Shakespeare's Jewish Questions

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"THE LETTER KILLS, but the Spirit gives life."[1] Oppositions like this one pepper the writings of Saint Paul, the earliest that survive from the stylus of a follower of Jesus: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:5-6). These polarities are Paul's, but they became so basic to Christianity that we cannot fault Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx for attributing them to the Evangelists in the first paragraph of their "The Holy Family" where they also proclaimed such antinomies as the most "dangerous enemy" of "real humanism."[2]

Paul deployed these antinomies in the name of overcoming others—such as Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free. To put it in anachronistic terms, they were part of his argument for Christian universalism. But because that argument took place in the specific context of Paul's program to separate the gentile followers of Jesus from the obligations of the Judaism into which their savior had been born, it tended to create new dualities and to designate "Judaism" as *the* particularism that remained for Christians to overcome. In Galatians, an Epistle entirely devoted to establishing these new antinomies, Paul employed the rare verb "to Judaize" to designate the action by which gentile Christians slip from one side of these oppositions to the other, becoming attached to "Jewish"

law, letter, and flesh and thereby cut off from Jesus Christ (Latin *iudaizare,* Greek Ἰουδαϊζειν, Gal. 2:14).[3]

Paul's antinomies would have the effect of stigmatizing as "Judaizing" vast areas of human life—letter, law, flesh—that are difficult to transcend in this world. He himself did not expect this world to last long, but even the short span of his own lifetime proved long enough to discover unintended but dangerous dualisms in the oppositions with which he had couched his arguments about the obligations of gentile Christians toward Judaism. In Romans, for example, he felt compelled to correct the antinomian view evidently inspired by Galatians, that the baptized should demonstrate their freedom from the law by doing evil. And to the Corinthians he found it necessary to insist that the fleshy body (*sôma*) is not a tomb (*sema*) but a sheltering tent.[4]

The difficulty would only grow sharper with time. If dependence upon letter, law, and flesh is "Judaizing," then how, within the confines of this material world, can the Christian avoid becoming a "Jew"? The tendency to align law, letter, flesh, slavery, and death with the Jews as carnal heirs of Abraham; to set all of these against the faith, freedom, and eternal life that characterize Christians as Abraham's heirs in the spirit; and to call "Judaizing" the fearsome slippage between them: these became an enduring characteristic of the movements we call Christianity. In this sense even Karl Marx remained Paul's heir, for he had argued in "On the Jewish Question" (the essay that immediately preceded "The Holy Family") that private property "Judaized" those who embraced it. In his graphic formulation, so long as Christian society privatized the fruits of man's labor, it would continue to "produce Judaism from its own entrails."[5]

Such "Jewish questions" and their analogues have troubled many chapters in the long history of Christian theology. Luther, for example, attributed the origins of his revolution—at least as he remembered it in retrospect—to his revulsion at Judaizing hints of law in Romans, chapter 1: "thus far there had stood in my way . . . that one word which is in chapter 1: 'The *justice* of God is revealed in it.' I hated that word, '*justice,*' " hated it because it seemed to drag into the Gospels all the legal threats of the Hebrew Bible. For Luther, as for Augustine and indeed for countless Christians after Paul, the critical "Jewish question" was this: how can the Judaizing potential inherent in the inevitable Christian encounter with letter, law, and flesh be contained? Luther's own answer to this question led him to condemn much of the existing hermeneutical, liturgical, and

institutional edifice of Christianity as Judaizing and to propose the erection of a new one in its place. But insofar as he also depended upon the authoritative mediation of letter, law, and sacrament, he too remained vulnerable to the charge of "Judaizing."[6]

Of course not every Christian culture was equally concerned with Judaizing, or concerned in the same way. But the charge of "Judaizing" remained available as a powerful tool of cultural critique, deployed in different ways at different times and places. In the sixteenth century, put to hard work during the sectarian conflicts unleashed by Luther's hermeneutics, that charge discovered "Jews" in the most unlikely places, as when an Augsburg Catholic preacher greeted the rumor that Edward VI had embraced Reform in 1551 with a sermon declaring that "the King of England, his council and kingdom had all become Jews."[7] It is the renewed power of this Pauline critique that accounts for the curious fact that in the second half of that century, at precisely the moment when centuries of expulsion and mass conversion had brought the Jewish population of the vast region from the Rock of Gibraltar to the castle of Wittenberg to the vanishing point, concern about Judaizing reached a new peak in Western Europe. It is the power of this same "Judaizing" critique that put so many imagined Jews on the new stages of London (a city that had sheltered fewer "real Jews" in its long history than perhaps any other major one in Europe). And finally, it is the power of this critique that animated Shakespeare's "Jewish questions" in *The Merchant of Venice.*

Shakespeareans will recognize here an explicit challenge to the school of criticism, founded by Sidney Lee and Lucien Wolf and reenergized by James Shapiro, that emphasizes the importance of excavating "real Jews" as the context for *The Merchant of Venice.* Such excavators are misguided, and not only because their confidence in the "Judaism" of the few dozen descendants of Spanish and Portuguese converts they discover living in Shakespeare's London—none of whom confessed to being anything but Christian—replicates the genealogical convictions of the Inquisition. More important, their insistence that Christian anxieties about Judaism depend on the existence of "real Jews" ignores the ability of Christian thought to generate Judaism "out of its own entrails." Even if we were to find an entire clan of Hebrews cowering in some Elizabethan estaminet, we would be no closer to understanding the work done by figures of Judaism on Shakespeare's stage. For that, we need to focus on the critical work done by "Judaism" within the Christian culture of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.[8]

But this does not mean—and here there is a less obvious challenge to another school—that Shakespeare presents us with healing allegory, as some biblically oriented critics would have it. Certainly Shakespeare insists, as Paul did in his "allegory" of Ishmael and Isaac in Galatians, chapter 4, on the important difference between Israel after the flesh and Israel after the spirit. But he also insists, as Paul did in Galatians 2:14, that the threat of "Judaizing" attends every Christian act of communication, interaction, and exchange. Like everyone else in this material world, Christians are bound by necessity to promise their words, their goods, and even their flesh (as for example in the marriage contract). In such texts as *The Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine,* Augustine had explained that love could discriminate between the killing hermeneutics of the Jew and the salvific one of the Christian. But the test of love only concentrates the problem, as George Herbert rather savagely recognized in "Self Condemnation":

> He that doth love, and love amisse,
> This worlds delights before true Christian joy,
> Hath made a Jewish choice.
> . . . He hath made a sorrie wedding
> Between his soul and gold . . .
> And is a Judas-Jew.[9]

But how to distinguish the "Christian" from the "Jewish" choice? This is Shakespeare's Jewish question at its most basic. From its first words to its last, the play poses this question repeatedly: Portia's famous "Which is the Merchant here, and which the Jew?" is only its most apothegmatic expression. *The Merchant of Venice* is a drama of chronic conversion whose every participant—including playwright and viewer—moves suspended like a compass needle trembling between Judaism and Christianity. Approached in this way, the play opens a new perspective on the role of Jewish questions in Shakespeare's thinking about the rapidly changing religious, legal, economic, and poetic landscape of his age, including, of course, the question of his anti-Semitism.[10]

From its first words—"In sooth, I know not why I am so sad" (1.1.1)[11]—centuries of critics have pondered the motives for Antonio's melancholy. Their explanations range from the self-alienation of the capitalist to the repressed homoeroticism of a man whose best friend wants to marry.[12] Shakespeare's own audience might have suspected yet another cause.

