from Portia to cut, or circumcise himself, thereby showing the integrity of his love in his religion in both the respectful request and the ritualistic action. Morocco continues, “The best-regarded virgins of our clime / Have loved it [his hue] too” (2.1. 10–11). The virgins of Islam as symbolized in *Merchant* have a strange non-human physicality. They remain virgins despite ‘lov[ing]’ Morocco. I claim that this concept of the virgins in the Islamic scriptures can be compared to Ezekiel’s prophecy of exotic beings in the Hebrew scriptures (Ezekiel 10). The beings by God’s throne envisioned by Ezekiel have a strange non-human physicality. They have four faces, cherub, human, lion, and eagle. The fantastical imagery of Ezekiel, this thesis claims, can be compared to the fantastical in Islamic scriptures as represented by Morocco. Scenes of divine and multi-dimensional beings can be understood with greater depth through the concept of ravishment. Simon Smith discusses ravishment in *Musical Response in the Early Modern Playhouse*.³⁸ While Smith explores

ravishment through music, I add that the “compulsion”³⁹ found in music can also be found within poetic and scriptural imagery. The powerful magnetism of music can be compared to the magnetism of poetic language. In *Merchant*, Portia attempts to use ‘compulsion’, or ravishment, to win both her husband and her case in court. When Bassanio is choosing the caskets, Portia orders “Let music sound” (3.2. 43). When Shylock asks, “On what compulsion must I [release Antonio]?” (4.1. 179). Portia answers with her powerful speech, “The quality of mercy is not strained” (4.1. 180). Portia, in her direct answer to Shylock, uses imagery associated with mercy as ‘compulsion’ even if Shylock is not convinced. The focused study of scriptures, I suggest, can elicit a ‘compulsion’ in the scholar, as the focus on music can elicit that ‘compulsion’ in the listener. Gerardus van der Leeuw in *Sacred and Profane Beauty* claims that something like ravishment can be realized through scriptures and art such as painting and dance as well as rhythm and theater.⁴⁰ Van der Leeuw claims, “Art is nature and culture and in both, holiness is revealed...Through beauty, we can share in His work of new creation.”⁴¹ Van der Leeuw describes ecstasy in dance as ‘being danced’ and claims that “intoxication is contagious. It is transmitted from one man to the next, and finally, the entire world is swept along.”⁴² This ‘sweeping along’ of beauty, holiness, ecstasy, and mesmerizing pleasure suggests that people can possibly be ‘musick-ed’ or ‘imaged’ and arrive at an intoxicating and sensual gratification.

Portia transmits ravishment. She creates compulsive and amazing sensory experiences for those around her, not to satisfy them, but to become the goddess at the center of their world. Morocco says, “all the world desires her [Portia]” (2.7. 38). She is not, I claim, close to the heavenly God. She is alarmingly close to herself as a goddess in competition with God. Of course, it is the devil who is the grand competitor with God (as seen in Job 6–13). Schwartz illuminates this devilish element of Portia. In a twist, she applies Antonio’s condemnation of

Shylock (“the devil can cite scriptures”) to Portia.⁴³ I agree with Schwartz when it comes to Portia’s fantastical abilities, but perhaps she is taking Portia’s darkness a bit too far. Portia’s ability to affect ravishment, Shakespeare believes or so this thesis claims is what can also drive her towards a new paradigm of love.

The audience hears the casket riddles for the first time from Morocco. Morocco reads each in a *p’shat* manner. The *p’shat* is the basic interpretation in Judaism which itself is founded, in part, on Islamic mysticism.⁴⁴ Morocco logically reads the riddle of the lead casket (“hazard all he hath”) (2.7. 16), of the silver casket, (“as much as he deserves”) (2.7. 23), and of the gold casket (“what many men desire”) (2.7.37).

Morocco then engages in a linguistic Neoplatonist examination of each casket. In his imagistic portrayal of each, we will soon see, it is as if he is climbing “the ascending layers of the universe.”⁴⁵ No one says it better than Aaron W. Hughes, who, in *The Texture of the Divine*, does not mention Shakespeare or the character Morocco but compares the stories of Muslim poets Avicenna (980–1037) and ibn Tufayl (1116–1185) with the Jewish poet Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164). Such stories, Hughes claims, reveal the protagonist’s “intellectual and mystical ascent and culminate in the...apprehension of the divine.”⁴⁶ Morocco, I claim, is like a character in these ancient stories. It is as if he is on an imaginative ontological adventure in which he attempts to express the “cultural, intellectual... and aesthetic”⁴⁷ interconnections of his civilization through the caskets. Morocco seems to embody the mystical Islamic and the connected Jewish influence of aesthetics and imagination on his decision making. In language borrowed from Hughes, Morocco seems to understand and behave on the belief that “the beauty to be found in an object or heard in a harmony point[s] beyond itself, thereby situating the object or harmony within an ontological hierarchy.”⁴⁸ Hughes is saying that the divine overflows from

a visual/sensual experience so much so that the thing itself, the object, becomes active in its intimation of God. Marion establishes in “The Saturated Phenomenon” that this “unconditioned and irreducible phenomenon...offers a true possibility and does not just amount to ‘telling stories.’”⁴⁹ The object reflects a human intuition. We see and relate to the object. The object’s essence, however, can surpass the intuition of the human. There is more to the object than what we see. This concept relates to the essence or “aura” that, I claim, overflows between characters from scene to scene in *Merchant*. If we add the concept of the “aura” of Walter Benjamin⁵⁰ as discussed in previous chapters to the scholarship of Hughes and Marion, the ‘divine’ can seemingly overflow from people as well as things. It is not that these objects or people are super powerful in an uncanny way. It is simply that there is an imbalance between the perception of the phenomenon and the actual essence of the phenomenon in question. I add, and we will see with Portia, that this same imbalance or lack of “adequation”⁵¹ can occur within one being. There is, after all, the Portia that is ‘locked’ in the archetypal casket and the Portia who speaks (3.2. 40). These two Portias are disconnected. The outer pretense of self sometimes does not realize the divine saturation of truth ‘locked’ away within the inner self. This inability of the outer self is not because the truth of self is so very holy, even though I think it is. There is often an imbalance between the intuition of the outer self and the essence of the inner self. There is more to inner truth than what the outer self sees. The invisible essence overflowing between objects, beings, and parts of being is not a magic act. It is a happening of natural balance within a world of violent imbalance. This positive repair of balance can possibly happen among objects, beings, and parts of beings in *Merchant*. I will return to this.

Let us look carefully at how Morocco manages his hierarchical description of the caskets. Morocco begins his symbolic adventure with the lead casket. It is incomprehensible to Morocco

to settle and ‘hazard all’ for such a base metal. He says, “this casket threatens: Men that hazard all / Do it in hope of fair advantages” (2.7. 18–19). He is here describing the seemingly lowest of men in a thieving world. The silver casket he “weigh[s] with an even hand” (2.7. 25) and realizes that the ‘enough’ of “deserve enough” might not include the “lady” (2.7. 28). The silver casket to Morocco is missing something essential and sacred. When considering the gold casket, he faces the divine. He is there to “kiss this shrine” (2.7. 40) and he claims that his wild Arabia now acts as thoroughfares “for princes to come view fair Portia” (2.7. 43).

Morocco’s dialogue reveals a pragmatic ascension towards a Portia-esque supernal existence. It does not lead to God. It leads to Portia. His ascension, as discussed, is weirdly influenced by Portia’s enchantment. Morocco’s analysis includes an overview, a description, and a decision. Each piece of his monologue suggests the hierarchical and ontological ascension to the supernal, one illuminated by Hughes in his study of both Muslim and Jewish mystics from the Middle Ages. The only difference is that Morocco ascends to the supernal Portia. He says, “Why, that’s the lady.” (2.7. 31).

Morocco’s authenticity, as well as his incapability to completely compromise—he cannot after all change the color of his skin—does not attract Portia. After the intense and enamored vocalization of his deified path, her response is remarkably blunt. She says, “A gentle riddance.../ Let all of his complexion choose me so” (2.7. 79). She does not even say goodbye.

The person who suffers from unkindness is ultimately Portia. Her agency for centrality is powerful. She lures her suitors to her caskets with her dialogic exorcisms (“swear before you choose”) (2.1. 40), her imagery (“if he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil”) (1.2 123–124), her challenges (“You must take your chance”) (2.1. 38), and, we will see, her music (“music is / Even as the flourish when true subjects bow / To a new crowned

monarch”) (3.2. 48–50). She materializes herself, magnetizes men to her for her freedom, and materializes them in her derogatory comments about them. In this obsessive materialistic behavior, she acts as a ‘parvenu’.

Morocco does not succeed in his goal, but his behavior and dialogue suggest honesty. He desires to be the ‘parvenu’ but is defeated by his own integrity. He wins more than realized. He is the ‘pariah’ and leaves the stage having been the first suitor to break the boundary of stage-appearance. Let us now move on to Arragon. Shakespeare may have been using Arragon to demonstrate degrees of assimilation to Protestant culture, Shylock as the most assimilated and Morocco, the least. Arragon represents the foreign Iberian Catholic and, therefore, the in-between, the half-‘parvenu’, the half-‘pariah’.

Arragon, as ‘parvenu’, immediately makes a strange rather manipulative promise (“if I fail /...never in my life / To woo a maid in a way of marriage”) (2.9. 11–13). As Portia suggests in her response, “everyone doth swear” (2.9. 16), Arragon’s promise is a hard promise to keep. Arragon, this thesis claims, is not lying about his future restraint. He is revealing that he depends solely on the feelings of the present in disregard for a level-headed honesty. Arragon also degrades those lower than himself in status whether they “give or hazard” (2.9. 21) or join the “barbarous multitudes” (2.9. 32), a possible reference to the Muslim people during the Crusades.

He aligns himself with the ‘pariah’ when he says, “O, that states, degrees and offices / Were not derived corruptly” (2.9. 39–41). He is showing his wish not to take part in such corruption. Therefore, his choice of the silver casket reflects his negative experience of government policies resonant with ‘minority management’ and his true authentic self.

