

# REPRESENTING SHYLOCK: THE PERFORMANCE HISTORY OF SHAKESPEARE'S JEW AS AN INDICATOR AND INSTIGATOR OF CULTURAL CHANGE

HANNAH RUBENSTEIN

## Introduction

**T**he *Merchant of Venice* is a play burdened with over four centuries of historical, political, and performative baggage, and as such should be read, discussed, and performed in ways that incorporate and build upon its complex history. As a play most famous for its portrayal of the Jewish moneylender Shylock, the debate over whether *Merchant* qualifies as an antisemitic play or a play *about* antisemitism has spanned centuries. Actors, directors, and scholars have come to fundamentally opposing views, yet these interpretive contradictions are all based in truth to be found in the text's ambiguities. Within its complete historical context, it is just as important to recognize William Shakespeare's understanding of Early Modern Jewish mythology<sup>1</sup> as it is to acknowledge the play's performance history in the centuries that followed, up to the present day (Lelyveld 4, Holmes X). For example, a survey of the play's performance history cannot ignore that *Merchant* was widely performed during the Third Reich and considered to present "exemplary portrayals of Jewish racial characteristics," but nor can it ignore that those same Nazi officials needed to cut and re-write large sections of the play in order to make it suit their propagandistic needs, as the original text allows for too much sympathy directed toward Jewish characters (Lelyveld 141).

Shylock is uniquely immersed in centuries of performative characterizations, innovations, and manipulations. From his original staging with the Lord Chamberlain's Men to the modern era, Shylock performances have shifted dramatically. During much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the character can be best summarized as a monstrous, if comical, villain. Following several actors' depictions of Shylock as a more sympathetic character, and thus as a vehicle for tragedy—most notably Henry Irving in 1879—cultural understanding of his image and motivation began to change, bringing to light the two basic interpretations of the character that persist today: Shylock as either villain or hero. He is a character who elicits strong opinions, yet those opinions vary widely

---

<sup>1</sup> "Myth" being a useful term, as Jews were exiled from England 1290-1656, covering Shakespeare's lifetime. The Bard likely never met a Jew, at least not an openly practicing one. Much of Early Modern England's knowledge of Jews came from their portrayal in travelling stage performances.

depending on if one sees him as an antisemitic caricature or an outsider telling truth to (and demanding justice from) Christian power. Because of those strong opinions, performative innovations that deviate from the culturally accepted image of Shylock have often met with immediate pushback from the society in which he is performed. But any interpretation that views Shylock as entirely villainous or heroic misses something critical about the character and how history has developed since Shakespeare wrote the play. That development of historical context and cultural imagery hinges around the middle of the twentieth century, as *The Merchant of Venice* was given a stark new context in the wake of the Holocaust.

Despite ongoing commentary on the merits of performing *The Merchant of Venice* in the twenty-first century, such a question is moot; if it was not struck from the stage after 1945, the play and its many problems are not going anywhere. Now, we must figure out what to do with it. This essay will reject any bifurcated Shylock narratives (hero or villain, antisemitic or tragic outsider) through an examination of how the text of the play dictates certain aspects of Shylock's performance, how his Jewish identity is intrinsically tied to all aspects of his character (good and bad), and how Shylock has been represented on stage throughout his performance history. Ultimately, this essay argues that Shylock serves as a reflection of the place and time in which he is performed, both an indicator of cultural attitudes and instigator of cultural action towards oppression, justice, and representation of those deemed outsiders.

## I. "Let him look to his bond": How *Merchant's* Text Dictates Aspects of Shylock's Appearance and Outsider Status

In grappling with the import of Shylock's performance history, we should first examine how *The Merchant of Venice* places a particular emphasis on performance in general. The play's text is fixated on themes of appearance, sight, and the relationship between exterior image and internal truth.<sup>2</sup> Portia and the "three caskets" plotline provides a clear-cut example of the play's complex relationship

---

<sup>2</sup> Key plot points: Bassanio wishes to woo a rich young woman named Portia, and goes to his friend Antonio, the titular "merchant", for financial aid. Antonio does not have the money but suggests Bassanio seek assistance from a Jewish moneylender, Shylock. Shylock practices usury, or the charging of interest on loans. Shylock and Antonio share a mutual hatred for one another along differences in religion and money-lending practices (Christians were forbidden from charging interest, leaving Jews to take up this economically necessary practice and hence become associated with money and greed). Shylock agrees to the bond on the condition that, if Bassanio cannot repay the money in three months, Antonio will owe him a pound of flesh. Antonio agrees and Bassanio goes to Belmont to win Portia's hand. Meanwhile, Shylock's daughter, Jessica, runs off with a Christian man, absconding with some of Shylock's money as she leaves. Shylock grieves his lost daughter and rails against Antonio's antisemitism. When Bassanio does not pay the loan back on time, Shylock takes Antonio to court to demand the pound of flesh promised by the bond. Portia disguises herself as a male lawyer in order to infiltrate the courtroom, begs for mercy from Shylock, and when that fails, catches him in a legal technicality that requires he forfeit his life and give half his goods to the state and half to Antonio. The Duke spares his life and Antonio returns half of his wealth, on the condition that Shylock convert to Christianity. Shylock leaves the courtroom, defeated, and the play concludes with a (theoretically) comic reunion for Portia and Bassanio.

between seeming and being. When Portia's father died, he left three caskets of gold, silver, and lead, each with riddles inscribed upon them; whoever chose the correct casket would win Portia's hand. Three suitors come to pick from the caskets, and when Bassanio eventually triumphs in his choice of "base lead" (II.ix.19), it is because "So may the outward shows be least themselves: / The world is still deceived with ornament" (II.ii.73-74), indicating that Portia herself contains more than her surface may let on. Despite Portia's advocacy for internal beauty, she paradoxically expatiates on one of her suitor's outward appearances: the Prince of Morocco says, "Mislike me not for my complexion," (II.i.1) but Portia's rejoinder after he chooses the wrong casket is, "Let all of his complexion choose me so" (II.vii.79), one of several hints at Portia's racialized hypocrisy when it comes to the question of appearance. With the culmination in Portia's cross-dressing as a male lawyer in the famous trial scene, it is clear that her character embodies the text's interest in the practice of costumery (or "ornamentation"). Of course, Portia's theatricality is not the central question of this essay, but it provides a useful backdrop for contrasting the relationship between Shylock's inner and outer identity. Antonio warns Bassanio of Shylock's appearance:

The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.  
An evil soul producing holy witness  
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,  
A goodly apple rotten at the heart:  
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath! (I.iii.97-101)

Here, Antonio draws on a long-historied comparison of Jews and the devil, down to an image of the apple from the Garden of Eden, possibly positioning himself and Bassanio as Adam and Eve. Barbara Tovey critiques the veracity of Antonio's warning: "Shylock has no 'goodly outside.' He appears to be what he is" (Tovey 261). The first part of this phrase seems to assume that Shylock is grotesque on the outside and rotten to the core, a concept that has been undermined by centuries of performance (as this essay will discuss in-depth later), but the second segment of the phrase holds some truth; Shylock is not interested in facade as the other Venetians are. He does not trick Antonio into a deadly agreement. When he wants a pound of flesh, he says as much, and Antonio gives his willing consent. Yet even though Shylock "appears to be what he is," each director, actor, or audience member who encounters the character might disagree on *who* he is, exactly.

While the ambiguities of the text refuse to give a single answer to that question, there is one characteristic that is obvious: Shylock is an outsider. Patrick Stewart, who has played the character three times over five decades, identifies language as the chief aspect of Shylock's outsider status: "The foreignness in Shylock, that which is truly strange and exotic, lies in the language, not how he appears. No one in *The Merchant of Venice* speaks like Shylock, not even his fellow

Jew, Tubal” (Stewart and Suchet 6:00-6:13). It is true that Shylock speaks differently than other characters; he has a habit of repeating phrases, such as in the first lines he speaks: “three thousand ducats, *well*,” “for three months, *well*,” “Antonio shall become bound, *well*” (I.iii.1-6; emphasis added). When he becomes fixated on the pound of flesh, he repeats variations on the phrase “let him look to his bond” over 10 times. The content of his speech also differentiates him; he makes numerous Biblical references, in which the other characters do not generally express the same fluency.