"Our English proverbe 'To looke like a Jewe,' " noted Thomas Coryate in 1611, means to look like "one discontented." Even their cookbooks taught Elizabethans to associate melancholy with Judaism. As Henry Buttes's diet book put it in 1599, the Jew's "complexion is passing melancholious," a situation he attributed to an excessive fondness for goose.[13] The audience's suspicions could only have increased with the dialogue. It is worry that your ships might sink, says one companion (Salerio), which makes you so sad. You think of nothing but your money. Everything else, no matter how sacred, reminds you only that your investments are at risk:

> . . . should I go to church
> And see the holy edifice of stone
> And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
> Which touching but my gentle vessel's side
> Would scatter all her spices on the stream. . . .
> (1.1.30–34)

Exit one friend and enter another (Gratiano), who makes a similar diagnosis in even harsher terms:

> You have too much respect upon the world.
> They lose it that do buy it with much care. . . .
> (1.1.76–77)[14]

Is our merchant, like the Jews and Pharisees, too concerned with earthly treasure, overly preoccupied by the material world? He objects strenuously to this critique. His investments are safe, he insists, his attachment to the world not excessive. Gratiano, not dissuaded, takes another, equally distressing tack:

> There are a sort of men whose visages
> Do cream and mantle like a standing pond,
> And do a wilful stillness entertain,
> With purpose to be dressed in an opinion
> Of Wisdom, gravity, profound conceit. . . .
> But fish not with this melancholy bait
> For this fool gudgeon, this opinion.
> (1.1.91–105)

If the merchant's melancholy is not the product of vulgar materialism, Gratiano implies, then it is the product of a Pharisaic hypocrisy, one that

conceals inner emptiness with outer profundity in order to earn—as Jesus puts it in the Gospel according to Matthew—the title of "rabbi," empty reputation among men. Either way he appears to be, in the vocabulary of Christianity, a "Jew."[15]

There are two businessmen in "The Merchant of Venice," the Christian Antonio, whose entrance in act I, scene 1, we have been describing, and Shylock the Jew. The similarity between them is deliberate, so deep that Shylock notes it with surprise when he first sees Antonio: "How like a fawning publican he looks!" This line too has perplexed its commentators. "Publican" is the Gospel name for Jewish tax collectors, and in the Gospel texts they play an ambivalent role: either (in Matthew's exhortation to love) as the most degrading example of people who are kind only to their friends or (in Luke's parable of the publican and the Pharisee) as the humblest example of the meek triumphing over the proud. By and large scholars have preferred to cleave the ambivalence rather than maintain it. Many have opted for the Lucan interpretation and seen in Antonio's fawning an allegory of Christian virtue. But how to suppress the whiff of "Jewish" misanthropy that Matthew's "publican" emits? Perhaps, some have suggested, the line as we have it is an editing error, and Shakespeare meant "publican" to apply to Shylock, not Antonio. Such arguments seek to cut the elegant knots with which Shakespeare bound Judaism and Christianity, rather than untie them. Yet it is precisely through these knots, and the confusions between Christian and Jew they make possible, that *The Merchant of Venice* does its work.[16]

By ambivalence and confusion I do not mean the often made point that Shakespeare's Jew is sometimes sympathetic ("If you prick me, do I not bleed?"), nor the less often made one that his Christians are sometimes not. It is true that the characters in *Merchant* make greater claims to sympathy and humanity than those in its influential predecessor, Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (ca. 1589), in which not only the title character but Christian and Muslim protagonists as well are all cynical distillations of villainy. But these claims are just one symptom of a much more systematically staged confusion of Christian and Jew in the play, and it is through this more general—indeed, all-pervasive—confusion that Shakespeare achieves his dramatization of a crucial question: how can a society built upon "Jewish" foundations of commerce, contract, property, and law consider itself Christian?

This question is as ancient as Christianity itself, encoded to some extent in a theology that distinguished more or less radically between the pursuit of earthly and heavenly treasure, between loyalty to secular law

or divine love, and that understood the Jews as the prototypical example of the alienation from God and spirit that results from the wrong choice. Many medieval moralizers exploited that exemplarity, preaching that attachment to material wealth in general, and its pursuit through certain forms of commerce and monetary exchange in particular, were not Christian but "Jewish" activities. Saint Vincent Ferrer put it eloquently around 1400: "Today, nearly everything is avarice, for almost everyone commits usury, which used not to be done except by Jews. But today Christians do it too, as if they were Jews." Sebastian Brant's "Ship of Fools" made the same point a century later (1494), half a continent away, and in a different genre: "Most tolerable was the Jews' petition/but they could remain no longer/The Christian Jews drove them away/who themselves tilt with Jewish spears."[17]

In the theater of Shakespeare's England, yet another century and genre later, there were plenty of dramatists willing to "Judaize" credit in much the same way. In *The Jew,* for example, an anonymous and now lost play performed sometime before 1579, the title character was meant to represent "the greedinesse of worldy chusers, and bloody mindes of Usurers." But this insistence on a bright contrast between the attitudes and practices of the spiritual Christian toward commerce and those of the fleshy Jew was becoming more difficult to maintain in a world in which the wheels of commerce were accelerating, and from which the Jews themselves had long since vanished.[18]

Beginning in 1571, the lending of money at interest became legal in England. The crime of usury remained but henceforth would mean only the charging of excessively high rates of interest (of which crime William Shakespeare's own father, John, was at least twice accused). Why was the rapidly spreading Christian practice of moneylending at interest not a "cruel" one, like the much-demonized lending of medieval Jews? Some writers tried to draw a sharp contrast, claiming that "our usury in money" is not "all one with that of the Jews," and even culled medieval chronicles in an attempt to prove that the latter had charged rates of up to 80 percent. Others, like the author of *The Jew,* effaced the contrast and strove to represent Christian moneylenders as "Jewish." It was even a commonplace, so Francis Bacon reported, that moneylenders should wear Jews' hats, "orange-tawny bonnets, because they do 'Judaize.' " Shakespeare, as we shall see, took a more sophisticated tack.[19]

The question of moneylending provides one "Jewish" context for Shakespeare's *Merchant,* but it is far from the only one. Moralists found

cause for further worry in the increasingly mercantile nature of the English economy. Merchants claimed with ever more vigor their rights as "profitable members of the common wealth, in transporting our commodities into other lands, and enriching vs with the benefits and fruits of other countries."[20] But was a man's profitability a sufficient measure of his virtue? Might not the merchant, who grows money by buying things at one price and selling them at a higher one, also be condemned as a kind of "Jewish" usurer?[21] And what was the relationship between the merchant's profit and the commonwealth or state? Should the latter organize itself in such a way as to maximize the former? Conversely, was a man's capacity to "act for the commodity of his Countrie" a good qualification for participation in the state and its governance, or were other virtues (such as aristocratic values or Christian morality) more important?[22]