Portia degrades Arragon (“O, these deliberate fools!”) (2.9. 79) and, in her degradation, generalizes Arragon and materializes him and herself. While Arragon leaves Belmont, something else, something abstract, feels sorely taken from Portia upon his departure. As Nerissa says, “Hanging and wiving goes by destiny” (2.9. 82). Nerissa does not say who, however, is being hung. By the time Bassanio enters, Portia needs more than to engender her own stardom and centrality. She needs to centralize an inner truth that is slowly being concealed. Her authenticity has been concealed not by the grandeur of the story of the wealthy inheritress, but by the pretenses associated with the game of caskets. Those pretenses override her authenticity. Bassanio offers a twisted honesty through his pretense of non-pretense. He also, we will see, offers love.

Bassanio and Conclusion

In *Shakespeare in Parts*, Simon Palfrey analyzes this response of Portia to Morocco in Act 2, Scene 1,

In terms of choice I am not solely led
 By nice direction of a maiden's eyes.
 Besides, the lott'ry of my destiny
 Bars me the right of voluntary choosing.
 But, if my father had not scanted me
 And hedged me, by his wit, to yield myself
 His wife who wins me by that means I told you,
 Yourself, renowned prince, then stood as fair
 As any comer I have looked on yet
 For my affection. (2.1. 13–22)

This speech, as previously explained, demonstrates Portia’s awareness of the power of her ‘affection’. I also agree with Palfrey that there is a “battle for control between the line and the sentence” that makes Portia seem like a “caged animal.”⁵² I add that the enjambment in lines

13, 15, 18, 20, and 21 reveals a mounting panic. The sentences in this speech seem to escape from each line and rush to the next until they stop at ‘affection’. The superficial Portia with her polite rhetoric strangely helps to cage the panicked soul symbolized by the racing enjambment. The polite diction, such as ‘renowned prince’, keeps the racing soul in check. Portia’s soul is caged by her materialistic tendencies and the related pretense. She is caged not only by her father’s decree but by her own need to be objectified and materialized. Palfrey writes, “the emphatic succession of ‘I’, ‘a maiden’, ‘my’, ‘me’, ‘my’, ‘me’, ‘me’, ‘my selfe’, ‘me’, ‘I’” indicates the battering of her by her father’s ghost.⁵³ I add that Portia engages in self-battering as well. The succession of personal pronouns accents an ache that is not being addressed, an ache and cry for something astounding, free, mesmerizing, and ecstatic. Her mistake is that, as dictated by a materialistic culture, she believes that the closer she is to celebrity status, the closer she is to a blessed satisfaction. The more suitors, or viewers with whom she interfaces, the more she is defined by her pretense and restraints. Only her imagination, a shock, and the spiritual force of her escape as symbolized in the enjambed lines can free her from herself and her materialistic society. This leads us to Bassanio.

By the time Bassanio arrives, Portia’s self-objectification has led to such an escalation of inner panic that there is an associated loss of composure. When discussing the “Venetian[’s]” (2.9. 86) approach, she says to the messenger, “I am half afeared /...he is some kind of kin to thee” (2.9. 95–96). Portia’s “edginess”⁵⁴ discussed by Palfrey, I claim, reaches its peak in that direct degradation of her servant. The escalation of that outer edginess reflects the escalation of her inner panic. She is, I argue, already connected to Bassanio. She has not only met him when he was possibly accompanying the “Marquis of Montferrat” (1.2. 108–109), but they have possibly already connected “beyond what can be seen or put into words.”⁵⁵ Bassanio speaks of

her in Act 1 and then she appears. The essence that connects Portia and Bassanio between scenes is concealed by the harsh pretense that comes with objectification. Portia needs to prove everything to everyone. She is defined by how she is seen. Jessica and Lorenzo are possibly alone at least three times (2.8. 8–9, 3.5. 58–83, and 5.1. 1–24, 49–65). Antonio and Bassanio are alone in Acts 1 and 4. Gratiano and Nerissa in Act 5, Scene 1 between lines 141 and 142 have spoken alone, even if not happily. Portia and Bassanio are never alone. Their love is an object of public knowledge even if real love might be concealed. The only love that the audience sees is that of show. When Bassanio is about to choose the casket, Portia says, “Nerissa and the rest, stand all aloof.” She (or Nerissa) does not say, as with the other suitors, “Draw the curtains” (2.7. 1) (2.9. 1). Curtains do not need to be drawn for Bassanio because Bassanio and Portia are already on display with or without the curtains. For Bassanio and Portia, the curtains are always analogically up. Since their love is a public event, Portia quantifies her love for public show. If everybody knows that they love each other, then their love is big. In *Merchant*, everybody knows that Bassanio is faithful, except for a moment. His lack of faith concerns the rings (4.1. 448–449). Gratiano, Nerissa, Lorenzo, Jessica, and Antonio witness Bassanio’s same infidelity. The rings become a place holder for infidelity, sexual included. There is something else though, a deeper love and a deeper symbol for the rings, which I argue does not depend on public knowledge. The deeper symbolism of the rings will be explored in the next chapter. The deeper love is expressed by Portia through her ravishment of Bassanio. This ravishment is suggested, we will soon see, in her song (3.2. 63–72).

I want to return to Portia’s ability to transmit her essence. Portia’s growing impatience with her suitors strangely seeps, I claim, into Act 3, Scene 1. There, Shylock, searching for Jessica, delivers his ‘Hath not a Jew eyes?’ speech. In the background of this speech, we are

aware that the exhausted Portia, after her demeaning of Arragon, waits for Bassanio. Meanwhile, on the stage, the demeaned Shylock expresses his horror at his stigmatization. Here, therefore, in a fantastically synthesized manner, we ourselves become capable of that same enchanted transfiguration that Portia continually demonstrates. In our minds-eye, Shylock appears weirdly affected by Portia's derogatory language and being. We interconnect Shylock and Portia. This is logically impossible, of course. The two characters are not yet aware of each other. However, there exists an interrelation of characters which is founded not only on the plot—one enters almost immediately after the other exits—but on dramatic influence. The presence of Shylock and Portia is too juxtaposed and intense to attempt to reject their deep synthesis. We the audience become capable of that mental transfiguration of their hearts and souls beyond logical understanding. This possibility of synthesis among those unaware of each other, and the audience as a witness, is earlier suggested at the end of Act 1, Scene 2. There, Portia aligns Morocco with the devil and then intimates the arrival of Shylock “at the door” (1.2. 129). Shylock is seen as the devil and is connected to Morocco before Antonio defines him as such (“The devil can cite Scriptures”) (1.3. 94). This thesis claims that Portia harms Shylock continually in the play even if he is not directly related to her world until Act 4. In our mental beings, we witness this strange interplay of harm despite all logic.

I argue that if our mental beings, or our mental cauldrons, can intermix the horrific and the dark, they can also intermix the exquisite. This might seem like an unlikely happening in our present corrupt and vile society. Perhaps it is exactly and painfully that same vileness which might cause us to decidedly re-determine a cauldron's ingredients. Cauldrons, after all, can hold seemingly anything. Portia, at the arrival of Bassanio, announces her inability to logically “teach [him] / how to choose [the caskets] right” (3.2. 10–11). Portia then entices him with her

sexuality, “your eyes, /...have o’er looked me and divided me” (3.2. 15). She indicates her enchantment by her wish to “draw [time] out in length” (3.2. 680). Portia with her sorcery enables and orders a ravishment by music (“let music sound”) (3.2. 43). She claims this music will have such an effect that any loss will be for Bassanio “swanlike” (3.2. 44) and any win will make of Bassanio a “new-crowned monarch” (3.2. 50) to whom subjects greet him in their “bow” (3.2. 49) and trumpets in their “flourish” (3.2. 49). In Portia’s uncanny musical enchantment, she draws out a new ability within herself, a calm and elegant clairvoyance, yet undiscovered and even beautiful.

Portia’s fantastical ability, which I have previously likened to that of the witches of *Macbeth*, to elicit her own centrality is drawn out in her song, the intention of which is not to “sommambulate to murder”⁵⁶ but to invoke an aural magnificence where all can hear “fancy’s knell” (3.2. 63). Through her song or incantation, she can become not someone else but herself transformed. In her transformed state, which is her, she can have the power to revolutionize pain to pleasure and fear to healing. Portia, with the song, uses ravishment to possibly transmit answers and truths with greater speed and strength than as if through singularly logical conduits. Portia uses her enchanted powers to create a cauldron, not of objectified and dismembered suitors, but her keener, finer, holy, and artistic talents. Portia uses exquisite melody and harmony to transform herself, to allow a flow of inner truth to outer pretense. We watch her transform from “in the heart” to “in the head” to “in the eyes” to the “cradle” in which “fancy dies” (3.2. 63–71). This cradle is, of course, where rebirth must happen, since a cradle logically is not for the dead, but the newborn. Transformed, Portia can now elicit an epiphany within Bassanio and instruct him of the right casket. She can do this *through* the created ravishment of music. Having moved between the figurative curtains of life and death in facing her dead father she now moves

through curtains of ravishment and reality. It is not, therefore, the seductive and ravishing music that inform Bassanio. It is Portia's ability, in her transformation, to transmit loving secrets through the music. If Bassanio is too dense to sense Portia's powerful ravishment, he can certainly rhyme 'bred' with lead. I claim that Bassanio would need to think hard, though. He is not seemingly the most intelligent of Shakespeare's characters. Before Act 1, he seemingly cannot even find Antonio on his own. He needs Lorenzo and Gratiano to show him the way. Lorenzo says, "since *you* have found Antonio" (1.1. 69) but I argue that Lorenzo is being polite as both Lorenzo and Gratiano leave soon after (1.1. 105–112). Bassanio can intuitively respond to Portia's ravishment. Portia's secret is heard. Bassanio picks the right casket. Portia's powerful abilities are not surprising. Shakespeare, as already discussed in this thesis, does not restrain himself from attributing surreal and transformative elements to his characters as exemplified by the "resurrection" of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*.⁵⁷

This transformation on the part of Portia is fleeting. It is not her epiphany as defined in this thesis. She does not realize that the center of the world is not the outer Portia. She does not realize that this center is arguably the abstract greatness of which her soul is a piece. Her outer self does not recognize the 'saturated' essence of her invisible truth. She cannot see that her soul synthesizes with the contents of her caskets and in my analysis, within the symbolic ark of testimony, as discussed. She returns quickly to her material self once her goal has been met, "You see me Bassanio where I stand" (3.2. 149). She has not accessed an amazing epiphany of lasting transcendence, but she is possibly one step closer on the path. She uses ravishment to access the true love concealed by pretense to influence the beloved. She returns to pretense once the task is done. I like to think, though, that she might one day transmit her essence from one part of herself to the other, from the truth within her being to her outer self. In this, the truth of love

might finally foreground its pretense and the associated pain. If the transference of essence can possibly happen between characters, between objects, as we have learned from Morocco, and between scenes in a play, it can possibly happen within one character. Portia, in describing herself, does say, “but she may learn” (3.2. 161). And then, “but she can learn” (3.2. 162). She is speaking to Bassanio about herself. We see in one astounding moment that Portia, even materialistic Portia, has a potential of transcendence and true love. Then, we once again get caught up in the plot.