While Stewart places an emphasis on Shylock’s distinct language, it is through his words that we find the most prominent clues regarding his physical appearance. When Shylock speaks about Antonio’s past antisemitism, he hints at how a production might costume the character:

Signior Antonio, many a time and oft  
 In the Rialto you have rated me  
 About my moneys and my usances:  
 Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,  
 For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.  
 You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,  
 And spit upon *my Jewish gaberdine*,  
 And all for use of that which is mine own.  
 Well then, it now appears you need my help:  
 Go to, then; you come to me, and you say  
 ‘Shylock, we would have moneys:’ you say so;  
 You, that did void your rheum upon *my beard*. (I.iii.105-116; emphasis added)

Here, Shylock intrinsically ties his visual status as an outsider to his Judaism. He wears a “Jewish gaberdine,” a loose-fitting gown, and keeps a beard, both of which may set him apart from the rest of Venetian society. Costume pieces, such as a kippah, prayer shawl, or side locks, have appeared in many productions, further linking Shylock’s appearance with his religiosity. Between the “*Jewish gaberdine*” and the repeated use of the word “Jew” or variations like “Hebrew” (about 74 times in the text), it is apparent that Jewishness is an intrinsic part of Shylock’s appearance and performance (Cohen 54). There is also a particular Jewishness in his unique verbal characteristics; his focus on the letter of the law (with his repeated phrase “let him look to his bond”) links his character’s way of thinking to what one scholar described as “typical Jewish Talmudic sophistry” (Bonnell 149). One argument for Shylock as an irredeemably antisemitic character cites how his evilness is tied to his Jewishness, yet his goodness tied to Christianity, when Antonio says, “The Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind” (I.iii.177) (Cohen 55). But this line cannot be taken at face value as a statement of Shylock’s Christianized morality. Instead, it serves as an unwelcome imposition in an attempt to characterize Shylock in a way

that *Merchant's* Christian protagonists can understand. Indeed, this assertion of Christian moral superiority comes from the same character who will force Shylock's conversion at the end of the play. Antonio's words serve not as a factual statement of religious worth but as evidence of how Christianity dominates the space in which Shylock exists and attempts to force him to conform to its religious and social understanding of the world. Ultimately, the language used to frame Shylock's action within a Christian context prevails when Shylock is forced to convert, but that conversion makes the degree to which Shylock stands apart as an outsider on stage before that point all the more significant.

The text even calls its own visual categorization of Shylock into question when Portia first enters the courtroom disguised as a man. She asks, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (IV.i.171), implying either a joke about their obvious distinctions or a statement on Shylock's ability to blend in with Christian society. Either way, the play text necessitates a particular interest with visual appearance and demands that Shylock be positioned as an outsider. But how Shylock appears, and whether he wears the apparel of a hero, villain, or somebody in between depends on the choices of each individual production.

## II. "The villainy you teach me, I will execute": Evolving Depictions of Shylock from the Seventeenth-Twentieth Century

In detailing the major actors and turning points in Shylock portrayals, this essay aims to establish several patterns within the character's performance history. Firstly, that Shylock's depiction is contingent upon the cultural time and place of each production, which suggests that it is impossible to form a single, unified image of the character. Secondly, just as Shylock's outsider status is tangled up in his religious status, the ambiguities in his character are also tied together with his Jewishness. This section will contextualize key performances within their particular social moment, but also within a long history of antisemitic ideology that associates Jews with actors. It will link that history of weaponized antisemitism to a recurring theme in public reactions to Shylock, which is audiences' inability to distinguish between actor and character. Finally, this production history will show how, especially in the early centuries of Shylock performance, actors who attempted to humanize the character were often met with initial social and theatrical pushback, though their same controversial innovations quickly became performance norms. For the purposes of organization and tracking history's impact on social perceptions of the Jewish community, this research is divided into three basic eras: pre-, mid-, and post-Holocaust. The interrelationships between Shylock, the actors who play him, and the society in which he is performed illustrate the argument that Shylock has been used for centuries as a blank space upon which a production can reflect the ideals of its own community and its relationship to outsiders.

The first recorded performance of *The Merchant of Venice* was in 1605, but the play was likely written and performed sometime in the preceding decade (Lelyveld 9). The widely publicized 1594 trial and execution of Roderigo Lopez, Queen Elizabeth's physician-in-chief, is one of the likeliest sources of inspirations for Shylock's character. Lopez was charged with (likely falsified) evidence of treason (Weisz and Donatella). It was easy to rally the Early Modern English public against him; though Lopez's family was "converted, or crypto-Jewish" and he rose through the ranks to become the Queen's physician, it was impossible to shake the title of "Jew" and the widespread cultural hatred that identity brought with it (Weisz and Donatella). Jews had been exiled from England in 1290, and would not be formally allowed re-entry until 1656, encompassing the entirety of Shakespeare's lifetime (Holmes).

If (openly-practicing) Jews were not allowed in England during Shakespeare's life, it begs the question of where Shakespeare acquired his image of Jewish people. As the Lopez affair indicates, there was a particular public interest in and animosity toward Jews, despite their social absence. In the Corpus Christi Plays, Jews played by Christian actors were staged as "inhuman and evil." In thirteenth century England, Jews were made to wear yellow badges to distinguish them from their Christian peers (Lelyveld 4-5).<sup>3</sup> The imposition of physical costumery in order to establish social difference implies a paranoia about Jews' ability to visually assimilate into Christian culture, which connects to a Medieval image of Jews as dangerous performers:

To define Christian one had to define Jew; these respective identities were constructed rather than essential, inevitably relational and, especially in a culture (medieval England's) where for nearly four hundred years no Jews officially resided, unavoidably performative. (We do well to remember that in the cycle plays or Saint's Plays which feature Jews as dramatis personae it was Christians who impersonated Jews). We shall see that the representational strategies of anti-Judaism ... have bearing both upon later inscriptions of the Other, and on conceptions of theatricality. (Jones 330-331)

This quote exemplifies one of the contradictions in Shylock's performance history: dominant Christian culture fears the theatrical Jew, while simultaneously Christian actors perform as Jews and exclude Jewish people from their own depiction. Thus, Jews' association with performance was forced upon them by law, as were their usury practices, but Shakespeare's knowledge of Jews likely revolved around those antisemitic laws, performances, and cultural perceptions (Lelyveld 4).

We know little about early performances of *Merchant*, including who originated in the role of Shylock. Because the Lord Chamberlain's Men tended to

---

<sup>3</sup> A similar law applied to Jews in Venice at the time, and in the Early Modern era it became the norm for Venetian Jews to be required to wear yellow and later red hats and forced to live in designated Jewish ghettos. (See Ravid.)

play a certain character type, this leaves open to conjecture how Shylock was first performed. For example, if Shylock was played by Will Kemp, he was probably depicted as a comical character. If he was played by Richard Burbage, he likely took on more tragic or even sympathetic characteristics (though that is unlikely, as “Reviling the Jew was part of the social convention of Shakespeare’s day”) (Lelyveld 7). His original costume may have resembled the Pantalone character from the Italian performance style *commedia dell-arte* (see Fig. 1), a grotesque-looking figure dressed all in red with a large, hooked nose. Indeed, wearing a false nose was a theatrical norm for stage-Jews at the time. Given the controversy surrounding Edmund Kean’s choice to play Shylock with black hair in the nineteenth century, it is likely that Shylock was associated with red hair and costumery from his earliest performances (Lelyveld 7-8). The color red plays an important role in Shylock’s performance history, not only because of its relevance to the red hats of Venetian Jews, but also because of its association with the devil, a comparison drawn throughout *Merchant’s* text and antisemitic ideology.

If Shylock’s initial performance reflects the cultural moment at the turn of the seventeenth century—in which Jews were absent from English society but a subject of public fascination, performance, and dehumanization—then subsequent centuries of performance demonstrate how society, and Jews’ place within it, evolved. After virtually disappearing from the stage for over a century, *Merchant* gained notoriety again in 1701, when a rewritten version of the text returned to the English stage. Thomas Doggett took the role of Shylock, likely performing the character in a comical, clownish fashion (Lelyveld 18). The next prominent performance came from Charles Macklin in 1741. If there is one word to associate with Macklin’s Shylock, it is “monstrous”. A far cry from Doggett’s clownish interpretation, Macklin demanded that the audience take Shylock seriously as a dramatic character, with reports of individuals who fainted or could not sleep the night after watching Macklin’s performance. In physical appearance, Macklin had dark piercing eyes, a big, hooked nose, and lost most of his teeth over 50 years of playing the role. In the early years, he “wore a loose black gown, long wide trousers and a [possibly red] skull-cap. His beard was short, red, wispy and pointed” (Lelyveld 25). The beard and nose remained constant over the decades, but Macklin’s costume may have been modified in later years; he is described as wearing “pantaloons and a Quaker collar that were much like the costumes worn by the Christians in the play,” providing an example of a gradually assimilating Shylock (26). (See Fig. 2) Macklin’s performance exemplified the audience’s conflation of character and actor (a recurring theme in Shylock’s early history); one writer called Macklin “the most celebrated Jew in all England,” yet he was a Christian (Jones 355). Audience members were said to believe “that in private life, Macklin was some sort of devil” (Lelyveld 23). As Jews began re-entering English society, Macklin’s eighteenth-century Shylock is indicative of how antisemitic images shifted from the mythical,

inhuman, clownish Jew whom nobody had ever met to a newly developing nightmare of real people who were perceived as societal infiltrators.