These and many others were urgent questions as England joined the fray of European mercantilism. Commerce, and the dangerous sea of contract, bond, and law upon which it floated, demanded exploration.[23] For that exploration, the city-states of Italy provided the perfect Indies. Italian treatises on political philosophy and economy were "Englished" and consumed by the dozen. And Venice, with its commercial dominance, its merchant oligarchy, and even (at times) its toleration of Jews, provided a particularly frequent example to philosophers and divines.[24]

Dramatists too turned to these examples, not only because entertainers need to comment on their times but also because the theaters of the Elizabethan age were among the newest barks on this dangerous sea of commerce. Vendors of words and pretense, they were as dependent on capital as any financier. Like directors of merchant companies, theatrical impresarios of the day rose and fell on their ability to obtain royal licenses and monopolies, secure cheap sources of product, and reach an audience whose hunger for that product was great enough to be turned into profit. Their diaries are full of the strategies by which all this might be achieved, strategies drawn from the most up-to-date arsenals of the market. (One such strategy, relevant to the theme of our play, was that of locking up actors under contracts enforced by "bonds," that is, threats of penalty should they be broken.) And were not playwrights also "worldy chusers"? After all, they sold their gilded words for sound silver, that "pale and common drudge/'Tween man and man" (3.2.103–4), which they then reinvested in commodity and credit markets. Shakespeare, for example, bought shares of theater companies, invested in real estate, and speculated in malt.[25]

As for theatrical words themselves, one did not have to be a dogmatic Platonist to charge them with all the dangers of mimetic deceit (or Pharisaism, to use a more Christian term for an excessive concern with appearances), given that drama was explicitly built, perhaps more than any other genre of its day, upon the gap between appearance and reality. Could a theatrical word ever be true? If not, it was in the interest of a Christian state, as some moralists argued, to suffocate this infant language in its crib. But if so, as a playwright might want to claim, in what sense could such words be true? These questions about the dangers of theatrical representation were hot ones in Shakespeare's time, and a good deal of that heat came from their connection to "Jewish questions" about the dangers of interpreting sign and sacrament that we have already found at the center of the disputes between the many flavors of Catholicism and Protestantism that so marked the history of England in this age.[26]

From its opening scene, *The Merchant of Venice* inserts itself into all these contexts and more.[27] You know the story. Antonio's friend, Bassanio, has

> plots and purposes
> How to get clear of all the debts I owe.
> (1.1.133–34)

His plan is to marry the rich and fair Portia,

> nothing undervalu'd . . .
> Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth.
> (1.1.165, 167)

But to woo and win this "golden fleece" he needs more cash.

> O my Antonio, had I but the means
> To hold a rival place with one of them,
> I have a mind presages me such thrift
> That I should questionless be fortunate.
> (1.1.173–76)

Value, thrift, worth, means, debts, fortune, fleece: thus far the plot sounds more like a business plan than a love story; a confusion of profit and passion that is precisely the kind of reversal of values the audience would have associated with Judaism. And to business Antonio goes. He has no liquid funds, his fortune is all at sea, but he determines to do what all businessmen do in such circumstances: borrow money.

Bassanio takes Antonio to Shylock the Jew, and it is at this point that Shakespeare's audience might expect a moralizing distinction to emerge between good merchant and bad. The expectation is not entirely disappointed. At first, for example, the Jew talks differently, in a strangely literal semicomprehension, repeating Bassanio's statements word for word. (Shylock's linguistics will be revisited later.) Then too, the credit negotiations between the three of them recapitulate the traditional Christian view of an irreconcilable enmity between Jewish and Christian economics. The character of Shylock articulates the difference as Christians imagined it:

> I hate him [Antonio] for he is a Christian,
> But more for that in low simplicity
> he lends out money gratis. . . .
> He hates our sacred nation, and he rails
> (Even there where merchants most do congregate)
> On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,
> Which he calls interest: cursed be my tribe
> If I forgive him!
> (1.3.37–47)

But then Shylock attempts to bridge the difference with exegesis. He tells the story of Jacob multiplying Laban's sheep and interprets it as legitimating profit: "Thrift is blessing if men steal it not."[28]

Now it is Antonio's turn to reject assimilation and recapitulate the traditional claim to irreconcilable economics. He rudely dismisses Shylock's reading with a distilled charge of Pharisaism:

> The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose. . . .
> O what a goodly outside falsehood hath!
> (1.3.94)

He calls Shylock a hostile cur, an enemy of his customers who breeds lifeless money from their living flesh:

> If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
> As to thy friends, for when did friendship take
> A breed for barren metal of his friend?
> But lend it rather to thine enemy,
> Who if he break, thou may'st with better face
> Exact the penalty.
> (1.3.127–32)[29]

The passage is indigestibly rich with allusion to the tropes of premodern economic thought. "Breed for barren metal" evokes the commonplace hierarchy of ways to create wealth from Aristotle's *Politics,* in which interest occupies the lowest and most stigmatized place: "And this term interest, which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the breeding of money from money because the offspring resembles the parent. That is why of all modes of getting wealth this is the most unnatural." (Or, as Luther put it, "money is a barren thing.")[30]

"Enemy," too, is an overgrown concept in the history of moneylending, one whose taproot lies in God's commandment that Israelites could lend at interest to strangers but not to their brothers. Though this commandment may originally have cut only between families, the requirement of brotherhood came over time to be read as a collective metaphor for community. The Israelite could charge interest only to the non-Israelite, the Jew only to the non-Jew, and the Christian, called to universal brotherhood in the Gospels, could take interest from no one. As always, Saint Thomas Aquinas summarized well the Catholic exegetical consensus: "The Jews were forbidden to take usury from their brethren; i.e., from other Jews. By this we are given to understand that to take usury from any man is evil simply, because we ought to treat every man as our neighbor and brother, especially in the state of the Gospel, where to all are called."[31]

Within this tradition, the charging of interest draws a sharp line between neighbor and alien, friend and enemy, Christian and Jew. Antonio's angry invocation of that line is intended to freeze the two merchants into starkly opposing allegories of their respective covenants: loving Christian, hateful Jew. But Shylock starts to melt the opposition as soon as it is made. He responds to Christian insult not with anger, but with love ("I would be friends with you, and have your love") and the offer of an interest-free loan. In seeming jest ("in a merry sport"), he asks only for a token penalty, a useless pound of flesh, should Antonio fail to pay. A dialogue full of double meaning convinces Antonio that "flesh" here is not meant literally, and that the contract is indeed an expression of charity:

> Hie thee, gentle Jew!
> The Hebrew will turn Christian, he grows kind.
> (1.3.173–74)

The vocabulary of conversion here is not coincidental, and its implications are too often overlooked: if according to our Pauline logic the

wrong kind of contract can make the Christian "Jewish," so conversely can the right kind make the Jew a "gentle" (gentile) Christian. (The pun will be repeated in the play.) Now it is Bassanio's turn to worry about the "Pharisaic" possibility that Shylock's "gentle" contract may be something other than it seems: "I like not fair terms, and a villain's mind" (1.3.175).