The game of the caskets is finally terminated bringing down with it a dead father’s philosophies and the damaging archaic patriarchal subjugation. Portia would seemingly be thrilled. She would seemingly have reached her goal of stardom and centrality on her climactic path. However, she still feels frustratingly placed aside, this time by a new construct, the unknown and frightening relationship between the enterprising Bassanio and the un-Christ-like Antonio, “a friend of this description” (3.2. 296). Still incapable of procuring her impossible centrality and freedom even now that her father is arguably exorcised, she charges into the trial with the myopic agency to defeat Antonio. This leads us to the trial, to her epiphany, and the debacle of the rings. While the rings are not a character, their importance is so penetrating and visceral in *The Merchant of Venice* that tracking them dramatically, in this analysis, can help to illuminate the play.

Notes

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 10. Heschel, *God*, 45–61.
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 14. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 138.

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15. Kiernan Ryan, “‘The Deed of Kind’: *The Merchant of Venice*,” in *Shakespeare’s Comedies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 117.
16. Kenneth Gross, *Shylock Is Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 38–41.
17. Gross, *Shylock*, 38.
18. The linear sequence pertaining to revelation and determining the contents of the important ark remains indefinite in Jewish thought. Rabbis such as Nachmanides, Maimonides, and Ibn Ezra, for example, do not agree on the chronology of the revelation, the receiving of the covenant, and the building of the tabernacle and the ark. The comment “there is not early or late in the Torah” or אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה has appeared in the Babylonian Talmud and the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael. Concerning the events of the Torah, the Jewish people do not know in certainty what came first. The testimony that God *will* give the Israelites to be placed in the ark can be, I suggest, the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments (as is the normative interpretation) or a future gift, something else, something abstract in its lack of definition, something that, I like to think, is possibly hopeful and beautiful. For a quick explanation, see Shua Solomon, “The Chronology of the Torah,” *Torah Eretz Yisrael* (April 2020), <https://mizrachi.org/the-chronology-of-the-torah/>. Also see the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, and the Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah 7a, Sefaria, https://www.sefaria.org/Jerusalem_Talmud_Megillah.7a.1?lang=bi
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Conclusion

The Trial and the Rings

Twentieth-century critical history of *The Merchant of Venice* overwhelmingly attributes the climax of that play to the trial scene. Stephen Greenblatt claims that the trial marks the closing moment when Shylock “shrivels into nothingness.”¹ John Drakakis claims that “the bond [during the trial] is overturned by... a literalism turning against itself.”² I agree that the bond, conceived as a “merry sport” (1.3. 141), assumes a literal interpretation by the time of Act 4. Shylock says that Bassanio cannot “rail the seal from off [the] bond” (4.1. 138). Shylock sees the bond’s seal as proof of its legitimacy. In *A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages*, Laura Whatley underscores the important function of 16th-century wax seals in legal administration as well as in “heraldry, family lineage, and pedigree.”³ The seal and the bond in *Merchant* are mutually indicative but the seal stresses the societal construct as well. In *Merchant*, Portia first attempts to turn Shylock from his bond by means of mercy or the “attribute of God himself” (4.1. 191). Portia’s powerful speech on mercy does not convince Shylock who “craves the law” (4.1. 202). Portia seems unsuccessful in her bid to save Antonio. She then says, “Tarry a little, there is something else” (4.1. 301). She ‘overturns’ the literal interpretation of the bond with an added literal interpretation gleaned from Venetian statutes. She says to Shylock, “This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood” (4.1. 302). The successful ‘overturning’ of one ‘literalism’ by another means that bonds and laws can be ‘overturned’. This perpetual ‘overturning’, Shakespeare is possibly saying, might demonstrate an innate defect in literal interpretations of legal documents, the law itself, and the court as an institution. Another day and with another lawyer, a new interpretation of the bond could possibly ‘overturn’ the argument of the ‘jot of blood’. Shylock

refers to Portia as a “Daniel” (4.1. 219). Gratiano, joyful at Portia’s new ‘literalism’, refers to Portia as a “second Daniel” (4.1. 329). What stops a third literal interpretation and a call to a seemingly third Daniel? A fourth? Laws historically fluctuate, which makes them flexible, and that is good, but also not dependable. For a present example, the 13th Amendment of the United States was written to free the black slaves after the American Civil War. A phrase in the amendment indicates that black people are free as long as they are not incarcerated for a crime.⁴ This phrase creates a loophole that enables the further ‘slavery’ of the black population at work camps through incarceration for crimes as petty as loitering and public intoxication.⁵ If a practical law in the real world cannot assure freedom despite its seeming fair intentions, I suggest, a corrupt bond in Shakespeare’s Venice cannot assure anything positive given its questionable reward, a pound of flesh. If the law is not supported by moral agency, Shakespeare seems to be saying, it becomes a sham. I argue that this ‘overturning’ of the bond in *Merchant* is best described as an overthrow and not just of the bond but of everything associated with its ‘seal’, the prevailing social/religious/political construct. This is possibly why Shakespeare includes an Act 5. Shakespeare needs an Act 5 to offer a replacement to that which has been overthrown, a replacement that is not false but honest, even if it requires clarification.

I argue that the agency of the *Merchant* plot reflects the agency of the characters. The plot intimates a climactic path driven towards satisfaction, whether human or divine. Antonio, in the first words of the play, cements this path when he questions why he is “sad.” He suggests that he is to “learn” (1.1. 1–6). His climactic path and that of the play intimate an experiential drive that seemingly leads away from sadness to satisfaction. I have discussed this in the chapter on Antonio. However, when one man such as Shylock is humiliated, satisfaction, individual, or community, is impossible. This does not mean that the plot stops. The plot maintains its drive.

After the trial, Bassanio is prepared to “fly towards Belmont” (4.1. 453). The drive within the plot still exists and has to go somewhere. The play cannot end at Act 4 because the dramatic action has been seemingly cut off by Antonio’s non-crucifixion and must, by its nature, continue towards a climax. The rings remain. The rings, we will see, become the needed replacement of the old overthrown paradigm. The rings become more than just rings. Their ability to remain after the seeming societal overthrow makes them strangely magical and transcendental. The rings potentially realize the ‘event’ as described in earlier chapters. Slavoj Žižek describes the ‘event’ as “the effect that seems to exceed its causes.”⁶ Up until now in this thesis, the ‘event’ has been abstract. I describe the ‘event’ as the trace of what fulfillment might be. The rings, we will see, in their thingness, become a phenomenon that has substance. They fantastically realize a supernal connection with such depth that the connection seems phenomenal and unreal. Yet the rings are real. The rings, therefore, make the phenomenal real. The rings offer a new supernal vision after the seeming failure of Judaism and Christianity to do the same. The rings become a physical epiphany at the center of Act 5.

This chapter will first engage in the key concepts and ideas that contribute to this analysis. Then it will review the trial and focus on the ultimate epiphany of the play as signified through the rings.

Key Concepts and Ideas

This section begins with the 19th-century essayist William Hazlitt. Hazlitt suggests that there are “individual beauties... [in *The Merchant of Venice*] ...which are... significant [and] pregnant with meaning.” Hazlitt references the performance of Shylock by Edmund Kean at the Drury

Lane in 1814.⁷ This thesis claims that ‘individual beauties’ can also be applied to the dramatic text. The plural of beauties intimates many. One ‘beauty’ in the phrase ‘individual beauties’ possibly leads to the next. Words are figurative ‘beauties’ in Jewish thought. Singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen arguably interprets the mystical *Zohar* when he infers “a blaze of light in every word.”⁸ ‘Every word’ intimates many. We possibly see these ‘beauties’ in Shylock’s speech bemoaning his daughter in Act 3. Shylock begins with the line, “Why, there, there, there, there! A diamond gone cost me two thousand ducats” (3.1. 76–88). The four calls to ‘there’ imply a drive to somewhere else, somewhere possibly divine. The word ‘there’ feels like it grows beyond its literal meaning to indicate the desired recess from pain. The words “precious” (3.1. 79) and “loss” (3.1. 84) are repeated twice each and, in their juxtaposition, possibly are mutually intensified. Precious becomes even more precious. The plural of “sighs” and “tears”—“no sighs but o’my breathing, no tears but o’my shedding” (3.1. 87)—indicates flow. The flow of air possibly indicates life, and the flow of tears, healing. Shylock’s speech, I argue, contains words that suggest a supernal force. The speech is a tragic expression of Shylock’s loss and otherization. However, even within a speech notorious for its darkness, ‘beauties’ can exist and offer repair.