In 1814, Edmund Kean took a different approach to performing Shylock. He played the role with a naturalistic style and saw Shylock “as a persecuted martyr who, through the forces of circumstances, finally became an avenger,” seemingly the most psychologically complex interpretation at this point in the character’s history (Lelyveld 51). He spoke Shylock’s unique language with a musical tone and wore a “black gaberdine, crimson vest, [and] black hat,” a costume which seems to have remained largely consistent over decades of performance (Lelyveld 49). (See Fig. 3) Reactions to Kean provide another example of the audience’s inability to differentiate between Jewish character and Christian actor; many audience members, and even a biographer, baselessly asserted that Kean may have been Jewish “since no one but a Jew could infuse Shylock with this awesome and terrifying tone of Hebraic majesty” (Page 116, Lelyveld 53). Kean’s performance also provides the first prime example of another pattern in Shylock’s early performance history: initial backlash to new interpretations. Before they even knew how he intended to play the role, the manager at Drury Lane and Kean’s fellow actors “were entirely hostile to him and to his proposed innovations, whatever they might be” (Lelyveld 40). The simple choice to wear a black wig instead of red was enough to cause controversy. But, while Macklin’s monstrous embodiment of Shylock remained an acceptable interpretation for some time to come, Kean’s more complex interpretation quickly became the “object of imitation for lesser actors,” demonstrating how norms for Shylock, and, by extension, cultural perceptions of outsiders, were changing in the nineteenth century (Lelyveld 52).

Henry Irving’s 1879 debut as Shylock typifies those changes. His performance was unprecedented, in that it presented Shylock as sympathetic, intelligent, and human. Playing the role as older and “infirm,” Irving used a cane and “wore an iron-gray wisp of beard, a brown gaberdine girdled with an Oriental shawl and a close-fitting black cap with a yellow line across it,” continuing in Kean’s deviation from a traditionally red-haired Shylock (Lelyveld 84). (See Fig. 4) Irving “introduced a crowd of Jews among the spectators on the stage” during the trial scene, giving the outsider Shylock a sense of community (and thus a community to lose) and lending new voices of communal grief in reaction to the forced conversion (Lelyveld 90). This production highlighted Shylock’s humanity within an oppressive environment and the hypocrisy of Christians who preach mercy but never show it (Schoch 53). One distinguishing feature of this production was a silent scene:

Irving’s sympathetic portrayal of Shylock rested chiefly upon an unscripted silent moment—a moment that could not participate in a discourse of veneration because there was no precedent to revere. After Jessica’s flight with Lorenzo the stage was overtaken by a whirl of revelers ... upon whose festivities the act curtain fell. As the



applause died down, the curtain unexpectedly rose on the same moonlit piazza, only now the stage was empty. From the far side of the bridge appeared a dejected Shylock, leaning heavily upon his cane, heading slowly home. Expecting to find solace in his daughter's company, Shylock knocked twice at the unopened door of his house and then looked upward in confusion toward Jessica's room. The curtain dropped just as the lonely father was about to enter his house and discover what the audience already knew: his daughter had abandoned him. (Schoch 53)

In reaction to this unscripted moment, George Bernard Shaw declared that Irving's Shylock was "neither good nor bad but 'simply not Shylock at all,'" playing into a now-familiar notion that acting innovations in characterization were somehow contrary to how the Jew was "meant" to be performed (Schoch 53). Irving pioneered a new kind of acting, one in which the audience attended the theater not with the hope to compare how each actor said the same lines in the same way, but to see how each actor brought their own interpretation to the role (Schoch 55). Indeed, many of Irving's innovations in his *Merchant* staging became popular later in the play's production history.

Irving's newly sympathetic Shylock was still very much a reflection of the cultural moment in which he performed. Richard Schoch links Victorian society's particular expression of enlightenment as being a factor in Irving's success:

Without question, national pride was aroused by Irving's distinctive performance. The starting point for that response was the recognition that a sympathetic portrayal of Shylock—a man proud of his Jewish heritage and subjected to the vicious intolerance of hypocritical Christians—was itself a proud sign of Anglo-American moral superiority. Only a civilization devoted to tolerance, only a civilization in the ascendant, could produce and value such an enlightened interpretation, or so the self-laudatory rhetoric would have it. (Schoch 54)

Just as during the era of Jewish exile from England, society's understanding of this Jewish character was mediated through the lens of dominant Christian society. Shylock himself had not changed, but the ideologies of the people performing and watching the show had. Irving's performance was touted for its modernity and its separation from Shylock's performance history. But Schoch points out that Irving's performance was in conversation with the character's history, and comments on the danger in an ahistorical approach to Shylock's character: "To praise a performance for existing only in the present—a present time, a present geography, a present culture, a present religion—which in this self-regarding instance was nineteenth century, Anglophone, and Christian—is to claim that history no longer matters. History, in fact, is what has been overcome" (Schoch 54). Such a claim of

overcoming history not only reeks of Icarus syndrome (the next century would melt the waxen wings of anyone claiming to see Shylock in an ahistorical light), but the claim was not even supported by Irving's performance; he played the role for decades, and over the course of his career, his Shylock shifted from "humanitarian" to "coarsened," possibly because of the "dawn of an era marked by fanatical nationalism" and a growing Jewish immigrant population in London (Lelyveld 91-92). History refused to stop even for Irving's late nineteenth century performance, and in 1905, when Parliament enacted the Aliens Immigration Act to curb the flow of Jews seeking refuge from antisemitic violence in Russia, his performance, praised for its sympathy toward the outsider, suddenly exposed a new generation of Christian hypocrisy (Lelyveld 95).

To conclude this section, I wish to focus on two actors from the turn of the twentieth century—Jacob P. Adler and William Poel—who offer vastly different interpretations of the character and serve as signposts for Shylock's performance trajectory throughout the rest of the century. Adler was a Jewish immigrant in New York City, famous for his performances in Yiddish theater. Himself a Russian refugee, Adler made his 1903 Broadway premier in a production of *The Merchant of Venice* in which all of the characters spoke English while Shylock spoke Yiddish. This production embraced Shylock's tragic elements and even offered its own variation on Irving's silent scene in which Shylock discovers Jessica has abandoned him: "after returning home to find Jessica gone, Adler 'tore his garment in a symbolic gesture of mourning' and sighed, 'oy, oy'" (Kingsley 26). Adler's Shylock refused to assimilate with Christian culture in either language or appearance: he sported a greying beard, carried a walking stick, and wore "an embellished vest and layered skirt of variously patterned, stiff satin" (Kingsley 24). (See Fig. 5) One key takeaway from Adler's performance comes in the form of reviews from the time that critiqued Adler's interpretation for straying too far from Shakespeare's original intent (as if they, the reviewer, knew the Bard's true intent) and presenting a narrow, individualized character, rather than trying to make a broad statement about all Jews (Kingsley 26). Of course, many reviews praised Adler for bringing Shylock into twentieth century America instead of keeping him shackled to a long-gone seventeenth century England, but the instinct to preserve a pure form of Shakespeare's text once again demonstrates a Christian sense of ownership over Shakespeare and, more disturbingly, the image of Shylock's Jewish identity.

Contrasting Adler's interpretation, William Poel performed as Shylock in 1898 England and sought to recreate an Elizabethan production (again, as if such a replication were possible in the first place). He wore a red wig to play the character for cheap laughs and slapstick comedy. Yet Poel's attempt at recreating an Elizabethan production could never have been entirely successful, for the simple reason that antisemitic ideology changed between 1605 and 1898, and Shakespeare's intent no longer resonated in the same way it would have in the seventeenth century.

I will not dwell on Poel's performance, but will conclude with a final quote from Toby Lelyveld, whose book *Shylock on the Stage* greatly informed this section on performances of Shylock prior to the Holocaust. Lelyveld says of Poel's clownish Shylock:

Whatever may be said for this reasoning from the viewpoint of dramatic construction, it is evident that it would lead to the annihilation of one of Shakespeare's greatest characters. ... It may be that *The Merchant of Venice*, as we know it, is, to a certain extent, the creation of the actor, and that Shakespeare had no idea of writing a tragic part for Shylock, but those who feel this must assume not only the burden of the proof, but also the responsibility for the resulting interpretation. (Lelyveld 98)

When Shylock positions his thirst for vengeance as being modeled on Christian example, saying, "The villainy you teach me, I will execute," (III.i.66-67), his words serve as an incisive statement as to the power of the Christian mainstream to portray Shylock as clown, villain, or tragic hero depending on their needs. That capacity to manipulate Shylock's image was soon to find itself at a logical and horrific culmination.

### III. "The devil can cite Scripture for his purposes": Shylock in the Third Reich

Before examining how Shylock evolved in the years following the Holocaust, I want to touch upon two actors who performed the role in Germany during the Weimar Republic and Third Reich: Werner Krauss in 1921 and again in 1943, and Fritz Kortner in 1927.<sup>4</sup> These performances serve as a conduit for understanding the ways in which Shylock has been used and abused for ideological purposes, but also provide context for performances that came later. These chapters in his performance history will help establish why it is impossible to view Shylock removed from the historical baggage the role accumulated from the Early Modern English stage to Nazi Germany.