The problem that worries Bassanio is the same one that bothered the Evangelists and church fathers. If in this world of flesh the nonliteral or spiritual sense of what lies before us cannot be separated from its literal or material form, then how can we avoid the danger of interpreting it incorrectly and thereby becoming "Jews"? Shakespeare knows that many have preached easy answers to this question. He puts one of these "answers" at the center of his drama: the test of the three chests by which Portia must be won. The test is simple: the suitor chooses among three boxes, one of lead, one of silver, one of gold. One chest contains Portia's portrait and brings her hand in marriage. The others condemn the suitor "never to speak to lady afterward" (2.1.41). The Prince of Morocco is the first to undergo the test, his blackness incarnating the ontology in question. Morocco insists that he be judged by inner virtue rather than external view. He picks the chest of gold on the (slightly different) hermeneutic theory that inner and outer beauty should ideally conform. Both these positions are defensibly "Christian," yet the casket contains a damning scroll:

> All that glitters is not gold.
> Often have you heard that told.
> Many a man his life hath sold
> But my outside to behold.
> Gilded timber do worms enfold.
> (2.7.66-70)

We are not surprised by Morocco's failure, and neither was Shakespeare's audience. They had probably heard the famous story of the three chests from the *Gesta Romanorum* (a late medieval collection of anecdotes for use in sermons widespread in Shakespeare's day). Even if they had not, they knew from Jesus's condemnation of the "whitewashed tombs" of the Pharisees that the "vessell of golde full of dead mennes bones" was the "Jewish" choice, not the "Christian" one. What is surprising about this scene is not Morocco's failure, but that of the test itself.[32]

We can best recognize the chests' inability to establish a distinction between "Christian" and "Jew" if we shift our focus from Morocco's ontological assumptions to Portia's. Portia—like every character in this

play—is at high risk of "Judaism." When we first meet her she is melancholy, like Antonio, and again for "Jewish" reasons: unfree to "choose" love, bound by "cold decree," "curbed by the will of a dead father," she is explicitly placed under the tutelage of the law, from which only the test of the chests can free her. But Portia, too, fails the test, and more blatantly than Morocco. Portia, this "angel," "this shrine, this mortal breathing saint," this woman "of wondrous virtues," commits the "Judaizing" error of placing more value on outer appearance than on inner worth. She has already stumbled in act 1: "if he have the condition of a saint, and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me." Now, with the poor prince condemned before her, Portia pitilessly sharpens the point: "Let all of his complexion choose me so." Shakespeare sharpens his point as well: the test of the three chests, with its confident opposition of outer and inner, of material value and spiritual worth, of Jew and Christian, will not suffice. No one in this play is capable of fully separating the material world from the moral or spiritual one. Like the apostles, who "Judaized" even as Jesus warned them against the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Luke 12:1-2, Matt. 16:5-12), the virtuous Portia opts for the "whitewashed tomb" of appearances the moment after the Moor has revealed the skeletons within it.

Shakespeare's characters repeatedly perform this problem, constantly mixing the vocabulary of outer form and material value with that of inner meaning and spiritual virtue. Equally constant is their attempt to remap the resulting confusion onto the polarity of "Christian" and "Jew." Consider, for example, the relationship between Shylock's daughter, the Jewess Jessica, and the Christian Lorenzo. From its beginning their affair is described in a double-dealing language of love and lucre. When Jessica writes a letter to Lorenzo it sounds—like most declarations of passion in this play—more like a business proposition than a pledge of love:

> she hath directed
> How I shall take her from her father's house,
> What gold and jewels she is furnish'd with.
> (2.4.29-31)

These very words move Lorenzo to rapture, and to religious confusion:

> If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven,
> It will be for his gentle daughter's sake,
> And never dare misfortune cross her foot,

> Unless she do it under this excuse,
> That she is issue to a faithless Jew.
> (2.4.33-37)

Is Jessica a "gentle" (gentile, i.e., a Christian) or a Jew? The question is crucial, and we will return to it. At the moment, however, Lorenzo's own identity appears precarious as well. He is late to the elopement, prompting his friends to describe his ardor in terms of broken faith:

> O ten times faster Venus' pigeons fly
> To seal love's bonds new-made, than they are wont
> To keep obliged faith unforfeited!
> (2.6.5-7)

When he does reach Shylock's house, he himself acknowledges his confused religious state: "Here dwells my father Jew" (2.6.25). The confusion only increases: Jessica comes to the window disguised as a boy, throws down a casket of her father's jewels, and promises gold: "I will . . . gild myself with some more ducats, and be with you straight" (2.6.51-52). Now it is Lorenzo's friend Gratiano who responds to this conflation of bride and bullion in religious terms: "Now by my hood, a gentle, and no Jew" (2.6.53). Our audience, better versed than we in the moral hierarchies I have been describing, would have found the joke amusing. Gratiano stakes his "hood"—which is to say, the foreskin emblematic of his Christianity—that Jessica is a Christian. But he does so at precisely the moment when she is most explicitly represented in terms of metallic value, a confusion associated with Judaism throughout the play. In other words, Gratiano "Judaizes," and his faulty hermeneutics effect his own "circumcision," thereby revealing (to paraphrase Paul's *Romans* and Augustine's *Confessions*) that his flesh may be uncircumcised, but his heart and lips remain suspect.[33]

This confusion between living being and object of value pervades the play, although Shylock the Jew is made to represent it in its purest form. Recall Solanio's report of the Jew's discovery of his daughter's deception:

> I never heard a passion so confus'd,
> So strange, outrageous, and so variable
> As the dog Jew did utter in the streets,—
> "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!

> Fled with a Christian!
> O my Christian ducats!
> Justice, the law, my ducats, and my daughter!
> A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
> Of double ducats, stol'n from me by my daughter!
> And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones,
> Stol'n by my daughter! Justice!—find the girl,
> She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats!"
> (2.8.12–22)

Girl, gold, justice, gentiles, genitals: all are jumbled together in the howling sorrow of the "dog Jew," who can no longer distinguish between his financial assets and his flesh and blood. His misery unmans him in a double sense. He is castrated through the loss of his "two sealed bags," his "two stones"; and he is classified (by the Christian) as nonhuman, a creature whose words are incapable of distinguishing between living people and material things.[34]

This confusion and the inhumanity it produces are presented in this moment as peculiarly Jewish traits. But they are also, as Shakespeare shows over and over again, to some extent characteristic of every act of communication and human interaction in the world of Venice. In this sense Shylock serves the Christian as a limit case, bringing relief through the extremity of the representation. The same is true of the specific form of communication and exchange through which Shakespeare chooses to explore the implications of this confusion: not tissues of lies or lace handkerchiefs as in *Othello,* but contract, oath, pledge, and promise, the legal words that relate people and property to one another. Such contracting words take many forms in *The Merchant of Venice.* Relationships of obligation between father and daughter, bride and groom, employer and employee, citizen and state, God and man: all are translated by Shakespeare into the question of how contracts should be read, explored as a quarrel between covenants.[35]

The form of contract at the center of the play—the debt contract, or IOU—was the subject of much debate in Shakespeare's day. Throughout much of the sixteenth century, parties to such contracts had been free to specify any mutually agreed upon penalty for nonperformance, in a type of bond known as "conditional defeasance." Such bonds enabled penalties independent of—and sometimes grossly incommensurable with—the value of the debt. But increasingly, they also raised difficult

questions, questions absolutely basic to economic and political life. Are there limits to the freedoms, the autonomies of soul and body, that can be alienated through contract? What legal practices, what ways of writing and reading contract and law, can help us determine these limits? By the later sixteenth century the courts were tending to decide that there were: Chancery (the high court of equity) began to reduce penalties to the amount of the debt on appeal, a practice that became routine by 1614. Shakespeare pushed these questions to their limits, not only by staging them as "Jewish questions" but also by posing the legal alienation of self in the extreme form of a carnivorous contract, one that explicitly equates three thousand ducats of Shylock's gold with (upon default) one pound of his Christian debtor's flesh.[36]