Shylock’s speech of Act 3 is heard in a theatrical space. George Home-Cook in *Theater and Aural Attention* speaks of “an ongoing intersensory process of dynamic embodied attending” that happens to the listener.⁹ Listening is not a ‘static’ action. Listening does not mean that our ears are recording each word in a perfect replica of the written text. I add that when we listen, certain words cognitively become prominent and form their own groups or ‘threads’ within our mental beings. In the present, these ‘threads’ can be compared to online discussions. The thread of an online discussion is within a larger platform, for example, but is also distinct. A

structuralist analysis of Shylock's speech, such as one influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure,¹⁰ would possibly minimize these figurative 'threads'. It would possibly argue that Shylock's speech only signifies the discussion of personal loss and otherization. Meaning in Saussure's philosophy is singularly derived from the linear representation of words. In response, Bento Prado Jr. argues, quoting from Ludwig Wittgenstein,¹¹ that the linear limitations of language,

invite us to 'dive down into primordial chaos and to feel at home there', to bring back some seashells, some traces... This is an operation that is ethical, aesthetic, and religious, but it is also the *telos* of philosophy, when it renounces the condition of theory or of representation and becomes a vision of its own limits and of the limits of the world or of life.¹²

The 'trace' is encapsulated by Jacques Derrida as a "way out of the closure imposed by the system."¹³ Prado is saying that the 'traces' or 'seashells' are found within an 'operation' that is at once religious and philosophical. In recognizing the limits of the literary narrative, as stated by Wittgenstein and explained by Prado, this analytic 'operation' expands the limits of the narrative itself. I add that the only way to see limits is to see what is beyond them. What defines a limitation is what is beyond it. What defines language is what it is as well as a vision beyond its literal limitations. Language that cannot reach beyond its literal limitations or address them, I argue, lacks definition, and possibly loses meaning. Prado and Wittgenstein seem to reference a literary narrative. I argue that Wittgenstein's theories can be applied to a dramatic text. The theater intensifies this 'operation' described by Prado. It is also possible that 'seashells' and 'traces' are sometimes experienced in groups as are 'individual beauties'. These 'beauties' and 'traces' do not group in some fairyland world that is unreachable and nonsensical. They group here and now as we listen in our 'individual embodied experience' and as Shylock, or other characters, speak. The 'beauties' point to an intense meaning that connects with the literal meaning. The drama includes both this vision beyond the limits of language and the literal text.

Our minds, I contend, have the power to engage in both this intense vision and the text at once. In Hebrew, this twin engagement with language is found *within* language. The word *davar*, for example, indicates both word and thing.¹⁴ Jean-Luc Marion in “The Saturated Phenomenon” speaks of the expansive unseen essence of things.¹⁵ Groups of certain words within the dramatic text can possibly arouse our curiosity or attention. Concerning *Merchant*, it is worthwhile to investigate those words, why they might stand out in our minds, and how they manage to indicate transcendence even within the corruption of the setting. In our ability to synthesize the ‘traces’ with the literal text, “life becomes transcendental.”¹⁶ We can understand each ‘trace’ or ‘individual beauty’ as an ‘event’. The ‘event’ to Žižek is a moment that “transcend[s] its historical context out of which a phenomenon emerges [and becomes] ...the spark of eternity, of virtual potentiality that is there forever.”¹⁷ Žižek is interested in how an ‘event’ that transforms history can also take place within history. While Žižek focuses on time in the above quote, Wittgenstein, in his work, focuses on language. I argue that perhaps Wittgenstein offers a partial answer to Žižek’s concern and that both scholars can help with our understanding of the rings of *Merchant*. Wittgenstein stresses that the vision of limitations, within the word and the text, enables both the word and the text to expand beyond those same limitations. Perhaps time can be seen the same way. If we envision the temporal limitations of the moment, the moment potentially becomes more than the moment. The moment becomes an intense moment or an ‘event’. If we connect Žižek to Wittgenstein, limitations strangely contribute to an intensification and expansion of both the moment and the word. The moment’s expansion beyond its limitations makes it an ‘event’. The fact of the moment itself places it within time. Human love, I add, is within a larger universal power, as the moment is within time. Love, I think, is always an ‘event’. Limitations imposed on love in *Merchant*, I suggest, are usually caused by the harsh materialistic

setting. Lorenzo describes his ‘muddy vesture of decay’. After the expression of this ‘decay’, he can then embark on a speech about both love and music in which “unhandled colts... fetch mad bounds” (5.1. 73). The ‘trace’ as defined by Derrida and indicated by Prado, the ‘beauties’ of Hazlitt, and the ‘event’ of Žižek are similar but not the same. They are mutually indicative in that they all seek meaning beyond textual, temporal, and human limitations. ‘Traces’ and ‘events’ intensify that which they are in, remain within it, and find a way beyond it through that same intensification. The power of the ‘trace’ and the ‘event’ partly depends on our willingness to feel their expansive potential.¹⁸ This intensity in the text, from now on called the intense text, can feel strange. We may not want to see it. It might feel that this intense text in *Merchant* is not practical or real. It might feel distinct and different from the literal text. I contend, however, that both texts, literal and intense, synthesize within the drama and are equally important. In the Hebrew language, the intensive reflexive verb form is within the text, not in some other world. Intensity, I argue, is not outside of language, but within it. Love, in its intensity, depends on the characters’ willingness to see its expansive beauty, potential, and synthesis within their lives. The characters may not want to see it. It might feel, possibly to Antonio for example, that it is not practical. Antonio, after all, says, “fie, fie” (1.1. 46). Love might feel too dream-like and impossible, as well as distinct and different from the seeming expectations of life. Lorenzo describes those who view only a limited love as “dull as night” (5.1. 86). He claims he is speaking of music, but as I have claimed in the chapter on him, he also speaks of love. The rings, we will see, in their synthesis with the *Merchant* plot demonstrate that love is finally the plot. Ultimately, the rings can lead to a transformed paradigm of intense love which is badly needed both in Shakespeare’s Venice and our present world. I will be indicating this transformation through an analysis that tracks the rings, just as I have tracked certain characters.

Allison P. Hobgood sees the rings as an apparatus and a physical dependency. She describes them as a verb or an “encounter insofar as [they] enable ways of knowing, embodied cognitions and intersubjective relations that fundamentally reconfigure phenomenological experience.”¹⁹ The rings are things that do things. They help the characters to tap into deep feelings and visions. And, we will see, they can transform our vision of the unknown and otherworldly. In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida does not mention *Merchant*, but he uses the dialogue of Hamlet to portray the quest for an apparatus, but an apparatus of time. Hamlet says, “the time is out of joint.”²⁰ This line, to Derrida, specifies a breakage in time. In recognizing this breakage in time, Hamlet then seemingly can seek a ‘joint’ which might fix it. Hamlet’s possible success is not the subject of this thesis. The rings in *Merchant*, I claim, are that joint. The rings become the solid thing through which the corruption of their past symbolism can be overthrown. They become the apparatus by which their transforming agency can fix time. Portia gives the rings to Bassanio “even now, but now” (3.2. 169). Portia includes the present ‘but’ the present, or the past and future, in her promise of love. I suggest that the rings allow eternity and love to meet with time. This way the new paradigm to which they point can be accessed past, present, and future. The rings, we will see, create a setting in which love foregrounds time.

The transformation of the rings, even if in the future, must be in the present because transformation is bigger than time. Humanity creates time. Derrida begins *Specters of Marx* with a description of the moment as “not docile to time.”²¹ The transformative moment, since it stands in front of us or anyone, must also precede us.²² Derrida claims that if a transformation is happening in the future, it is happening now. The rings as ‘joint’ possibly fix time continually and allow beings to realize their love, continually.

Before attempting a textual analysis of the rings, we must first look at the trial. During the trial, Kenneth Gross claims that “all bonds get tangl[ed] up with something else.”²³ This chapter will next review the trial as perceived by the characters as discussed in the chapters on them.

The Trial

In this thesis, I have analyzed five characters to demonstrate their potential epiphanies. The trial, I suggest, becomes the symbolic nerve-center where the characters’ blocked paths converge. The next five paragraphs review each character’s singular connection to the trial.

Lorenzo is at Belmont when informed of Shylock’s loss. He immediately embarks on a soulful adventure towards “immortal souls” (5.1. 63) and the audible ‘motion’ of the eternal. His epiphany is delayed by his “muddy vesture of decay” (5.1. 64). While Lorenzo cannot seemingly hear the supernal, he can hear the report of “good news” (5.1. 47) of the trial. His delayed epiphany, I have argued, delays his ability to hear Jessica, as well as his God, and to realize his great love for Jessica in full. Shakespeare shows us, through Lorenzo, that divine intimacy, like music, can transform lovers into sexually and spiritually synthesized beings as real and glorious as “the floor of heaven” (5.1. 58). The ‘decay’ of which Lorenzo speaks is caused in part by his cowardly and antisemitic silence in response to the trial. His refusal to defend Shylock hinges on his interpellation within the systemic racism typified by his community. The trial strangely cultivates a vision of the epiphanic for Lorenzo and dims that vision. Lorenzo is not discouraged but aware that he must transform. In saying that some men are not “trusted” (5.1. 88), he is showing his desire to be trusted. The proximity of the epiphanic excites Lorenzo and he hurriedly

drives himself towards the “sweet power” of not only music but of a fantastically real eternal love (5.1. 79).

Antonio, during the trial, begins to understand perhaps a trace of fulfillment as a result of a shock. The shock transpires when his Christ-like death is stopped. Shylock says, “Let the Christian go” (4.1. 316). Antonio’s possible erotic love for Bassanio, I have claimed in the chapter on Antonio, creates a map in Antonio’s mental being of love. His repression, partly instigated by homoerotic feelings, contributes to an antisemitism and a racism that limits his epiphany. Oddly, Antonio leaves Venice, his home and the place of Shylock’s imminent conversion, immediately after the trial. Antonio might feel that his home is weirdly ‘emptied’ of its ethos. Christian tropes have failed him. Portia says to Bassanio of Antonio upon their arrival at Belmont, “You should be...much bound to him, / For,..he was much bound for you” (5.1. 136–137). The once passive Antonio responds that he is “acquitted” from the bond, thereby grouping the overthrow of all bonds, legal, financial, and personal. (5.1. 138). The rings strangely cause Antonio to be bound again, this time as Bassanio’s “surety” (5.1. 254). The overthrow of the bond’s ‘literalisms’ at the trial possibly enables the illumination of a new bond concerning the rings. While Lorenzo is driving head-on towards the supernal, Antonio seems to be harnessing his agency and blocked path to negotiate a new bond symbolized by the rings.