Kortner and Krauss' embodiments of Shylock in 1920s Berlin were diametrically opposed. Krauss<sup>5</sup> played Shylock in a 1921 Weimar Republic as grotesque, arrogant, and comical (Bonnell 73-75). He wore a kippah, a dark kaftan, and a red wig. When he reprised the role in 1943, key descriptors of his costume imply that he amplified the image of a grotesque, animalistic Jew: he wore a "shabby and greasy kippah," "yellow, frayed prayer shawl hanging over a long kaftan," "unkempt

---

<sup>4</sup> Shylock has a rich and complex performance history in Germany, one that I, unfortunately, will not have time to explore in depth in this paper. For further reading, see Bonnell, *Shylock in Germany*.

<sup>5</sup> Krauss is infamous for his roles in the notoriously antisemitic Nazi propaganda film, *Jud Süß* (1940).

and *long*” beard, “*uncombed and frizzy*” hair, and “*shabby shoes*” which “contributed to his much-ridiculed flat-footed waddle” (Bassey; emphasis added). (See Fig. 6) As outrageous as this portrayal sounds, especially given its 1943 setting, Krauss’ performance did not exist in a vacuum. Many of his character choices (the clown, the monster, the villain) have a long legacy in Shylock’s performance history; his red costumery may have been present from the first incarnation of the character in the Early Modern era. Though the Third Reich twisted the character to fit their propagandistic needs, it is crucial to remember that Krauss’ Shylock was just as historically informed as it was harnessed for its particular cultural context.

It is easy to look at Krauss’ performance, or the fact that *Merchant* was recommended reading for Nazi’s literature and racial science classes, as proof of the text’s irredeemability (Bonnell 141). But the truth of *Merchant*’s history in Germany is more complex. These were translated texts, which allowed each individual translator to interpret or manipulate the content. For example, Rainer Schlösser, the Reich’s dramaturg who operated under Propaganda Minister Goebbels, edited his own version of *Merchant* in which Jessica’s parentage is changed to imply that Leah (Shylock’s presumably dead wife) cheated on Shylock with a Christian. That revision renders Jessica’s marriage to Lorenzo acceptable by Nazi standards, as it did not violate laws prohibiting marriage between Christians and Jews (Bonnell 127, 145). It was not enough for the Third Reich that Jessica converted: she needed to have never been Jewish in the first place. Schlösser also cut Shylock’s famous “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech,<sup>6</sup> as Shakespeare’s declaration of Jewish humanity or capacity for conversion was antithetical to the twentieth century’s version of radical antisemitism.

Adding to these complications in Germany’s history with *Merchant*, some performances undermined the rise of National Socialism through their portrayals of Shylock. In 1927, Fritz Kortner, a Jew, played Shylock in a popular Berlin production. “Kortner’s Shylock wore sidelocks, a symbol of an observant Jew, with a prayer shawl draped over his head when in prayer. His piety was supposed to bestow more gravity and seriousness onto Shylock, contrasting him with the frivolous, exultant Venetians” (Bassey). After Hitler became chancellor in 1933 such a performance of Jewish moral superiority, or indeed Jewish actors themselves, were barred from the stage (Bonnell 123). From that point, Shylock was controlled by non-Jewish translators and actors, who were happy to depict him as a clownish monster. But Kortner’s performance proves that, even in the most overtly antisemitic historical context, there was ample room for Shylock to receive varied interpretations, with both the “comic devil” and “tragic hero” having significant historical precedent in other cultural contexts (Bassey). But whether one takes the

---

<sup>6</sup> “He hath disgraced me, . . . and what’s his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that” (III.i.50-63).

opinion that *Merchant* is an antisemitic play or a play *about* antisemitism, the question any modern actor, director, or audience member must consider in the wake of the Third Reich's manipulation is, how do we perform Shylock today given the character's potential to be harnessed for such evil?

#### IV. "If you prick us do we not bleed?": Emphasizing Shylock's Humanity after the Holocaust

While every production grapples with that question differently, there are a few themes that have emerged since the second half of the twentieth century. For a start, the devil-Shylock has become taboo for most modern productions.<sup>7</sup> But even if it fell out of cultural favor to put a villainous, clownish Jew on stage, the reverberations of dehumanizing performances (such as those by Poel or Krauss) can still be felt today. One interview between Patrick Stewart and David Suchet—both of whom played the role for the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) production of *Merchant* directed by John Barton, Stewart (who is not Jewish) in 1978 and Suchet (who is) in 1981—provides several quotes that nicely summarize modern discourse on the play. Suchet articulates the presence of historical ghosts in any rehearsal room for *Merchant*, saying, "It is always a terrifying thing, with anything like Shylock . . ., because of the history of how it's been played. What I was desperate to do was look at that play without preconception," and that "we all have to be very very careful not just to respond to the play in relation to the twentieth century Holocaust" (Stewart and Suchet 9:31-9:46, 0:31-0:39). That separation from recent and ancient history may be helpful for an individual actor in tackling the script, but it is impossible for the audience themselves to view this show without feeling its place in history. Stewart makes that point when he says, "for us in the second half of the twentieth century, the antisemitic expressions in the play are going to reverberate very powerfully and the director and the actor won't need to emphasize them." (Stewart and Suchet 1:07-1:19). Different productions approach that historical context differently, often either grounding their design very firmly in Early Modern Venice or choosing a distinct, updated setting.<sup>8</sup>

But in many modern productions, there is one aspect of Shylock's identity that garners tension, and that is the same quality that is entangled with his visual appearance and outsider status: his Jewishness. Stewart asserts that "To concentrate on Jewishness is to avoid the great potential in the character which is his universality.

---

<sup>7</sup> This is not to say it has disappeared entirely; German-Jewish director Peter Zadek garnered criticism in the 1970s for depicting Shylock as a fierce villain, aiming to fight back against a post-war image of Jews as victims and bring his audience to reconcile with the culturally ingrained antisemitism that brought about the dehumanization of Jews in the first place. (See Schnauder.)

<sup>8</sup> Two unique examples: Rupert Goold's 2014 production set the play in Las Vegas, and Peter Sellar's 1994 production was set in Venice Beach, California, in the wake of the Rodney King riots, with Shylock played by a black man. (See Clapp and Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*.)

Whenever I've seen a very ethnic, very Jewish Shylock, I've felt that something has been missing, something has been lost in the performance. ... I think that Shylock is an outsider who happens to be a Jew," and Suchet rebuffs, "[Shylock is] an outsider not who *happens* to be a Jew, but *because* [he is] a Jew" (Stewart and Suchet 1:25-2:22). Given the text's (often injurious) repetition of "Jew" and the costumes (necessitated by the text) that position Shylock as an outsider wearing distinctly Jewish apparel, Suchet's understanding of the character seems to be the more convincing one, but the question of how exactly Shylock's Judaism manifests on stage remains. In examining a handful of Shylock performances since the Holocaust, I will review how performance traditions have persisted or subsided and explore the successes and pitfalls of various productions and setting choices. This overview will support the argument that recent productions' desire to grapple with antisemitism (or something more "universal") is unto itself a way in which modern performances carry on a tradition of using Shylock to reflect the cultural place and time in which he is performed.

Stewart and Suchet's 1978 and 1981 (respectively) Shylocks both wore kippahs, Stewart's with a "yellow sash under his shabby black waistcoat" smoking "miserly little hand-rolled cigarettes" and Suchet's "an opulently dressed, cigar-smoking businessman," indicating that both actors' opinions on the character (Stewart as a more universalized outsider, Suchet as a Jew "confidently moving among the Christians, sure of his superiority") were reflected in their costuming choices ("Stage History"). (See Fig. 7 & Fig. 8) The RSC produced *Merchant* again in 1987, directed by Bill Alexander and starring Antony Sher. Sher wrote that "in rehearsal, we used apartheid as an example of violent prejudice," the actor himself being of Jewish heritage and South African upbringing (Costa). Set in a "shadowy latter-day Venice", this production kept the play grounded in its original setting but was lent new context by current geopolitical events. Sher's purple gaberdine and the set's brick backdrop both bore the yellow Star of David, drawing on cultural memories of the Holocaust. (See Fig. 9) Sher's "intense Shylock, long-bearded and thickly accented and often davening in Hebrew prayer," endorses the idea that a production can take inspiration from modern history and universal examples of discrimination while still grounding the story in Shylock's Judaism (Rich). (See Fig. 10) Sher's Shylock was repeatedly spat upon by the Christian ensemble, a popular performance choice in recent decades; Dustin Hoffman's 1989 Shylock "was greeted repeatedly with great gouts of saliva" and wore sidelocks and a black gaberdine. He spoke "more like a central European Jew in Williamsburg than a moneylender in Renaissance Venice," a choice which many critics rejected (yet another example of audiences coming in with preconceived notions of how the character ought to be performed) (Whitney). One particularly well-received production in 1999 starred Henry Goodman and was set in 1920s Venice. This production did not address the time period's historical rise of fascism head-on but presented a Shylock who was the

picture of devoutness against a backdrop of Christian hedonism. Goodman wore a beard, baggy suit, kippah, and walking stick (Jongh). (See Fig. 11)

This handful of twentieth century productions is by no means comprehensive, but it does allow a few themes to emerge: especially in the decades following the Holocaust, Shylock is often pitted against the cruelty (and saliva) of his amoral Christian peers. There is also a clear change in who plays the character, and thus controls his image—Stewart is the only non-Jewish actor listed in the paragraph above, indicating how identity politics and questions of representation have changed in the modern era. But while Shylock’s characterization and the identity of his actors have evolved, certain costume elements—e.g., a kippah or prayer shawl—have remained a relatively stagnant part of Shylock imagery, reiterating that his Jewishness cannot be separated from his character or historical performance.