Such contracts already occupied a distinguished place in European genealogies of morals by the time Shakespeare drew his up. The most famous one stalked the primeval forests of Roman law, at the mythic origins of the European legal order. The Romans were fond of telling stories about the earliest codification of that law, which they called the Law of the Twelve Tables (because it was said to have been inscribed on twelve tables of bronze erected in the Roman Forum in 451–449 BCE). According to Cicero (106–43 BCE), "no bond [*vinculum*], by the wish of our ancestors, was to be tighter in binding good faith than a sworn oath."[37] In the case of debts, the tightness of that bond deeply impressed later commentators. In his *Attic Nights,* a popular collection of ancient lore, the Roman jurist Aulus Gellius (ca. 125–ca. 170 CE) included a description of the capital punishment inflicted of old upon debtors who broke their bonds:

> But it was in order to make good faith sacred . . . that they made that capital punishment dreadful by a display of cruelty and fearful by unheard of terrors. For in cases where there were several creditors to whom the debtor had been adjudged, the Board allowed them the privilege of cutting up in pieces and sharing out the body—the body of a man—of him who had been made over to them; and listen, I will quote the actual words of the Law, lest you believe that maybe I shrink from their odium—"On the third market day creditors shall cut pieces. Should they have cut more or less than their due, it shall be with impunity."[38]

Gellius treated this repayment in flesh as an extreme representation of the sacrality of contract in ancient Rome. The Christian Tertullian, writing a generation later, took a very different tack. His *Apologeticus,*

addressed in 197 CE to the judges who were condemning Christians for violations of Rome's laws, begins with a consideration on the nature of justice. Laws should not be enforced unless they can be shown to be just. Enforcing the law merely because it is the law, rather than inquiring into its higher truth, is not justice but tyranny. Of course Tertullian was aiming at the laws by which Christians were condemned, but the best example he could find of legal tyranny is the one that concerns us:

> There were laws, too, in old times, that parties against whom a decision had been given might be cut in pieces by their creditors; however, by common consent that cruelty was afterwards erased from the statutes, and the capital penalty turned into a brand of shame. . . . How many laws lie hidden out of sight which still require to be reformed! For it is neither the number of their years nor the dignity of their maker that commends them, but simply that they are just. . . . It is a positively wicked law, if, unproved, it tyrannizes over men.[39]

Today's scholars are fond of suggesting that the Twelve Tables themselves never existed but were rather a mythical foundation for the Roman legal order, built out of the retrospective imagination of later lawyers. If this is so, then already within the Roman legal imagination the butchering of the bankrupt represented a "limit case," a way of exploring the extreme implications of basing a society upon exchange and of society's dependence upon the forms of communication (promise, oath, contract) that guarantee that exchange. It is precisely this type of foundational exploration that Shakespeare was engaged in through the "limit case"—equally mythic in his England—of the cruel Jew and his carnivorous contract. The answers he produced are tremendously revealing of the political and economic imagination of his age and of the places assigned in that imagination to figures of Judaism.[40]

The political stakes become clear in act 4's courtroom drama, which is staged as a constitutional affair, presided over by the Duke. From its beginning the Duke makes his opinion clear: the state cannot deny the Jew law but nevertheless expects him to show mercy:

> Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,
> That thou but leadest this fashion of thy malice
> To the last hour of act, and then 'tis thought
> Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange
> Than is thy strange apparent cruelty.
> (4.1.16–21)

The language ("last hour") alludes to the Christian belief that the hard hearts of the Jews will be softened just before the apocalypse, their conversion ushering in Christ's second coming and the redemption of the world. With this hope the Duke ends his speech: "We all expect a gentle answer, Jew" (4.1.16-34).

The Jew does not "turn gentle" (i.e., convert). He demands instead the "due and forfeit" of his bond. The Duke takes yet another theological tack: "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rend'ring none?" (4.1.88). Shylock responds as Christian theology dictates Jews should, by claiming to be justified by the law. "What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?" (4.1.89). But in a celebrated speech, he points out as well that the opposition encoded within that theology is not as stark as it seems.

> You have among you many a purchas'd slave,
> Which (like your asses, and your dogs and mules)
> You use in abject and in slavish parts,
> Because you bought them,—shall I say to you,
> Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?
> . . . you will answer
> "The slaves are ours,"—so do I answer you:
> The pound of flesh which I demand of him
> Is dearly bought, 'tis mine and I will have it:
> If you deny me, fie upon your law!
> There is no force in the decrees of Venice:
> I stand for judgement. Answer, shall I have it?
> (4.1.89-102)

The Christians rail: the Jew is not a human, he is as senseless as the tide, as the mountain forests, his is the soul of a man-eating wolf, reincarnate in man's body. The Jew's response: "I stand here for law" (4.1.42).

The line recalls Portia's portentous words to Bassanio, just before his happy choice of chests: "I stand for sacrifice" (3.2.57). But with law and sacrifice now posed in intractable antithesis, the choice before the Duke's court, a choice between mercy's antinomian anarchy or the tyranny of contract, seems irreconcilable. It is at this point of impasse that Portia enters the scene, disguised as a doctor of laws. It is she who will decide the case, and her decision will again make clear that (pace so many preachers) against the claims of law there are no easy answers, no easy distinctions between Christian and Jew: indeed, her first question will famously be, "Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?"[41]

Portia's initial strategy, like that of many early Christian theologians, is to point earthly law toward the divine. Mercy, she tells Shylock, is the miracle that transcends the difference between giver and receiver. It is mercy that mediates between laws earthly and divine, raising "temporal power," the "dread and fear of kings," to godliness:

> And earthly power doth then show likest God's
> When mercy seasons justice: therefore Jew,
> Though justice be thy plea, consider this.
> That in the course of justice, none of us
> should see salvation: we do pray for mercy.
> (4.1.200-204)

Alongside equity, Portia appeals to transcendence, to deferential emulation of a heavenly and spiritual court. But the Jew rejects the otherworldly gambit: "My deeds upon my head! I crave the law" (4.1.210). The point is clear: the legal claims of this world cannot be overcome simply by pointing to the existence of another. Bassanio pleads that Portia "Wrest once the law to your authority,/—to do a great right, do a little wrong" (4.1.219-20). But Portia understands the antinomian danger:

> It must not be, there is no power in Venice
> Can alter a decree established:
> 'Twill be recorded for a precedent,
> And many an error by the same example
> Will rush into the state,—it cannot be.
> (4.1.222-26)

In order to solve the problem, the "doctor of laws" cannot simply transcend "Judaism," "legalism," and contract. On the contrary, she must embrace them.