Shylock, by the time of the trial, seemingly relies on a climactic path driven towards Jewish revelation but is blocked, I claim, by victimhood. Shylock is understandably angered by the loss of his daughter to the men who humiliate him. He sees the trial not as a way of community transformation but as his path to personal “revenge” (3.1. 49). He does not say, I stand for judgment to help those in need. He says, “*I* stand for judgment. Shall *I* have it?” (4.1. 102). The trial indicates Shylock’s possible and figurative ‘sacrifice’ of Antonio and rescinds

that same sacrifice. With Shylock's 'false' sacrifice rescinded, Shylock's connection to his God is seemingly gone. When the 'literalism' of the bond is overthrown by another 'literalism', that concerning the 'jot of blood', the bond is seemingly overthrown. Shylock not only needs a new 'sacrifice' after the trial. He arguably needs a new law. He asks, "Is that the law?" (4.1. 310). As with Antonio and the Christ-sacrifice, Shylock's revelation has not transpired but not because there is something wrong with his singular religion. Both characters use materialistic images to understand religion as if God is to be "dearly bought" (4.1. 98). The trial, in its overthrow of a Judaism materialized and minimized to victimhood, leaves Shylock "not well" (4.1. 392) but also, not eliminated. Shylock, in his shock, is open to transformation. After the trial, Shylock is not driving himself towards an epiphany like Lorenzo or jumping from bond to bond as does Antonio, now 'surety' for the rings. Shylock leaves the trial not in a state of nothingness, as claimed by Greenblatt, but 'emptied' and ready to receive the gift as described by Derrida. Derrida explains that the gift results not from a surplus but a vacuum.²⁴ Lowell Gallagher says it best: "For Derrida, the gift's spirit is a subtraction from our everyday phenomenal world...that creates a space when new things emerge."²⁵ By experiencing a vacuum of revelation in his being, Shylock strangely attracts the related epiphany.

Jessica, like Lorenzo, is not present at the trial. Jessica has been exposed to Shylock's victimhood possibly all her life. Jessica is ignored or degraded by her father, respected but otherized by her lover, and slighted as are most Jews and women in the Venetian society. Such inescapable otherization leads to her radical and individuated search for a spiritual/earthly/sexual sanctuary. This need for sanctuary drives her towards her epiphany. In this way, she is very much like Lorenzo. They both prioritize the epiphanic and yearn to express that dynamic love fully in each other's company. However, she does not know how to realize the epiphany within

her very real social humanity. The trial is part of that social humanity. The trial, in its harsh temporality, for Jessica symbolizes the exact situation that she cannot yet synthesize. It creates a question in her mind and it strangely leads to her silence. The only response to a corrupt humanity, she is realizing, is silence. Her comment “I am never merry when I hear sweet music” (5.1. 69) reflects her supernal intimacy and her painful distance from the temporal. Jessica, in her silent reaction to both Lorenzo and Shylock, reveals an inner vacuum like that of Shylock. Jessica’s silence enables an inner intensity that strengthens her drive towards the epiphany. She shares this drive with Lorenzo. Lorenzo and Jessica complete each other and need that completion to courageously drive themselves forward. What is amazing about this couple is that despite the cultural challenges, they manage to strive together towards their ultimate loving and divine satisfaction and a new paradigm of repair.

Portia’s need for star-like status is demonstrated by her behavior at the trial. Portia, I have claimed, uses the trial to cement her importance and free herself from subjugation. Portia weirdly thinks that her star status will free her and forward the ‘right’ and true love. The seeming problem is that regardless of Portia’s drive, her centrality is continually lacking. This possibly frustrates her. She, in her mind, is not central or visited enough. Portia is on a climactic path similar to that of Antonio and Shylock, but her goal does not resonate with Christianity or Judaism. The trial for Portia is the platform where she feels her success is cemented and her goal of centrality is realized. She says to Antonio, “I, delivering you, am satisfied” (4.1. 412). When the ring is offered to Balthazar, Portia’s climactic path is not only cut off. She experiences a faint spark of an understanding that true love belies self-importance. She says, “that cannot be” (4.2. 8). Her climactic path collapses but her agency is immediately redirected towards the physical, emotional, and spiritual fulfillment symbolized by the rings.

The trial possibly promises epiphanies for everyone. It promises delivery from the generalized building pain in the play. Instead, all characters are blocked, and they strangely synthesize in their disappointments. We have a non-denouement and a non-happening. Shylock says, "I am not well" (4.1. 385) and goes home depriving the audience of conversion that moment. Portia says, "That cannot be" (4.2 8) in reference to the rings. We also have sore despair. Salvation for Antonio, revelation for Shylock, and centrality for Portia are not affected. No one gets what they want. Portia says, "Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeiture" (4.1. 340).

The ascending excitement leading to the trial results in a shocking non-climax, and the related exhaustion. Shylock, who asks for his forfeiture, the pound of flesh, for "his principal," and to be "let...go," instead loses "the means whereby [he] live[s]" (4.1. 332–373). Antonio's vocal request for "judgment" (4.1. 240) and "love" (4.1. 274–278) is frustrated. He later speaks only to "please the lord my Duke and all the court" (4.1. 376). Portia, who claims that the Jew "be merciful" because "mercy is an attribute to God himself" (4.1. 178–191), points the court away from mercy. She says, "The court awards it and the law doth give it...the law allows it and the court awards it" (4.1. 295–299). The law here can both 'give' and 'allow'. The court can only 'award'. The law, in juxtaposition to mercy, is allocated more agency than the court. The court cannot be merciful because the court has less agency than the law.

Each character advances to the trial with a painful drive for meaning. Each has faith that God or someone will listen or empathize, which makes them oddly sympathetic: "I pray thee, hear me speak" (3.3. 11). The trial, though, does not deliver any satisfaction or empathy. Instead, the 'tangling' of the characters leaves everyone, the audience included, disarranged and "outface[d]" (4.2. 17).

Ewan Fernie in *Shakespeare for Freedom* claims that the audience, in the watching of a play, achieves its satisfaction through a self-consciousness which is “in” another self-consciousness.²⁶ The trial in *Merchant*, I claim, only achieves, for all involved, a strange feeling of disconnection from self and community. There happens a sudden disorientation and spiritual impotence within the audience as informed by the characters. While all of Act 4 concerns a trial in which, it seems, Shylock will win, when he loses, he does not sign his deed on the stage. Shylock says, “Send the deed after me” (4.1. 391). We never see Portia alone with Bassanio. Nor do we see Shylock discussing personal matters alone with Jessica. We want that ultimate action, the salvaging answer, some validation of intimate personal relationships, and divine connections. We never see Antonio or Shylock praying, despite their mentions of the “devil” and the patriarchs (1.3. 72–94). The audience does not receive satisfaction from the characters, nor do the characters from their seeming religions. Religious constructs fail the characters and the audience.

Something powerful does happen, though. The religious goals of the characters do weirdly conjoin in verbal ‘events’ as if “exploding”²⁷ from within the linear dialogue. They conjoin in what I have discussed as the ‘events’ or ‘traces’ in the text. For example, Shylock’s “knife” of revenge (4.1. 120) is mentioned two lines after Antonio refers to his gravestone “epitaph” (4.1. 117). The ‘knife’ and the ‘epitaph’, in proximate linear sequence, strangely connect. The former perhaps can literally carve the latter. Shylock confusedly aligns his revenge with the covenant and revelation. Antonio confusedly aligns his death to the crucifixion. Therefore, the knife of Shylock and the epitaph of Antonio conjoin Shylock’s revelation to Antonio’s salvation. Portia, likened to the prophet Daniel (4.1. 219), oversees the “stop[ping] of [Antonio’s] wounds” (4.1. 254), as well as the Torah, symbolized in Shylock’s “deed of gift”

(4.1. 391). After his humiliation, Shylock's language reverberates with the tropes of Christian salvation in that his life is "taken" (4.1. 370). Further, Antonio requests a seemingly Jewish "judgment" (4.1. 240). Portia deemed as "reverend doctor" (4.1. 222), claims "that in the course of justice, none of us should see salvation" (4.1. 195–196) and takes on both Jewish and Christian motifs. Through specific words or phrases, there happens a synthesis of language that expands and intensifies the text. An uncanny connection of religious goals regardless of religion is affected.

The words in Act 4 often flow with an urgency that severs them even from those who speak. Words seem to detach not only from the text but from the characters who speak them. Words, beyond both text and character, get knitted together in the mental experience of the audience. As we will now see, religious goals connect through these words while religion, as well as the characters who claim religious faith, are left out.

In *Merchant*, the "craving of the law" (4.1. 202) conjoins with demands for "mercy" (1.4. 229) and "thrice the money" (4.1. 230). The "oath in heaven" (4.1. 224) grotesquely fuses with "a pound of flesh" (4.1. 228), "the tongues of man" (4.1. 237), "the merchant's heart" (4.1. 229), "the estimation of a hair" (4.1. 327), and "Christian blood" (4.1. 306). During the trial, questions which give Portia the dominant perspective, such as "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1. 170) recall previous questions intimately related to religious exegesis: "Do all men kill the things they do not love?" (4.1. 65). I claim that the rising tension of the trial makes 'events' of certain words, those associated with religious goals and epiphanic objectives. Such words resonate with uncommon intensity because of their literal meaning, rhythmic accent, and poetic elements. For example, Shylock says,

Proceed to judgment. By my soul I swear,

There is no power in the tongue of man
To alter me. I stay here on my bond. (4.1. 236–238)

The stressed words are ‘judgment’, ‘soul’, ‘swear’, ‘power’, ‘tongue’, ‘man’, ‘alter’ sounding like altar, and ‘bond’. These words resonate beyond the text. The experience is similar to that in music when the pedal on a piano is pressed. There results a fusion of some notes while the others are in the past. We hear that fusion through the obvious mechanization of the piano pedal. In theater, we experience that fusion through the elements of drama and poetry. The words that fuse in the speech cited above imply literally the Torah, human physicality and sensitivity, spiritual yearning, sacrifice as in Christ’s sacrifice, and revelation through the covenant or bond. These literal meanings oddly create a clear fusion of God, soul, pain, joy, yearning, humankind, and transformation. This fusion of words elevates meaning by creating synthesis where least expected. It is certainly not expected within the linear text and Shylock’s murderous monologue in which the words are spoken.