Al Pacino stands out as perhaps *the* definitive actor of Shylock in the twenty-first century thus far, having played the role once in a 2004 film (the first theatrical film adaptation of *Merchant* in the sound era) and twice on stage in 2010 (Ebert).<sup>9</sup> While those two embodiments of the character were quite different, together they serve as a central point upon which historical Shylock performances and norms for future interpretations hinge. The 2004 film, directed by Michael Radford, places the “Jewish problem” front and center, opening with a series of title cards describing the social status of Early Modern Venetian Jews over an added prologue depicting violence against Jews and their sacred texts.<sup>10</sup> The cinematic medium allows for Radford to transport the audience to the “real” Venice, and thus the production can better highlight the historical realities for Venetian Jews.<sup>11</sup> Pacino—who is not Jewish, but, as one reviewer points out, has a history of playing “Jewish Monsters Through the Ages” (e.g. Herod and Roy Cohn)—offers a consistently sympathetic portrayal of Shylock (Scott). Antonio spits on Pacino’s Shylock within the first few minutes of the film, maintaining pre-existing performance convention and giving visual context to Shylock’s subsequent claim that Antonio spits on his “Jewish gaberdine” (I.iii.111). The 2004 film also adds a scene in which Shylock comes home to find Jessica gone. (See Fig. 12) This scene—perhaps a reference to Henry Irving’s

---

<sup>9</sup> Directed by Daniel Sullivan, this production began at the Delacorte Theater and later transferred to Broadway. (See Brantley, “Love and Dirty, Sexy Ducats.”)

<sup>10</sup> The title cards place the film in 1596 Venice and inform the viewer that “By law the Jews were forced to live in the old walled foundry or ‘Geto’ area of the city. After sundown the gate was locked and guarded by Christians.” “In the daytime any man leaving the ghetto had to wear a red hat to mark him as a Jew.” “The Jews were forbidden to own property. So they practiced usury, the lending of money at interest. This was against Christian law.” (See *The Merchant of Venice*. Directed by Michael Radford, 2004.)

<sup>11</sup> Though not all of the historical realities enumerated in the title cards are actually reflected in *Merchant*’s text. For example, while the movie asserts that Jews in Venice were not allowed to own property and were forced to live in ghettos, the text of *The Merchant of Venice* shows Shylock instruction to Jessica to “lock up my doors” and not “thrust your head into the public street / To gaze on Christian fools” (II.v.29-33) on the evening of a Christian parade. This implies that Shylock (as he was conceived of by Shakespeare) likely did not live in a ghetto at all, but resided within the Christian community, raising even more unanswerable questions about the character’s ability to blend in with Christian society. (See Davis Perry.)

innovation over a hundred years before—calls into question the character Solanio’s reliability when he cruelly recounts Shylock running through the streets, calling “O, my ducats! O, my daughter!” (II.vii.15) and gives Shylock control over his own performance instead of allowing Christian characters to manipulate his grief.

When Pacino played Shylock again in 2010, this time on the New York stage, the production was set in Edwardian England, “a ‘Merchant’ for the age of Wall Street bubble boomers” (Brantley, “Railing at a Money-Mad World”). Like the 2004 film, this production added a prologue to establish strained relationships between Jews and Christians, focusing on the financial aspects of the text by setting it in a stock exchange with “tense interactions between the affluent-looking gentlemen in their morning suits and the Jews in their Orthodox garb” (Brantley). Shylock was “neither merely the victim nor the villain of this piece” but “instead the very soul of the money-drunk society he serves and despises” (Brantley). In the trial scene, his black finery contrasts with Portia’s red robe, an interesting handling of his historical association with red. (Fig. 13) One key innovation from this production was the image of Shylock’s forced baptism at the end of the play (Brantley). It compelled the audience to see Shylock’s fate not merely as a verbal sentencing but as a visual and visceral violation.

Though Pacino’s performances honored certain innovations from historical productions, this shocking image established a new possibility for future stagings. In a 2015 production starring Jonathan Pryce (also a non-Jewish actor), there was a prologue in which two Jewish men are attacked in the middle of a Venetian festival, and a “coda depicting Shylock’s enforced baptism, while Jessica sings a Jewish prayer for forgiveness” (Isherwood). Pryce’s Shylock wore red, perhaps in reference to historical images of the character and Venice’s anti-Jewish laws,<sup>12</sup> and “exchanged Yiddish asides with Jessica,” part of a linguistic performance legacy that may have been influenced by the likes of Jacob P. Adler or Anthony Sher. (See Fig. 14) That same year, Israeli-Palestinian actor Makram Houry took on the role with the RSC to more lukewarm reviews. Houry’s Shylock was just as sympathetic (and spat upon) as many actors who came before him, but “altogether muted” (Clapp). With a short beard and Israeli accent, his blue zip-up jacket (distinctly less opulent than his Christian counterparts) did not project a particular image of religious affiliation, and production photos from various performances show him wearing a kippah inconsistently. (See Fig. 15)

The modern productions discussed in this section, while by no means exhaustive, demonstrate how performance conventions for Shylock have evolved in the decades following the Holocaust. One of the most distinct changes is an uptick in Jewish actors playing the famous Jewish role, which is a reflection of the modern

---

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that the 2015 production premiered at the Globe Theatre, a building that by its very existence “reflects a desire to see performance releasing original Shakespearean meanings,” which may have informed the decision to costume Shylock in red. (See Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*, 28.)



era's interest in the power of representation or, from a more cynical perspective, identity politics. The fact that Shylock is often (though not always) played by Jews today raises more questions about how the ancient perception of performable Judaism continues to present itself on our stages. These modern productions also demonstrate that, as our society evolves, facing political ramifications ranging from apartheid to stock market crashes, the current cultural context finds its way into *The Merchant of Venice*.

## V. "Is that the law?": Using Shylock to Engage History and Incite Change

In 2019, the Anti-Defamation League reported more antisemitic incidents perpetrated against American Jews than any other year in the past four decades ("U.S. 'Moving into a Dangerous Phase' as Anti-Semitic Incidents Surge"). The U.K. also saw a spike in the first half of 2020 (likely lessened by COVID-19 lockdowns), with Germany and other countries making similar reports, all of which indicate that antisemitism is on the rise around the world (Schwartz, "Germany warns of anti-Semitism"). Given an international spike in antisemitism and Shylock's inherent ambiguity and interpretability, the question becomes: how can we harness Shylock's signifying capability such that his performance does not merely *reflect* but *impact* his cultural context? The import of this question is evident, as Krauss' ability to manipulate and dehumanize the character still reverberates on our stages today. A few fascinating examples of *Merchant* productions that attempted to make an impact on their social climate can serve as guideposts for future approaches to the character.<sup>13</sup>

In 2016, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg presided over a mock appeal for Shylock's sentence at the end of act four. The event was staged in Venice's Jewish ghetto to commemorate the 500th anniversary of its construction (Donadio). Shakespeare scholar James Shapiro recalls his presence at the event:

[I]t was hard to ignore the messages of gender equality and religious tolerance implicit in [Justice Ginsburg's] rulings: she declared that Portia should go to law school, and Shylock was to have his loan returned to him and his coerced conversion to Christianity nullified. Supreme Court justices weren't supposed to go around promoting their ideological views; I saw how Shakespeare proved an effective way of doing so indirectly. (Shapiro xv)

---

<sup>13</sup> The capacity for political action inspired by Shakespeare's plays is hardly a new concept, perhaps beginning when Queen Elizabeth famously self-identified with Richard II; German National Socialists were certainly aware of its potential for social impact when *Merchant* was staged in the relatively liberal-minded city of Berlin in 1942, and the director planted actors in the audience so as to ensure a vocal, hostile reaction to Shylock on stage, making clear both the subversive potential and regulatory control of performance. (See Bonnell, 156.)