Embrace them she does, engaging Shylock in a battle of literalism, and emerging the winner. The contract stipulates a "pound of flesh" but does not mention blood. Therefore should Shylock shed a drop in cutting out his pound, or take a hair's weight flesh too much, "Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate" (4.1.330). Moreover, as an "alien" who has sought the life of a citizen, the Jew's goods are forfeit, and his "life lies in the mercy/Of the Duke only, 'gainst all other voice" (4.1.353-54). Antonio is saved from Shylock and the rule of law is simultaneously maintained, by the paradoxical expedient of making the Jew both supremely subject

to the law and placed outside it, as an alien whose life is entirely in the sovereign's hands. That sovereign chooses to be merciful, "that thou shalt see the difference of our spirit" (4.1.366). The Jew's life is pardoned, though his property is confiscate, and he must convert to Christianity.[42]

For critics who think that the courtroom scene has separated the Christian from the Jew, the fifth act that follows must seem a puzzling anticlimax. But if my reading is correct, the courtroom scene, like the test of the three chests, represents another failure, and the separation remains unclear. One symptom of this failure, at least for modern readers, is that the "Christian mercies"—confiscation, choice between death or conversion—seem "Jewishly" cruel.[43] But a more telling symptom for Shakespeare's audience would have been the competing poetics of conversion within the scene. The doctor's feats of literalism convert Shylock to Christianity, but they simultaneously convert Gratiano—with his eponymous claim to Christian "grace"—to "Judaism." The conversion is evident in Gratiano's diction as well as in the content of his speech. Throughout the courtroom scene he increasingly imitates Shylock's rhythms, repeats his phrases and his biblical allusions, adopts his merciless insistence on the application of law (punning on his own name as he does so: "a halter gratis—nothing else, for God's sake!" [4.1.390]), until at last he appears as cruel as the Jew. His fall reminds us of the fundamental unclarity between "Jewish" and "Christian" approaches to the myriad forms of promise and contract inescapable in this world. The doctor has defeated the limit case, but only by resorting to a "Judaizing" hyperliterality, that is, by "out-Jewing" the Jew. The Christian difficulty with law and language remains.[44]

If the court fails to establish "the difference of our spirit," it is because Shakespeare, unlike some of his sources, is uninterested in minimizing the dangers of "Judaism" that haunt contract. On the contrary, he wants to extend those dangers into the contractual realm at the heart of his own practice: the promise of meaning inherent in the exchange of words themselves. Communication and interpretation have long been associated with lending and obligation, as the etymology of those words themselves makes clear.[45] In Shakespeare's age, a number of prominent theorists understood every communicative act, regardless of whether it involves words, objects, or money, as a promise of meaning to others. Words are, to quote Francis Bacon, "the tokens current and accepted for

conceits," just as money is the accepted currency of value. What Bacon meant is that in order for communication to be possible, every sign exchanged (be it word or coin or ring) must bind all parties to a common understanding of its meaning. In other words, when we communicate with someone else, we enter into a type of contract with them, promising that our words mean more or less what others expect them to mean. We pour into our sounds and symbols a significant portion of our interpretive freedom, and we subject ourselves to language's laws.[46]

Since ancient times this contractual understanding of language was thought by many to be a prerequisite for human society. An example well known to Shakespeare and his contemporaries was that of Cicero, for whom the common bond (*societas*) of political life was unthinkable without a strong common bond (*societas*) of language. Men were joined, according to Cicero, by the "most cheerful chains of speech."[47] In the century after Luther, as Catholic consensus collapsed into religious and civil wars, the contractual model of language offered some refuge. Hugo Grotius, for example, looking for the sources of an international law that could hold all religions and peoples (even atheists) under its jurisdiction, found that law in the contract of language. The "common usage" (*populari ex usu*) of words, according to Grotius in his *On the Law of War and Peace,* is the basis of all association:

> There would be no obligation at all by Promises, if every man were left to his Liberty, to put what Construction he pleased upon them, therefore some certain Rule must be agreed on, whereby we may know, what our Promise oblige us to; and here natural Reason will tell us, that the Person to whom the Promise is given, has a Power to force him who gave it, to do what the right Interpretation of the Words of his Promise does require. For otherwise no Business could come to a Conclusion, which in moral Things is reckoned impossible.[48]

This contractual linguistics produces a difficult question, one distantly related to the debates over the relative merits of literal and nonliteral readings of the Bible that divided the theologians. In exchange for a stable society, just how much of our freedom do we need to surrender to the symbols with which we communicate? For Hobbes, writing half a century after Shakespeare and anxious to augment the stabilizing powers of contract after a bloody civil war, the surrender was almost total: "Metaphors, and senslesse and ambiguous words, are like *ignes fatui;* and reasoning upon them, is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities; and

their end, contention, and sedition, or contempt."[49] Shylock's warning to the Duke of Venice invokes the political danger. Deny the binding force of contract and you "let the danger light/Upon your charter and your city's freedom" (4.1.39-40). Shylock's speech itself expresses his awareness of the linguistic origins of that peril when we first encounter him, literally repeating his interlocutor's words. Hence his constant effort to stipulate his metaphors: "There be land rats and water/rats . . .—I mean pirates" (1.3.20-21); "but stop my house's ears—I mean my casements" (2.5.34). If Shylock can be said to have a theory of how language should function, it is one very close to Hobbes's: "Fast bind fast find,/A proverb never stale in thrifty mind" (2.5.54-55).

But Shakespeare's linguistics is not Shylock's. A playwright cannot deny the literal and common claims of the "tokens current and accepted" (i.e., words) that he depends on, but neither can he afford to invest them with too tyrannical a power over the pun and play of his poetics. How much liberty can the language of theater be allowed? This is yet another of Shakespeare's "Jewish questions," posed perhaps most explicitly in the person of Launcelot, first Shylock's servant and then Bassanio's. Launcelot is, of all the characters in the play, the most self-conscious of the danger of becoming Jewish: "For I am a Jew if I/serve the Jew any longer" (2.2.107). His awareness of the risk is as much the product of profession as proximity: he deals in words, and knows (like Shakespeare) that how he employs those words will determine whether or not he "Judaizes." In this sense, Launcelot performs the problem of theater as another version of the Jewish problem. On the one hand, he lives from mimetic deceit of the sort we have seen Christian hermeneutics associating with "Judaism." On the other, his wordplay, like that of many of Shakespeare's fools, strives toward truth telling. His claim, like that of Elizabethan theater, is of virtuous deceit, and the establishment of that claim requires distancing from the Judaism that threatens it.

Shakespeare explicitly stages this linguistic similarity between playwright, jester, and Jew when he has Launcelot "contrive confusions" on his blind father, in obvious imitation of the biblical Jacob's theft of Isaac's blessing, and in echo of Shylock's earlier conversation. But imitation is not repetition. Launcelot pretends to be other than he is only to obtain what is already his in any case (his father's blessing), not to take what belongs to another. His deceit may be similar to Jacob's or Shylock's, but it produces no theft, no false claims to identity. "Thrift is blessing, if men

steal it not": the point of the Launcelot/Gobbo scene is to claim, in the moral terms of the day, that Launcelot's profit from his words is Christian and not Jewish. Shakespeare is as fond as Launcelot of this ontological trick, restaging it at the end of the play in Portia's "adulterous" oath to lie with the lad who has her ring (an oath that similarly resolves into identity, rather than the adultery it pretends to threaten, since Portia is herself that boy).