In a similar analysis, Simon Palfrey focuses in *Shakespeare’s Possible Worlds* on “scenes reported but not witnessed: or possible but un-confirmable-experiences that are so deep in body that they are impossible to see.”²⁸ I claim that these ‘possible worlds’ point to the ‘event’ of Žižek, the ‘beauties’ of Hazlitt, and the ‘traces’ of Derrida. These ‘traces’ create what I can call an intense text in that they are unexpected. They gesture towards this immaterial ‘event’ where the play subtly turns us. The intense text can be likened to the radical amazement of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a state of being in which “everything is phenomenal.”²⁹ The intense text does not stay lifted, though. It re-joins with the main text, enhancing it in subtle but pronounced ways. The experience of the ‘event’ in the language settles back into the dramatic text. To recall the earlier metaphor, the fused sound caused by a piano pedal brings us into a

world of tone that is surreal and often beautiful, but that finally joins with the now enhanced melody. So too with the intense text once it reconnects through the characters to the literal text itself.

The characters remain dumb to their potentiality. Sadly, without self-awareness, potentiality remains unfulfilled. Strangely, it is the same as if someone or something were watching us here on earth and seeing the same intensity and love within our lives. At the same time, for whatever reason, we lack the ability to both see and act on this same love. This state of being is intimated in Act 1 by Antonio. He says of sadness,

But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn; and such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
That I have much ado to know myself. (1.1. 3–6)

Antonio is admitting that there is something other than sadness involved in sadness. Sadness must be 'made of' something and 'born' from something. Experiences unknown to humankind include how sadness is 'caught', 'found', or 'come by'. Antonio is suggesting a vision. In the words of Palfrey, this vision, or something like it, is 'impossible to see'. The *Merchant of Venice* begins with this suggestion of the unknown elements of being. Shakespeare, through Antonio, is preparing the audience for an understanding of life and language that is expansive. Right at the beginning, Shakespeare is letting the audience know how he wants his language to be understood, expansively. This expansiveness can be likened to the "extravagance" of Shakespeare's language described by Margaret Tudeau Clayton in *Shakespeare's Englishes*.³⁰ Lorenzo, to Clayton, touches upon this 'extravagancy' when he mentions the "play upon the word" (3.5 38).³¹ I add that many of Shylock's phrases, such as "hearsed at my foot" (3.1. 81) or "a wilderness of monkeys" (3.1. 111), demonstrate a way with language that seems to open up

life to uncontrollable chaos or unknown possibilities, even if dark. Lorenzo's phrase "fetching mad bounds" (5.1. 73) propels many of us towards exciting, and now penetrable, transformative vistas. 'Extravagance' arguably abounds in *Merchant*. Tudeau claims that such language has "emancipatory [as well as] powering implications."³² *Merchant* characters are possibly partly emancipated and empowered by their own language as they drive the play towards a startling new Shakespearean political/spiritual paradigm.

Once the trial is finished, its charged, unsatisfied agency, in effect, redirects its drive toward the rings. Only twenty lines after the Duke leaves (4.1. 403), Portia demands the ring from Bassanio (4.1. 423).

The Rings

Rings, to Kaara L. Peterson, in Elizabethan England offer "sexual activity for suffering virgins."³³ Gratiano aligns the ring with "couching with the doctor's clerk" (5.1. 305–307). I agree with Peterson but argue that a singular focus on sex, virginity, fidelity, and infidelity as the ring symbol minimizes the critical potentiality. The traditional symbol of the ring is one of ancient unity, circularity, strength, and wholeness. Wendy Doniger, in *Marriage Rings and Adultery Rings*, quotes the 16th-century lawyer Henry Swinburne, who remarks, "It skilleth not at this day what metal the ring be of, the form of it being round and without end doth import that their love should circulate and flow continually."³⁴ Portia's gift of the ring to Bassanio in Act 3 is far from pure, but she does commit her "gentle spirit" to Bassanio (3.2 163–164) through it. The ring symbol in *Merchant* is reworked continually to symbolize corruption as well as love. David Schalkwyk claims, "The rings, initially exchanged as contracts, are transformed through their

recirculation as gifts: gifts that will now be kept ‘safe’, gifts that are pure tokens of love.”³⁵ I agree that love is the primary gift in *Merchant* and is often corrupted. I add that love is forwarded by the rings in *The Merchant of Venice* as seen in a potentially transformed paradigm. This paradigm is inclusive of all religions but expands beyond them. The rings advance beyond the limitations imposed by past and present symbolism and offer a new potentiality to Shakespeare’s Venice.

The first image of any ring is in Lorenzo’s strange speech in Act 2. Lorenzo is sharing that Jessica has offered, “What gold and jewels she is furnished with” (2.4. 32). Rings are reasonably within this promising treasure. Lorenzo redirects his speech to “heaven” (2.4. 34) and to Jessica’s “gentleness” (2.4. 35). He claims that if she errs it will result from her Jewish “issue” (2.4. 38). The dramatic text indicates a Lorenzo who turns his focus from ‘jewels’ to ‘gentle[ness]’ to ‘heaven’. He is seemingly attempting to lift the ‘gentle’ Jessica out of her stuff and seeming ‘issue’ to a more supernal or ‘heavenly’ place. His clear antisemitism limits his noble attempt. This first possible reference to rings in *Merchant* indicates corruption not only due to materialistic norms. The generalized objects, of which rings are possibly a part, indicate a generalized love which, itself, is corrupted through boasting and otherization. Morocco, in his wooing of Portia, speaks of words “graved in gold” (2.7. 36). This phrase ‘graved in gold’ feels distanced from the caskets and indicative of something else engraved, such as rings as was the norm in early-modern England. He says that Portia is a gem too great to be set in “worse than gold” (2.7. 54). The image of a gem set in gold indicates a possible ring. Morocco is revealing his love for Portia in his reference to rings. There is something weirdly forced in his mental connections as if he is granting a true love gleaned from the ancient symbolism of rings to the corrupted caskets. Morocco chooses the casket ‘graved in gold’ and loses Portia. Tubal, in Act 3,

Scene 1, speaks of Shylock's "ring" (3.1. 107) that Jessica has reportedly sold for a "monkey" (3.1. 108). Shylock claims that he had the ring "of Leah when [he] was a bachelor" (3.1. 110). I am offering a new interpretation of Leah's gift. The renowned gift of the biblical Leah is not a ring but *dodaim* (Genesis 29–31). The *dodaim* are described as 'love-apples'. They magically engender true love. Any gift from the biblical Leah, besides her children, would be these 'love-apples'. Shakespeare might be indicating a magical love in the 'ring' from Leah, a love that Shylock now misses in Jessica's abandonment of him. The inclusion of a woman named Leah in *Merchant*, I suggest, synthesizes the biblical 'love-apples' with the ring, granting the ring a powerful mythic symbol of supernal and human devotion.

It feels appropriate to review ideas central to this chapter. I have illuminated a few situations in which words possibly become stressed within the text, such as in Shylock's speeches in Acts 3 and 4. I have likened moments and their limitations, as described by Žižek, to language and its limitations, as described by Wittgenstein in the criticism of Prado. I have compared both the 'event' and the 'trace' to the rings in *Merchant*. This thesis has mentioned Derrida's explanation of the Shakespearean 'joint' that fixes time. I argue that this 'joint' also fixes texts. Any 'joint' that fixes time, I contend, can also fix a myriad of other dichotomies. I am not saying that fix one dichotomy and you fix them all. I am saying that when dichotomies indicate a schism between the abstract and the temporal present, they all have a similar seemingly impossible gap to overcome. The rings fix that which goes beyond limitations to the literal limited text. The rings are within the dramatic text as an 'event' and they fix that text like a 'joint'. The rings and their symbol of love, we will see, are within time and they fix time. Rings, I argue, can do such phenomenal work because they are, in *Merchant*, 'saturated

phenomena'. Marion speaks of the phenomena's ability to give "'more, immeasurably more' than either mind or body can grasp."³⁶ Gallagher states that Marion implies,

saturated phenomena surround us...in the inexhaustible character of historical events and works of art, in the profound intimacy of the human sensorium with its environment, in the elusive constitution of interpersonal relations, in the giving of time, of one's attention, one's word, one's life, and, crucially, in the possibility of divine revelation.³⁷

Gallagher, in referencing Gobbo's gift of doves, is saying that almost anything can be saturated with essence. I add that the *Merchant* rings can be, as well. Whether we are looking at 'traces', 'beauties', the 'aura' of Benjamin, the 'saturation' of Marion, or the 'event' of Žižek, they each point in part to a similar phenomenological action, the recognition and inclusion of a space or state of being beyond a boundary. It might be the boundary of thingness, of time, or of language. The rings of *Merchant*, in turn, point beyond the seeming boundary of love. Palfrey indicates a dichotomy in *Merchant* between the literal text and something else when he says that there is a "battle of control between the line and the sentence."³⁸ I add that the sentence indicates the literal text while the line, an element of poetry, indicates intensity. This battle for control potentially stops being a battle, we will see, by the end of the play. The rings allow sentences, words, and lines to synthesize.