Here, *The Merchant of Venice* is not merely a canvas upon which a modern context can be reflected but a vehicle for imposing ideological views on the past. Justice Ginsburg said at the time, “When I was going to school, *The Merchant of Venice* was banned because it was known as an anti-Semitic play.” She agreed with that assessment because she believed that Shakespeare intended Shylock to be a villain (somewhat paradoxically imposing her own moral judgement upon the characters while asserting that the playwright’s original intent was paramount) (Donadio). This event at Venice’s ghetto epitomizes the modern era’s capacity to impose its own values on a story written 400 years ago, achieving a kind of symbiosis between original context and modern live performance, perhaps even achieving catharsis in relation to historical and literary trauma.

Another example of *Merchant* as a vehicle for social change took place over 50 years before Justice Ginsberg imposed a modern ruling on Shylock’s fate. On November 12th, 1964, the trial scene was performed at the Vatican as part of a collection of famous Shakespeare scenes celebrating the 400th anniversary of the playwright’s birth (Cerezo 135-136). The event fell in the middle of the Second Vatican Council, which convened in the early to mid-1960s (Cerezo 132).<sup>14</sup> A key outcome of the Council’s meeting was the release of an official statement that “condemn[ed] hatred and persecution of Jews,” “rejected the charge of deicide against all Jews,” and “suppressed the call to conversion” (Cerezo 136). Scholar Marta Cerezo does not go so far as to credit the trial scene performance as being the impetus behind this decision, but points out that the Council exchanged various drafts of the document—some of which “deleted the rejection of the deicide charge against all Jews and seemed to reiterate the call for the conversion”—but released the final document just eight days after the excerpt from *Merchant*, a scene which advocates mercy (Cerezo 136). The scene is bookended with questions of Christian hypocrisy, beginning with Shylock pointing out the Christian practice of keeping slaves and ending with the Christian community’s distinctly un-merciful treatment of Shylock in forcing him to convert. At the very least, Cerezo writes, “it is easy to imagine that the trial scene must have had a deep resonance” (Cerezo 139). This performance met its specific historical and cultural moment, reflected a history of antisemitism back toward the Council, and inspired action motivated by an ideal of Christian mercy worthy of Portia’s courtroom oration, “The quality of mercy is not strained” (IV.i.181).

This exploration of key productions and innovations throughout Shylock’s performance history demonstrates that there is no such thing as (to borrow a concept from the Victorians’ description of Irving’s sympathetic portrayal) a Shylock that exists devoid of history. The character is always informed and inspired by the past, whether it be past innovation in performance—such as Irving’s addition of a

---

<sup>14</sup> After Pope Pius XII refused to publicly denounce Hitler’s persecution of the Jews during World War II, the Council sought to reform the Catholic Church’s relationship with other religions. (See Cerezo, 132.)

silent scene, Adler’s Yiddish-speaking Shylock, or Pacino’s forced baptism—or the progression of global history—such as the Victorian Era’s self-laudatory sympathy toward the outsider, Nazi Germany’s manipulation of the play, or the Catholic Church’s steps to address a history of forced conversions and Christ-killer associations. But just as every performance in the twenty-first century must be informed by history, they must also be informed by the present place and time in which the play is staged. Any charge of the text being an antisemitic play or a play *about* antisemitism will prove both right and wrong, as the answer depends entirely on how different productions approach the complex middle ground within that binary framework. Evidently, Shylock is a Shakespearean figure who dwells in ambiguities and possibilities, exemplifying Keats’ famous notion of “Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubt” (Keats).

Any attempt to engage with *Merchant’s* capacity for antisemitism requires each production to decide how Shylock will appear on stage. While the play text itself dictates certain aspects of Shylock’s appearance be tied to his visual Jewishness and outsider status, as the photos in the Appendix show, the way that Shylock looks and acts on stage has varied dramatically over the years. Though many continue to argue the play should be struck from the stage,<sup>15</sup> the fact of Shylock’s ever-evolving appearance and characterization suggests we cannot give up on the text so easily; regardless of Shakespeare’s speculated intent in writing the character as a clown or devil or tragic martyr, the character re-engages in a conversation with historical antisemitism and cruelty toward outsiders every time he is staged. Though innovations in his performance have sometimes been met with pushback, the very fact that society has such a clear image of what “Shakespeare’s Jew” ought to look like is evidence enough that there is still value in exploring, subverting, and challenging those images with new re-inventions of the character.

Shylock asks of Portia in a pathetic moment before he leaves the courtroom, converted and defeated, “is that the law?” (IV.i.311). The answer, when it comes to Shylock’s performance history, is no. The past can inform, but it does not need to legislate or restrict the future. There is no perfect performance of Shylock, nor will there ever be, because, ultimately, the performance will hinge upon how future actors and directors adapt to meet history as it is created. We cannot stop putting *Merchant* on stage, because, if we do, then the ability to converse with its history will cease. The ugly potential for antisemitism and cruelty will be all that remains. What matters is that we continue putting it on stage, not in the hope that we will one day get it exactly right, that we will one day figure out exactly what Shakespeare intended, or even that we will redeem Shylock as an unambiguous hero (all of those are

---

<sup>15</sup> A 2016 Washington Post editorial points out that Shylock’s famous “if you prick us do we not bleed?” speech, often pointed to as a sign of Shakespeare’s endorsement of Jewish humanity, has not aged well in the past 80 years, writing, “after the Holocaust, do we really need to be reminded that Jews, too, bleed?” (See Frank.)

impossible), but in the hope that every production might get us closer to understanding the complexities within Shylock's character and our potential to learn from *The Merchant of Venice* about our own community and how it treats outsiders.

## APPENDIX



**Figure 1:** Illustration of Don Pantalone, 1550, reprinted from the Memoirs of Carlo Gozzi vol. 2, 1797, from: “Commedia dell’Arte Pantalone.” *The Museum of Cultural Masks: Second Face, Second Face*, 2018, <https://www.maskmuseum.org/mask/commedia-pantalone/>.



**Figure 2:** Charles Macklin as Shylock, ca. 1777-1780, from: “[Charles Macklin as Shylock] [realia].” *LUNA: Folger Digital Image Collection*, Folger Shakespeare Library, [https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGERCM1~6~6~149284~109188:-Charles-Macklin-as-Shylock--reali?sort=Call\\_Number%2CAuthor%2CCD\\_Title%2CImprint](https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/detail/FOLGERCM1~6~6~149284~109188:-Charles-Macklin-as-Shylock--reali?sort=Call_Number%2CAuthor%2CCD_Title%2CImprint).



**Figure 3:** Edmund Kean as Shylock, ca. 1814, from: Barnard, R. et al. “Edmund Kean as Shylock.” *National Portrait Gallery*, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw37677/Edmund-Kean-as-Shylock>.



**Figure 4:** Henry Irving as Shylock, ca. 1879, from: Sawyer, Edward Lyddell. "Sir Henry Irving as Shylock in 'The Merchant of Venice!'" *National Portrait Gallery*, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw88740/Sir-Henry-Irving-as-Shylock-in-The-Merchant-of-Venice>.





**Figure 5:** Jacob P. Adler, far right, as Shylock, ca. 1903, from: “Plays, ‘The Merchant of Venice.’” *Museum of the City of New York*, MNY, <https://collections.mcny.org/CS.aspx?VP3=DamView&VBID=24UP1GRU3KAIZ&SMLS=1&RW=1440&RH=699>.



**Figure 6:** Werner Krauss, right, as Shylock at Vienna's *Burgtheater*, ca. 1943, from: "Photograph of the 1943 production of *The Merchant of Venice* directed by Lothar Müthel." *British Library*, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/photograph-of--the-1943-production-of-the-merchant-of-venice-directed-by-lothar-muthel>.



**Figure 7:** Patrick Stewart as Shylock, ca. 1979, from: Dickson, Andrew. “Patrick Stewart on Shylock: ‘I Should Have Been Arrested for Overacting’.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 22 Aug. 2016, [www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/aug/22/patrick-stewart-i-should-have-been-arrested-for-overacting](http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/aug/22/patrick-stewart-i-should-have-been-arrested-for-overacting).



**Figure 8:** David Suchet as Shylock, right, kneeling after being stripped of his power by a disguised Portia (Sinead Cusack), ca. 1981, from: Joe Cocks Studio Collection, “John Barton 1978 and 1981 Productions.” *Royal Shakespeare Company*, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, [https://www.rsc.org.uk/the-merchant-of-venice/past-productions/john-barton-1981-\]production](https://www.rsc.org.uk/the-merchant-of-venice/past-productions/john-barton-1981-]production).



**Figure 9:** Kit Surrey's set design for the 1987 RSC production starring Antony Sher bears a graffitied image of the yellow star of David, from: Joe Cocks Studio Collection, "Bill Alexander 1987 Production." *Royal Shakespeare Company*, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, <https://www.rsc.org.uk/the-merchant-of-venice/past-productions/bill-alexander-1987-production>.



**Figure 10:** Anthony Sher as Shylock, ca. 1987, from: Wilson, Reg, “Bill Alexander 1987 Production.” *Royal Shakespeare Company*, RSC, <https://www.rsc.org.uk/the-merchant-of-venice/past-productions/bill-alexander-1987-production>.