Both Launcelot and Shakespeare realize that such narrow scenes of ontologically virtuous deceit cannot serve as a general justification for theater. What underlying identity can be established between players and audience that would suffice to make theatrical deceit virtuous? Launcelot proposes one possibility. Speaking to his new employer, he divides words in two, assigning the "thingness" of words to the Jew and their spirit to the Christian: "The old proverb is very well parted between my/master Shylock and you sir, you have 'the grace of/God' sir, and he hath 'enough' " (2.2.132-34). For Launcelot, as for much of the Renaissance poetic tradition, it is "the grace of God" that separates Christian wordplay from its materialist "Jewish" neighbor, raising poetry from mere letter to spirit and thereby legitimating it as a Christian art.[50]

Shakespeare does not rest with Launcelot's solution, perhaps because its hermeneutic dualism produces as many difficulties as it solves. Instead, in act 5 he embarks on one more exploration of the problem: the "comedy of the rings."[51] Portia and her maid Nerissa had each given their respective fiancés an engagement ring, making them promise to keep it forever. Then, disguised as the doctor and his clerk, they extracted the rings from Antonio's grateful friends as reward for his rescue, then hurry home to prepare their reproach. The comedy is full of double entendres that exploit the difference between appearance and reality in order to threaten infidelity, but now both "outer" and "inner" will simultaneously, even miraculously, be true. The "men" to whom the men gave the rings were really women, but they were "their" women, and so fidelity is maintained. Similarly, confusions between monetary and spiritual value begin to resolve themselves. Gratiano (as we've come to expect) remains too worldly, disparaging the monetary and aesthetic value of the ring he gave away, but Nerissa brings him up short: "What talk you of the posy or the value?/You swore to me when I did give it you" (5.1.162-64). The object of exchange has, in other words, symbolic as well as metallic value: it represents an oath of love.

We are approaching a hopeful hermeneutics. But this distinction is still not enough. Shylock, after all, had made it as well, upon hearing of Jessica's trade of one of his rings for a monkey: "I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor: I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys" (3.1.112–13). The distinction is not enough because excessive attachment to a "thing held as ceremony," "a thing stuck on with oaths upon your finger,/And so riveted with faith unto your flesh" (5.1.168–69), still represents a "Judaizing" literalism, a confusion between symbol and meaning almost as dramatic as that expressed in the contract of the pound of flesh. Shakespeare's players must go further. They must recognize that the Christian triumph over Judaism consists in knowing not how to keep the oath and its symbolic forms but when, in the interests of love, to let them go. Like everyone else within the material world, they too are bound by necessity to promise their words, their goods, and even their flesh (as, for example, in the marriage contract) in a vast and shimmering network of communication, circulation, and exchange that entraps even the wisest person. Within this world, Shakespeare seems to suggest, it is only the exceptional knowledge of love that can distinguish the "gentle" from the "Jew."[52]

At last we are in a position to identify the twin constitutional pillars of Shakespeare's imagined community: the sovereignty of love, the rule of law. Relations between man and man, man and money, man and material thing can be mediated and represented only in the language of law and contract. This language cannot be denied, hence law must rule. But among fellow Christian citizens, at least, its reading should be oriented in a particular way. The point remains that of Augustine, articulated in *On Christian Doctrine:* "To follow the letter, and to take signs for the things that are signified by them, is a mark of weakness and bondage." According to Augustine, this was the weakness and bondage of the Jews, and the only way to avoid it is for the Christian to subject all readings to the test of love. "Every man . . . has hope in his own conscience, so far as he perceives that he has attained to the love and knowledge of God and his neighbor." It is this hope, offered by Augustine to readers struggling to distinguish between the literal and the figurative in biblical texts, which Shakespeare offers to readers of contracts and the world in *The Merchant of Venice.*[53]

Of course there are many differences between Shakespeare and Augustine, but there are also some similarities worth noting. Shakespeare,

like Augustine, realizes that the tendency of the material sign and its immaterial meaning to fly toward opposite poles can only be combated by holding them in close proximity. Like Augustine, he realized the risks of confusion that this close proximity of matter and spirit creates, and much more than the saint, he exploited the comic (as well as the tragic) potential of those possibilities. In the end, though, he relieved these risks in much the same way that Augustine did, by pouring their extremes into the figure of the Jew. Shakespeare's Jews remain in some sense ontologically alien, irreducibly more literal and less loving than the Christian. Shylock may bleed like a Christian, hate like a Christian, even occasionally talk like a Christian, but he most emphatically does not become a Christian, not even after his conversion. It is in this enduring distinction, with all the projections it facilitates, that we begin to see an essential "difference of our spirit" emerge.

Given the importance of this distinction, it is not surprising that the question of whether or not a Jew can "turn Christian" is a crucial one in *The Merchant of Venice,* with Jessica as its focus. Comedy requires happy endings, but Shakespeare gives us plenty of reason to doubt that even Jessica's liberality, seemingly in every way the reverse of her father's misanthropy, can ever be enough to overcome the Jewishness of her flesh. Already in the third act Launcelot joked that Jessica's only hope for salvation is a "bastard" one: namely, that she might not be the Jew's daughter (3.5.1–21). The skepticism of the fifth and final act is more serious. It opens with banter on a beautiful evening in Belmont, as Jessica and Lorenzo compare this night to nights that enveloped great lovers of the past. As the stakes rise, Jessica makes a final classical allusion:

> In such a night
> Medea gathered the enchanted herbs
> That did renew old Aeson.
> (5.1.15–17)

The allusion is appropriate, in that Medea was a sorceress who abandoned her father in order to elope with Jason and who used her magic to help him win the Golden Fleece. It is, however, unfortunate, since the marriage ended in betrayal, infanticide, and Medea's murderous exile. It is for this reason that Lorenzo comes crashing swiftly back into the near present:

> In such a night
> Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew
> And with an unthrift love did run from Venice
> As far as Belmont.
> (5.1.18–21)[54]

Is the momentum of Jessica's "unthrift love" enough to free her soul from the gravitational grip of Judaism and launch it into Christian orbit? Early modern Europeans like Thomas Calvert were famously pessimistic about the ability of Jews to convert sincerely to Christianity: "When a mouse shall catch a cat, then a Jew converted . . . will remain a firm Christian."[55] Shakespeare leaves the diagnosis open, but the prognosis is not good. At the end of their evening stroll, Lorenzo puts the problem in cosmic terms, explaining to Jessica that music causes the harmony within our souls to echo the harmony of the heavenly spheres.