This synthesis does not magically happen. When characters intentionally add meaning to words, this synthesis has a greater possibility. *Merchant* characters possibly say more than the direct and the literal. When the characters intentionally expand the essence of words to give greater meaning to their dialogue then, I argue and we will see, love is possibly expanded. The action of expanding essence points to love because love is arguably human essence expanded. Love is arguably who we are and more. In *Merchant*, the rings are a subject of contention. Portia and Bassanio want to talk about their love but do not have privacy. They create ways to

communicate within and beyond the text through the rings. Portia first says the word ‘ring’ in Act 3. In the chapter on Portia, I have described her ravishment of Bassanio through her song (3.2. 63–71). I claim that through her song or incantation, she can become not someone else but herself transformed. Portia with the song uses ravishment to possibly transmit answers and truths with greater speed and strength than as if through singularly logical conduits. I want to stress her use of the word “ring” (5.1. 70) or “fancy’s knell” (5.1. 71). Ring, in this literal context, is a verb indicating sound. *To ring* as a verb indicates *the ring* as a noun simply through the aural experience in *Merchant*. This verb, to ring, with its different literal meaning, can point cognitively to the ring as a noun in the play. The same word for two different meanings offers a certain mental transference. The ringing in Portia’s song can possibly be of the ring. There is a certain synesthesia involved as we begin to possibly hear the ring and hear the feeling it symbolizes, love, now that ‘fancy’ or pretense is temporarily dead. Synesthesia, or the transference of senses, is expressed by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*. Bottom claims, “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen” what happened in his dream (4.1. 209–210).³⁹ The negation in this line shows that sense transference is possible if not present. Lorenzo in *Merchant* describes a setting in which music “creeps,” harmony “touches,” and “motion” creates angelic song (5.1. 55–61). Lorenzo is describing a world in which we can hear with our eyes and feel with our ears. Love, the traditional symbol of the ring, is possibly even more empowered by the verb ‘to ring’. As discussed, Portia is intentionally inserting words to hint to Bassanio what she desires. Portia is potentially approaching a place where love, the symbol of the ring, can be so amazingly powerful that it can possibly be heard.

This fantastic paradigm realized by Portia is, not unexpectedly, placed aside by her as soon as she realizes her materialistic goal. Ravishment to Portia is used for the advancement of

materialistic gains, such as winning Bassanio. Portia says to Bassanio, “I give you this ring” (3.2. 171) and stresses that if he parts from it, it will indicate the “ruin of [his] love” (3.2. 173). The ring temporarily loses its magical place in the *Merchant* text. Portia deprives the ring of its ‘saturated essence’ as in the language of Marion. The ring, as does love, becomes reduced to its most minimal meaning. Even if Portia’s comment is to stress the ring’s traditional symbol, as I have argued, the materialistic focus partly deprives the ring of that symbol as well as of its essence of ravishment.

Once Portia wins the trial in the mask of Balthazar, the ring becomes the “tribute” (4.1. 418) for Portia’s seeming expertise in court, a “trifle” of “shame” (4.1. 426–427) to avoid the giving of it, a thing that is more than its “value” (4.1. 430), a gift from a “wife” tied to a “vow” (4.1. 437–438), the “saved” gift that will not be given (4.1. 440), a wife’s “commandment” (4.1. 447), Balthazar’s “deservings” (4.1. 446), and finally, an object requiring that one “overtake” the recipient (4.1. 448). It covers a large spectrum of materialistic definitions. The focus of the play at the end of Act 4 shifts from the trial to the rings. Strangely, the characters are still stuck in the past paradigm. They cannot move on because there is nowhere to move to. The only way the characters can negotiate the rings is through the structures, both religious and materialistic, that have been overthrown during the trial. Nothing has seemingly changed.

I have indicated the intense text as a way of further illuminating the dramatic text. I have also indicated that this intensity of meaning can be intentional on the part of the characters. I want to discern between the academic pursuit of this intensity and the character intention. Academic criticism, I contend, becomes action in the recognition of the intense text. When we willingly commit to seeing more than the literal text, we are acting to expand the meaning of the play and in association, I argue, meanings and symbols in real life. A character in *Merchant* such

as Portia is arguably intending to transmit a message through the intensifying of certain words. Strangely, the action of the living critic merges with the action of the fictional character. There is an agency that they share, utilizing a direction towards intensity within language, an intensity that finally indicates transcendence. Shakespeare, I argue, shows his interest in transcendence through the characters. Critics can possibly illuminate that interest through an analysis that questions seeming limitations imposed on the text. This action in seeking the intense text within the dramatic landscape is political. It relates to those, Shakespeare included, who seem interested in foregrounding human and community transformation in the understanding of his plays.

The ring is mentioned twenty-four times in Act 5 between lines 147 and 307, ten of which occur in lines 192 to 208 in the speeches of Bassanio and Portia. Bassanio, in his speech, is possibly showing his remorse at having given the ring away. He wishes that Portia could “conceive for what [he] gave the ring” (5.1. 195). Portia is aligning the ring with Bassanio’s infidelity. Portia claims that Bassanio does not know “the virtue” of the ring (5.1. 199). Fidelity to a beloved, in expansion, potentially indicates fidelity to the supernal. Religious, spiritual, and human fidelity are all interconnected in Portia’s speech in Act 5 and, therefore, in the symbol of the rings. Both characters intentionally intensify the ring through repetition. Bassanio arguably repeats the ring to demonstrate his value and respect for it. Portia, I believe, is chastising Bassanio with her repetition. The ring comes to symbolize pain as well as love. Portia mentions Bassanio’s lack of “worthiness...honour [and] modesty” (5.1. 199–205).

I argue that the repetition of the ring by both characters feels cyclical. The ring is stressed at the end of certain lines and the enjambment causes the text to cycle around to the next line and the next ring. The cyclical feeling emphasizes the covenantal potentiality of the ring, arguably the finest possibilities enabled by a bond. The ring feels like the Torah in its cyclical readings or

the Incarnation in its possible cyclical yearly commemoration. The repetition feels continual and even infinite. It poetically illuminates the circularity of the ring itself. The ring is possibly cycling out of ancient religious paradigms towards a covenant no longer limited by religion. The repetition of the rings ten times in these speeches of Act 5 has a strange effect. We hear, “ring... ring...ring... ring... ring... ring... ring... ring... ring...ring” (5.1. 192–208). The noun *ring* that is also a verb, *to ring*, indicates the verb in the repetition of its sound. The ring can be said to not only be ringing but ringing obsessively. The ring is made of gold. Metals are used for tools, to fix things or break them, to connect as serves a joint or a screw. The rings are tangible and real. The connection of ring to ring feels like the soldering of love to love. The rings cement love even while we face their fluctuating symbolism. They expand time in that they become a repeated ‘event’ in the intense text. The rings by expanding time are not stopped still. They move and ‘perhaps’ transform. I have discussed the ‘perhaps’ as borrowed from Derrida and John D. Caputo in previous chapters. Once again, the ‘perhaps’ signals a transformation, a transcendence yet to come but, I claim, happening now. While Derrida is future-oriented, being future-oriented is *present*. The Messianic in Judaism, through experience, exists *now*. This ‘perhaps’ is abstract, though. The rings are solid. The rings cement transformation and transcendence but in the present, past, and future as the audience watches now. The ring repeatedly rings now. It rings so long, hard, and consistently that love possibly enters the audience cognitively like a wake-up call to the world. The ringing proclaims the end of an era and the beginning of a new one.

The rings, in their transformative state, continually bring past and future myth to the present. Time becomes so large that the past and the future are the present. Because of the rings, the love seemingly obscured in the present text of the play in Act 3 becomes synthesized with that same act through the love between Jessica and Lorenzo. Quickly, in *Merchant*, via the rings,

future love heals present and past non-love now. The truth of Act 5 penetrates the characters in Acts 2 and 3 via the rings.

Jewish liturgy can clarify my analysis. The Jewish prayer service has a climax that marks an intimacy with a sublime being. This climax happens during the *Amidah*. The *Amidah* consists of a series of prayers that, for example, honor peace. Immediately after the *Amidah*, the Torah is brought out from behind its curtain and chanted. In that altered state of mind as produced through the intense prayers of the *Amidah*, the congregation sees the Torah no longer as a thing, but as a living being transmitted through Moses. The ravishment afforded by the *Amidah* enables the Torah to transform to its intended past, present, and future state but in the present. This intimacy is, I offer, the crux of Jewish liturgy. The Torah at its best points beyond itself to universal meaning. The rhythmic chanting of the *Amidah* prayers, in their intimacy with the divine, can help to ‘turn on’ the Torah.

The rings in *Merchant*, as discussed, can transcend time, fix and expand the text, fix and expand love, reflect ravishment, and hold the drive of the trial. The rings still await something that can affect their potentiality so that the characters can act on the rings’ new symbolism. It is as if the rings need to be ‘turned on’. They get ‘turned on’ by the monologue of Lorenzo on the spheres (5.1. 54–88) and Jessica’s arguably brilliant response, “I am never merry when I hear sweet music” (5.1. 69).

Act 4 ends with humankind in a confused and dark place, with a call to bring Shylock “to the gallows, not to the font” (4.1. 397). At the beginning of Act 5, there is a change in the energy (or the ‘aura’ of Benjamin) on the stage as indicated by Lorenzo’s indisputable drive for intimacy with a universal being. He exalts “touches of sweet harmony” (5.1. 57) and “young-eyed cherubim” (5.1. 62). All does not begin perfectly in Act 5. Jessica is called a “shrew” (5.1.

21). However, this strife connects the darkness of Act 4 to Lorenzo's ecstatic monologue. The audience this way can advance from that humiliation of the trial through the "muddy vesture of decay" (5.1. 66) to the surreal "orb" that "sings" (5.1. 21) to the harmony unheard (5.1. 65). Lorenzo's comment to Jessica, "look" (4.1. 58) resonates with 'listen', the first word of the *Sh'ma*, the 'mantra' of Jewish liturgy: *Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echod*, "Hear oh Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One." Lorenzo is introducing something astonishing and inexperienced in *Merchant*. He is not praying to an authoritative religion, with its "treasons stratagems and spoils" (5.1. 85), but to the actualization of an awesome, astral, and eternal presence.