**Figure 11:** Henry Goodman as Shylock ca. 1999, from: Lewis, Geraint. “The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare, directed by Trevor Nunn.” *Alamy*, <https://www.alamy.com/the-merchant-of-venice-by-william-shakespeare-directed-by-trevor-nunn-with-henry-goodman-as-shylockperformed-at-the-cottesloe-theatre-at-the-royal-national-theatre-in-london-in-1999-pic-geraint-lewis-editorial-use-only-image354521164.html>.



**Figure 12:** [Click this link](#) to access film clip of Al Pacino as Shylock when he realizes that Jessica has abandoned him, from: *The Merchant of Venice*. Directed by Michael Radford, 2004.

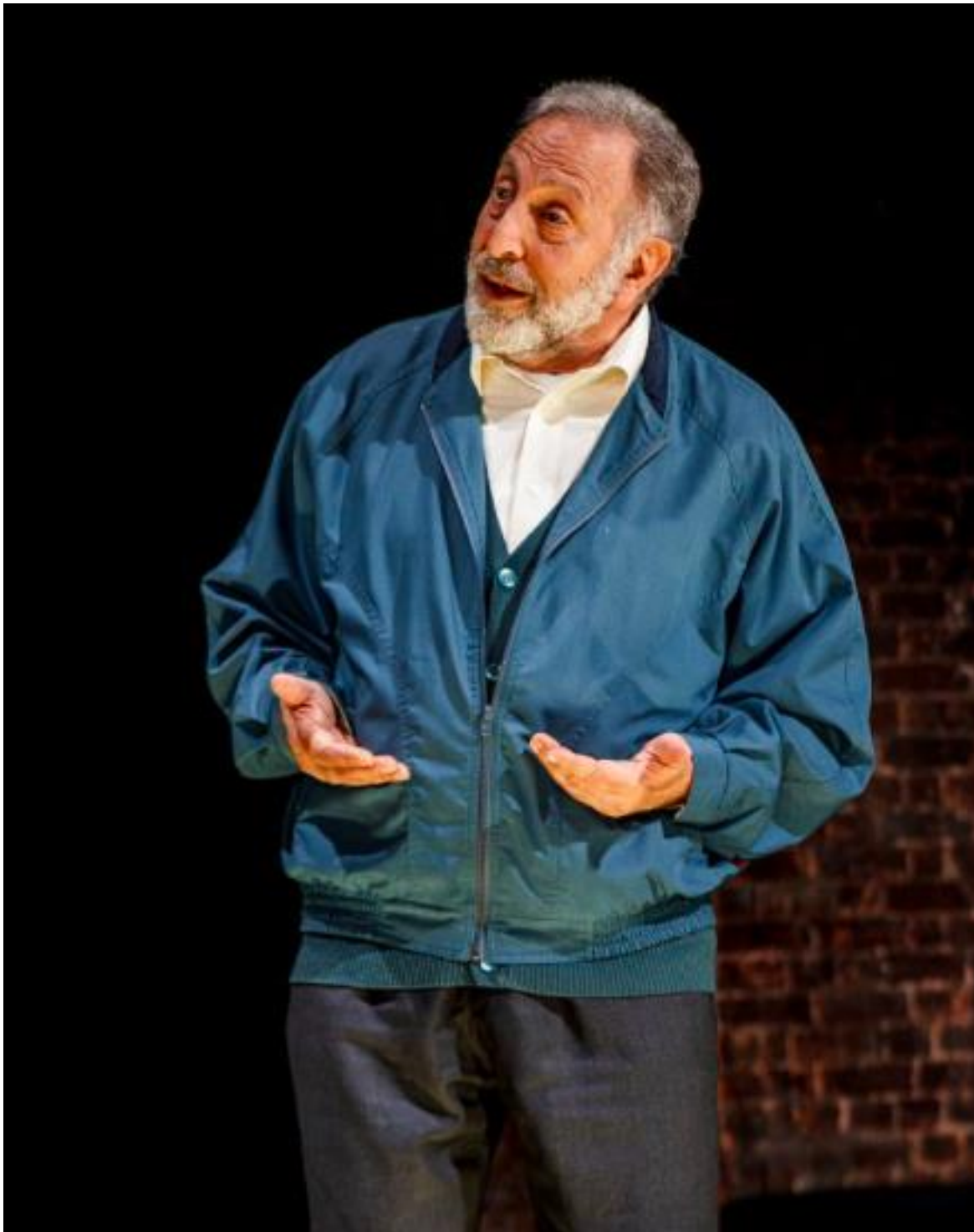




**Figure 13:** Al Pacino dressed all in black to emphasize Lily Rabe's red Portia costume, from: Brantley, Ben. "Love and Dirty, Sexy Ducats." *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 13 Nov. 2010, [www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/theater/reviews/14merchant.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/theater/reviews/14merchant.html).



**Figure 14:** Jonathan Pryce as Shylock at the Globe Theatre, preparing to take a pound of flesh from Antonio (Dominic Mafham), ca. 2015, from: “Globe on the Screen: THE MERCHANT OF VENICE Starring Jonathan Pryce.” *Shakespeare in LA*, 23 Aug. 2016, <https://shakespeareinla.com/2016/08/23/globe-on-screen-the-merchant-of-venice-starring-jonathan-pryce/>



**Figure 15:** Makram Khoury in the RSC's 2015 production directed by Polly Findlay, from: Henry, Zuleika. "Makrah J. Khoury as Shylock." *Zuleika Henry Photography*, <http://www.zuleikahenry.co.uk/content/ma-3/>.

---

## WORKS CITED

- Bassey, Alessandra. "Shylock and the Nazis: Continuation or Reinvention?" *European Judaism*, vol. 51, no. 6, 2018.  
[link.gale.com/apps/doc/A564342844/EAIM?u=columbiau&sid=EAIM&xid=75ecdce7](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A564342844/EAIM?u=columbiau&sid=EAIM&xid=75ecdce7).
- Bassi, Shaul. "Shylock and Othello in the Time of Xenophobia." *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 4 Aug. 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/08/04/opinion/shylock-othello-shakespeare-venice-xenophobia.html?searchResultPosition=6](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/04/opinion/shylock-othello-shakespeare-venice-xenophobia.html?searchResultPosition=6).
- Bonnell, Andrew G. *Shylock in Germany*. London, Tauris Academic Studies, 2008.
- Brantley, Ben. "Love and Dirty, Sexy Ducats." *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 13 Nov. 2010,  
[www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/theater/reviews/14merchant.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/theater/reviews/14merchant.html).
- Brantley, Ben. "Railing at a Money-Mad World." *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 30 June 2010,  
[www.nytimes.com/2010/07/01/theater/reviews/01merchant.html?scp=4&sq=%2522merchant%2520of%2520venice%2522%2520and%2520%2522by%2520ben%2520brantley%2522&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/01/theater/reviews/01merchant.html?scp=4&sq=%2522merchant%2520of%2520venice%2522%2520and%2520%2522by%2520ben%2520brantley%2522&st=cse).
- Brantley, Ben. "Review: A Flock of Shylocks Transforms 'Merchant of Venice'." *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 25 Sept. 2017,  
[www.nytimes.com/2017/09/25/theater/review-a-flock-of-shylocks-transforms-merchant-of-venice.html?searchResultPosition=3](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/25/theater/review-a-flock-of-shylocks-transforms-merchant-of-venice.html?searchResultPosition=3).
- Cerezo, Marta. "Shakespeare at the Vatican, 1964." *Celebrating Shakespeare*, edited by Clara Calvo and Coppélia Kahn, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 121-139.
- Clapp, Susannah. "The Merchant of Venice Review – Significance Steams Through." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 21 Dec. 2014,  
[www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/dec/21/merchant-of-venice-review-significance-steams-through](http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/dec/21/merchant-of-venice-review-significance-steams-through).
- Clapp, Susannah. "The Merchant of Venice review – Antonio moves centre stage." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 31 May 2015,  
<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/may/31/merchant-of-venice-rsc-stratford-review-polly-findlay-patsy-ferran>.
- Cohen, D. M. "The Jew and Shylock." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1980, pp. 53–63. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/2869369](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2869369).
- Costa, Maddy. "'The Cast All Abused Me': the Pain of Playing Shylock." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 8 May 2011,

- www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/may/08/playing-shylock-patrick-stewart-sher.
- Davis Perry, Lori A. “Shylock, Bassanio, and the Jacob Narrative: Jewish Love and Christian Wealth in *The Merchant of Venice*.” *Christianity & Literature*, vol. 68, no. 4, 2019, p. 623-649. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/735214.
- Dickson, Andrew. “Patrick Stewart on Shylock: ‘I Should Have Been Arrested for Overacting?’” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 22 Aug. 2016, www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/aug/22/patrick-stewart-i-should-have-been-arrested-for-overacting.
- Diedrich, Antje. “Acting Out Trauma in the Theatre of Embarrassment George Tabori’s Shylock Improvisations.” *Performance Research*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2011, pp. 142. *ProQuest*, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/scholarly-journals/acting-out-trauma-theatre-embarrassment-george/docview/862274777/se-2?accountid=10226>.
- Donadio, Rachel. “Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Presides Over Shylock’s Appeal.” *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 27 July 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/07/28/theater/ruth-bader-ginsburg-rbg-venice-merchant-of-venice.html?\_r=0.
- Ebert, Roger. “‘Merchant of Venice’ Gets Its Due.” Ebert Digital LLC, 20 Jan. 2005, www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-merchant-of-venice-2005.
- Edelstein, Barry, et al. “Shylock, Shakespeare, and the Jews: Anti-Semitism in the Merchant of Venice.” *YouTube*, uploaded by MuseumJewishHeritage LivingMemorialToTheHolocaust, 20 May 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=961TYRfkFzA&ab\\_channel=MuseumJewishHeritageLivingMemorialToTheHolocaust](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=961TYRfkFzA&ab_channel=MuseumJewishHeritageLivingMemorialToTheHolocaust).
- Frank, Steve. “‘The Merchant of Venice’ perpetuates vile stereotypes of Jews. So why do we still produce it?” *The Washington Post*, 28 July 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/28/stop-producing-the-merchant-of-venice/>.
- Galery, Maria-Clara Versiani. “Shylock in the Cinema: Michael Radford’s *The Merchant of Venice*.” *European Judaism*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2018. *Gale Academic OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A564342840/AONE?u=columbiau&sid=AONE&xid=9fc6c4f1.
- “Germany warns of anti-Semitism among lockdown protests.” *AP*, The Associated Press, 24 Nov. 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-anne-frank-coronavirus-pandemic-berlin-anti-semitism-cfec5dc69e9c0fa69ef23f1e15ff90c4>.
- Gross, Kenneth. *Shylock Is Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press, 2006.

- Holmes, Tara. "Readmission of Jews to Britain in 1656." *BBC*, 24 June 2011, [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/history/350.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/history/350.shtml).
- Isherwood, Charles. "Review: 'The Merchant of Venice' With Extra Fog, Moral and Atmospheric." *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 22 July 2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/07/23/theater/the-merchant-of-venice-jonathan-pryce-review.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/23/theater/the-merchant-of-venice-jonathan-pryce-review.html).
- "John Barton 1978 and 1981 Productions." *Royal Shakespeare Company*, <https://www.rsc.org.uk/the-merchant-of-venice/past-productions/john-barton-1981-production>.
- Jones, Michael. "'The Place of the Jews': Anti-Judaism and Theatricality in Medieval Culture." *Exemplaria*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2000, pp. 327-357. DOI: 10.1179/exm.2000.12.2.327.
- Jongh, Nicholas de. "Stunning Shylock of Real Rage." *London Evening Standard*, 17 Jan. 1999, [www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/stunning-shylock-of-real-rage-7435218.html](http://www.standard.co.uk/culture/theatre/stunning-shylock-of-real-rage-7435218.html).
- Kaplan, M. Lindsay. "Others and Lovers in *The Merchant of Venice*." *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare, Second Edition*, edited by Dymphna Callaghan, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2016, pp. 359-377.
- Keats, John. "Selections from Keats's Letters." *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, 22 Dec. 1818, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69384/selections-from-keatss-letters>.
- Kinsley, Elisabeth H. "'The Jew That Shakespeare Drew, at Least in Outlines': Renderings of a Yiddish-Speaking Shylock in New York, circa 1900." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2016, p. 17-36. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/tj.2016.0002.
- Lelyveld, Toby. *Shylock on the Stage*. London, Routledge, 1960. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.4324/9781315759296>.
- Malkin, Jeanette R., and Eckart Voigts. "Wrestling with Shylock: Contemporary British Jewish Theatre and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*." *European Judaism*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2018. *Gale Academic OneFile Select*, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/A564342847/EAIM?u=columbiau&sid=EAIM&xid=83ed495d](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A564342847/EAIM?u=columbiau&sid=EAIM&xid=83ed495d).
- The Merchant of Venice*. Directed by Michael Radford, 2004.
- "The Merchant of Venice || William Shakespeare || Full Play and Movie || ICSE English || ICSE Novel." *YouTube*, uploaded by VK Online Guru, 21 Jul. 2020. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9q7h9b-KWs&ab\\_channel=VKOnlineGuru](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9q7h9b-KWs&ab_channel=VKOnlineGuru).
- "National Theatre *The Merchant Of Venice* starring Laurence Olivier 1973." *YouTube*, uploaded by Pratyush Siroya, 24 Jan. 2017. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuZS1-pLQMM&ab\\_channel=PratyushSiroya](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuZS1-pLQMM&ab_channel=PratyushSiroya).

- Page, Judith W. “‘Hath not a Jew eyes?’: Edmund Kean and the Sympathetic Shylock.” *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2003, pp. 116–119. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/24044954](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24044954).
- Ravid, Benjamin. “From Yellow to Red: On the Distinguishing Head-Covering of the Jews of Venice.” *Jewish History*, vol. 6, nos. 1-2, 1992, pp. 179-210.
- Rich, Frank. “STAGE: MANY FACES OF SHAKESPEARE.” *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 16 June 1987, [www.nytimes.com/1987/06/16/theater/stage-many-faces-of-shakespeare.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1987/06/16/theater/stage-many-faces-of-shakespeare.html).
- Schnauder, Ludwig. “‘The villainy you teach me I will execute...’ Peter Zadek’s Productions of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* at Vienna’s Burgtheater.” *Anglo-German Theatrical Exchange*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Rodopi, 2015. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004292307\\_015](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004292307_015).
- Schoch, Richard. “Commemorating Shakespeare in performance: Betterton and Irving.” *Celebrating Shakespeare*, edited by Clara Calvo and Coppélia Kahn, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 38-56.
- Schwartz, Yaakov. “1st half of 2020 sees near-record anti-Semitism in UK despite lockdown.” *The Times of Israel*, The Times of Israel, 30 July 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/1st-half-of-2020-sees-near-record-anti-semitism-in-uk-despite-lockdown/>.
- Scott, A.O. “Putting a Still-Vexed Play in a Historical Context.” *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 29 Dec. 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/29/movies/putting-a-stillvexed-play-in-a-historical-context.html>.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works, edited by John Jowett et al., Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 425-451.
- Shapiro, James. *Shakespeare in a Divided America*. Penguin Press, 2020.
- “Stage History.” *Royal Shakespeare Company*, [www.rsc.org.uk/the-merchant-of-venice/about-the-play/stage-history](http://www.rsc.org.uk/the-merchant-of-venice/about-the-play/stage-history).
- Stewart, Patrick, and David Suchet. “shylock-actors-discuss.mpg.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Matt Bracksieck, 20 Sept. 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU\\_zqBIITDM&ab\\_channel=MattBracksieck](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU_zqBIITDM&ab_channel=MattBracksieck).
- Tovey, Barbara. “The Golden Casket: An Interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*.” *Shakespeare as Political Thinker*, edited by John E. Alvis and Thomas G. West, ISI Books, 2000, pp. 261-287.
- “U.S. ‘Moving into a Dangerous Phase’ as Anti-Semitic Incidents Surge, Group Says.” *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, 26 Jan. 2021, [www.cbsnews.com/news/anti-semitic-incidents-on-rise/](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/anti-semitic-incidents-on-rise/).

- Weisz, George M, and Donatella Lippi. "Roderigo Lopez, Physician-in-Chief to Queen Elizabeth I of England." *Rambam Maimonides medical journal* vol. 8, no. 3, 2017, doi:10.5041/RMMJ.10306.
- Whitney, Craig R. "Hoffman as Shylock: London Critics Cool." *The New York Times*, A.G. Sulzberger, 3 June 1989, [www.nytimes.com/1989/06/03/theater/hoffman-as-shylock-london-critics-cool.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/03/theater/hoffman-as-shylock-london-critics-cool.html).
- Wilson, Robert J. "Censorship, Anti-Semitism, and 'The Merchant of Venice.'" *The English Journal*, vol. 86, no. 2, 1997, pp. 43–45. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/819672](http://www.jstor.org/stable/819672).
- Worthen, William B. *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 1997. *EBSCOhost*, [search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=55762&site=ehost-live&scope=site](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=55762&site=ehost-live&scope=site).
- Worthen, William B. *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 2003. *EBSCOhost*, [search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=112635&site=ehost-live&scope=site](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=112635&site=ehost-live&scope=site).

---

**HANNAH RUBENSTEIN, Barnard College '21**, majored in English with concentrations in Creative Writing and Theatre. She is interested in exploring the multidisciplinary and intersectional aspects of performance, artistic expressions of grief, and the capacity to harness the arts for positive community impact. Hannah is pursuing a career in theatre production and creative writing.