Jessica's response— 'I am never merry'—illuminates her intimacy with God. Just as Portia describes the difference of perspective concerning the fictitious nightingale by day and the nightingale by night (5.1. 105), Jessica negotiates her own perspective. She focuses on a higher, prophetic, more exquisite sound than human music, the soundless sound, the wordless word. In Judaism, she focuses on a *bat kol* or the daughter of the voice of God. This is Jessica's path. Portia's ring of Act 3, the possible ring that rings, synthesizes with Jessica's aural experience. Jessica's silence synthesizes with Shylock's silence after Act 4. Jessica and Shylock create the vacuum for epiphanic love to enter. In our mental beings, Shylock's shock synthesizes with Antonio's shock. They both experience a failure in religious tropes. This is the relational agency at the start of Act 5. Jessica's and Lorenzo's profound drive for the phenomenal seems to explode with the "trumpet sound" (5.1. 75). Together, they create a penetrating state of ravishment on the stage.

Then Portia enters with her focus on the rings.

The ravishment created by Lorenzo and Jessica resonates in the memory of the audience. The rings take on Lorenzo's holiness and Jessica's prophecy. The rings revolutionize their own symbolism through both the sweet power of music and through "the hot condition of their blood" (5.1. 74). The rings, in connecting the ravishment of Lorenzo and Jessica to the 'ringing' of Portia and Bassanio, are the place holders for traditional love and the harbinger of the new. The 'ringing' of the rings is possibly the sound that might help Lorenzo to hear beyond his 'decay'. In being intensified by both character and critic, the rings become the center of the transformative agency of all people, real and not quite real. They fix expansion to the literal text and the eternal to the moment. They expand love between characters strangely through a vision of their limitations. They are, in Act 5, the focus of the *Merchant* plot and concurrently they are the 'joint' that connects past, present, and future. Through their openings, the light gets in. Through the agency of intentionality, the rings possibly connect the abstract to the temporal, life to death, and satisfaction to impossible love. They ring love. They introduce a sound for not only love but for a revolution beyond the oppressive structures of society in Shakespeare's Venice. While infidelity hurts Portia, transcendence places infidelity within such a large universal scope that infidelity can possibly be repaired. Skeptics cannot limit the rings. Gratiano says that he would "keep safe Nerissa's ring" (5.1. 307). His intention is arguably limited to the sexual. He reminds the audience of the power of the sexual in the rings' transformative potentiality. The ring is action in that it takes on the agency of the trial. The empty space within the ring indicates Shylock's final emptiness that becomes a vacuum for more. The rings, therefore, point to Shylock's movement away from victimhood, towards the epiphany, and towards the 'deed' that cannot happen without his signature. The ring is the last word of the play (5.1. 307). The ring symbolizes the characters' ability to actively transform a paradigm of violence and antisemitism.

The intense drive from the trial goes into the rings, through the rings, and potentially to the hearts of the characters and the audience. Most importantly, the rings' physicality shows that a physical thing can be an epiphany. They point to a day when the ring will no longer be needed. The human, also physical, can possibly embody a ring-like epiphany. By the end of *Merchant*, the ring is already growing beyond itself. Portia indicates the universal expansion of the ring in the image of the cycles of the sun. Portia turns her agency from the trial to the rings and then to "morning" (5.1. 295). It is as if the ring as object once described as "gone" (5.1. 188), is transforming once again. Portia says, "It is almost morning; / And yet I am sure you are not satisfied" (5.1. 295–296). The rings just may indicate a cycle of repair and growth for a future human community. While Portia points out the cycle of the sun and its 'blaze of light', Lorenzo and Jessica, with their intense love, can possibly take us to it. Even in a world of dissatisfaction, violence, and corruption, the *Merchant* character can possibly access through the epiphany a natural and peaceful cycle of existence. Ultimately, this cycle is the foundation of a new social/political paradigm of peace. Antonio's satisfaction is not complete. My guess is that he still does not know why he is so sad. This satisfaction might not be here yet, but we get the feeling that it might still be here now.

Notes

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1. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 59.
 2. John Drakakis, "Introduction," in Shakespeare, William and John Drakakis, *The Merchant of Venice*, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series, ed. John Drakakis (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 103, <https://www-dramaonlinelibrary-com.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/plays/the-merchant-of-venice-arden-shakespeare-third-series-iid-111754/do-9781408160398-div-00000034>.
 3. Laura J. Whatley, "Introduction: Approaches to Medieval Seals and Sealing Practices," in *A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Laura J. Whatley (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1–5.
 4. "13th Amendment: Abolition of Slavery," Interactive Constitution, *Constitution Center*, Washington DC, accessed June 16, 2020, <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-xiii>
 5. To make matters even more tenuous, many prisoners cannot vote. Something as seemingly foundational as the law has failed to not only be the bulwark of the freedom of a whole race of people, but has failed in supporting a true democracy. This article on institutional racism, I think, helps in understanding the complexity of the problem: Karen D. Pyke, "What is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don't We Study It? Acknowledging Racism's Hidden Injuries," *Sociological Perspectives* 53, no. 4 (2010): 551-72. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/stable/10.1525/sop.2010.53.4.551?seq=4#metadata_info_tab_contents
 6. Slavoj Žižek, *Event: A Philosophical Journey Through a Concept* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014), 1–20.
 7. William Hazlitt, "The Merchant of Venice," *The Morning Chronicle* (April 1816), in "William Hazlitt: Kean's Debut as Shylock," in "*The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare: The Critical Edition*, ed. William Baker and Brian Vickers (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 30.
 8. Leonard Cohen, "Leonard Cohen: Hallelujah (Live In London)," *Veva*, Youtube video, accessed July 2, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrLk4vdY28Q>.
 9. Andrew George Home-Cook, *Theater and Aural Attention: Stretching Ourselves* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). 30.
 10. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Writings in General Linguistics*, trans. Carol Sanders and Matthew Pires, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009).
12. Bento Prado Jr., “The Plane of Immanence and Life,” in *Introduction to the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*, ed. Jean Khalfa (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 9–26.
13. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 141.
14. In Genesis, God speaks the world into existence. The word arguably points so totally to the symbol that it indicates the thing (creation) as well as the speech. *Davar* indicates both the actual and the expansive meaning associated with language. In the Talmud, only when the word seems to point to two different things, are interpretations then made contextual, and a third passage of the Torah is introduced in the discussion. A contextual analysis in Talmud is used only when expansive interpretations of biblical language do not allow for synthesis. This thesis engages in expansive interpretations of language in literature rather than contextual. See the Jewish Encyclopedia for an explanation of Talmudic hermeneutics, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14215-talmud-hermeneutics>
15. Jean-Luc Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” *Philosophy Today* 40, no. 1 (Spring, 1996), 1–2: 103–125, <https://search-proquest.com.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/docview/1301475119?accountid=8630>
16. Bento Prado Jr., “The Plane,” 22.
17. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2003), 10–25, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=4523470>
18. See Jean Luc Marion, “The Saturated Phenomenon,” 108. Marion asks why “adequacy,” or the meeting of the thing’s essence with the vision of the human, seems “inaccessible at the very moment when it is invested with the dignity of truth.” Marion’s question has implications in this thesis. I ask why epiphanies in Shakespeare’s play almost happen and at the same time can feel true. The essence of the thing, to Marion, exists whether we recognize it or not. We are closer to fulfillment and in the language of this thesis, the epiphany, when we begin to recognize the essence of things (or words) beyond literal or physical limitations. Transformation and change, in my opinion a Shakespearean theme, cannot happen positively if we do not face that which must be changed and concurrently direct that change positively and perhaps towards the epiphany. This, I feel, is important whether the epiphany, and in the words of Marion, fulfillment, ever happens or not. The direction towards the epiphany of the rings in *Merchant*, I claim, can potentially be transformative. That same direction or agency, I argue, potentially becomes fulfillment and the *Merchant* epiphany itself. In this sense, inaccessibility as mentioned by Marion, arguably creates truth.
19. Allison P. Hobgood. “Prosthetic Encounter and Queer Intersubjectivity in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Textual Practice* 30, no. 7 (2016): 1294.

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20. Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006), 32, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=668662>.
21. Derrida, *Specters*, xix.
22. Derrida, *Specters*, xix.
23. Kenneth Gross, *Shylock Is Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 47–48.
24. Derrida, *Specters*, xix.
25. Lowell Gallagher, “Waiting for Gobbo,” in *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. Ewan Fernie (London: Routledge, 2005), 78.
26. Ewan Fernie, *Shakespeare for Freedom: Why the Plays Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 204–208.
27. Žižek, *Event*, 20.
28. Simon Palfrey, *Shakespeare’s Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 15.
29. Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 1–30, 45–51, 73–80.
30. Margaret Tudeau Clayton, “Figures and Parables of a ‘Straing’ Word: Shakespeare’s ‘extravagancy,’” in *Shakespeare’s Englishes: Against Englishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 175.
31. Clayton, “Figures,” 175.
32. Clayton, “Figures,” 176.
33. Kaara L. Peterson, “The Ring’s the Thing: Elizabeth Is Virgin Knot in *All’s Well That Ends Well*,” *Studies in Philology* 113, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 101–31.
34. Henry Swinburne, “A Treatise of Spousals, or Matrimonial Contracts” (posthumously, 1686), Sect. 15, in Wendy Doniger, “Marriage Rings (and Adultery Rings),” in *The Ring of Truth: And Other Myths of Sex and Jewelry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
35. David Schalkwyk, *Shakespeare, Love and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 126–67.

36. Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Towards a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 197, in Lowell Gallagher “Waiting for Gobbo,” in *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. Ewan Fernie (London: Routledge, 2005), 78.

37. Gallagher, “Waiting,” 78.

38. Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 392.

39. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Arden Shakespeare Second Series, ed. Harold Brooks. (London: Bloomsbury, 1979).

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