> The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, strategems, and spoils;
> The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
> And his affections dark as Erebus:
> Let no such man be trusted. Mark the Music.
> (5.1.91–96)

"Mark the Music": Shylock has already failed this test in the second act, when he condemned "the vile squealing of the wry-necked fife" and commanded Jessica to close the windows lest the "sound of shallow foppery/enter my sober house" (2.5.30–35). Has Jessica just failed the test as well? "I am never merry when I hear sweet music" (5.1.77). These flat words of blank verse, Jessica's last in the play, were the ones that prompted Lorenzo's leap into harmonic theory. Lorenzo tells us that even wild horses are made gentle by music. By that diagnostic, and depending on how we interpret her lack of musical merriment, is Jessica condemned to remain, like her father, worse than an animal?[56]

A great deal rides upon our answer to this question. Generations of critics have debated whether or not *The Merchant of Venice* is anti-Semitic. Their argument is not so much about the play's reception and historical effects: few would deny, for example, that however complex a character Shylock might be, his name quickly became a popular synonym for usurious cruelty. The disagreement is rather about the range of interpretations

the play can reasonably sustain and which of these interpretations Shakespeare himself might have intended. A subtle defense can even set the one against the other, suggesting, for example, that Shakespeare gave his vulgar audience the Jewish stereotype they demanded but hollowed it out with an irony that he intended the wise to detect.[57]

It is certainly true that Shakespeare undermines the easy answers to the difficult questions he poses. Indeed, the play reminds us with its very last words that even in Belmont, the Christian can still "Judaize." Those last words are, not surprisingly, Gratiano's: "Well, while I live I'll fear no other thing/So sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring" (5.1.306–7). A few moments ago, confronted with Nerissa's playful "threat" of adultery with the young clerk to whom he gave her ring, he responded with a brutal conflation of writing and circumcision: "I'll mar the young clerk's pen" (5.1.250). Now, with Portia's pedagogy revealed and the lovers reconciled, Gratiano remains hermeneutically unreformed. Not only is his conflation of Nerissa's symbol ("ring") with her sex precisely the type of confusion the play has again and again associated with "Judaism," but his notion of exchange remains fearful and contractual rather than loving, "Jewish" rather than "Christian." Gratiano's use of language remains, to adapt a formula of Jacques Derrida's, "an experience of circumcision."[58]

Gratiano marks one limit to Shakespeare's poetics of conversion: in this world communication cannot be purged of "Jewishness"; the Christian remains at risk. But Jessica marks a starker limit, for if we take seriously the doubts that Shakespeare has planted about her conversion, then his irony is not bottomless.[59] The Christian may be confused with "Judaism" on Shakespeare's stage, and the Jew appear Christian, but the one cannot become the other. The Jew stands—unlike the Christian—outside the reach of Shakespeare's poetics of conversion. In this scenario, it is that poetics itself which, like Lorenzo's music, rediscovers "the difference in our spirit," the vanishing difference between Christian and "Jew."

To a Christian world increasingly convinced that (as Adam Smith would put it a good while later) "every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant,"[60] the rediscovery of that difference brings immeasurable relief, even when it takes place in a world without "real" Jews. It is this lingering fantasy of relief based on an irreducible difference from "the Jew" that, if we wish, we can begin to call anti-Semitism. Or to put it in the very different terms of Adorno and Horkheimer, "what is pathological about anti-Semitism is not projective behavior as such, but

the absence of reflection in it."[61] Are Shakespeare's projections of the contractual dangers of symbolic economies onto figures of Judaism pathologically anti-Semitic? Your answer to this final question may well come down to your explanation of one character's melancholy: not the melancholy of Antonio or of Portia, with which we began, but that of Lorenzo's "Jewess," who is never merry when she hears sweet music.

Notes

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1. 2 Cor. 3:6 (AV, spelling modernized). Except where otherwise noted, all biblical citations in this chapter are from this version.

2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Die heilige Familie oder Kritik der kritischen Kritik. Gegen Bruno Bauer und Konsorten," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke,* vol. 2, p. 7 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1958). Marx and Engels paraphrase the biblical sentiment.

3. The literature on these oppositions in Paul is vast, but a crystalline treatment of their rhetorical structure in Galatians can be found in J. Louis Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 410–24; "cut off," for example, "for if you circumcise yourselves, Jesus Christ will avail you nothing," Gal. 5:2. On the verb "to Judaize," see Róbert Dán, "Judaizare—the Career of a Term," in *Antitrinitarianism in the Second Half of the 16th Century,* ed. R. Dán and A. Pirnát, 25–34 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982); Gilbert Dagron, "Judäiser," *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991): 359–80.

4. On the body, see 2 Cor. 5; 1 Cor. 15:42–50. Paul's defense against the claim that he taught antinomianism is at Rom. 3:8. It is worth pointing out that not all theologians have concluded that containment is possible. The ancient dualists (such as Marcionites and Manicheans) thought it was not, and their modern cousins (who include theologians as different as Karl Barth and Adolph von Harnack) have also had doubts.

5. Karl Marx, "Zur Judenfrage," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke,* vol. 1, 347–77, at 374 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957).

6. For Saint Augustine's struggles with similar "Jewish questions," see Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Luther's description of his struggle with "justice" is in *Luthers Werke, Weimarer Ausgabe,* 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), 54:185–86. Luther eventually became preoccupied with the dangers he believed Jews posed to Christians, and he coordinated efforts to exile Jews from the lands under his influence. At least one Jewish contemporary attributed Luther's late concern with living Jews (rather than "Judaizing" Christians) to the fact that his own teachings were frequently attacked as "Jewish," both by Catholics and by reformers more radical than he.

7. On the Augsburg preacher, see the complaint of Sir Richard Morrison, England's ambassador to the court of Charles V, in *Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers,*

Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain (1550–1552) (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1862), 236 and 254.

8. For a description of this school, and a renewed insistence on the importance of acknowledging the presence of Jews and conversos (descendants of converts) in London, see Janet Adelman, *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in "The Merchant of Venice"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4–12. I find these the least convincing pages of an otherwise luminous book, perhaps because my own work focuses on periods (the Middle Ages) and places (Spain) where that presence was much more real than imagined. But even in Spain, where (unlike England) the demographic presence of descendants of converts from Judaism was statistically significant, there is no easy case to be made for the relationship between living Jews and literary ones. On this see David Nirenberg, "Figures of Thought and Figures of Flesh: 'Jews' and 'Judaism' in Late Medieval Spanish Poetry and Politics," *Speculum* 81 (2006): 398–426.

9. George Herbert, *The Complete English Poems,* ed. John Tobin (London: Penguin, 1991), 160–61.

10. For biblically oriented critics, see, for example, Barbara Lewalski, "Biblical Allusion and Allegory in the *Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13 (1962): 327–43; Frank Kermode, "The Mature Comedies," in *Early Shakespeare,* ed. J. R. Brown and R. Harris, 224 (New York: Capricorn Books, 1966), and reprinted as a debate between Kermode and A. D. Moody in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Merchant of Venice,"* ed. S. Barnet (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 97–108. Steven Marx provides a more subtle—but still supercessionist—reading of Shakespeare's biblicism: Steven Marx, " 'Dangerous Conceits' and 'Proofs of Holy Writ': Allusion in *The Merchant of Venice* and Paul's *Letter to the Romans,*" in *Shakespeare and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 103–24. For Augustine on love as diagnostic, and on the Judaizing danger of misdirected love, see Augustine *De doctrina Christiana* 3.9; Augustine *Confessionum* 7.9, 10.35.

11. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice,* ed. Leah S. Marcus (New York: Norton, 2006). References are to act, scene, and line number of this edition.

12. An elegant example combining both capitalism and homoeroticism is W. H. Auden, "Brothers and Others," in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), esp. 232–35.

13. Thomas Coryate, *Coryat's Crudities,* 2 vols. (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905), 1:372–74. See also Henry Buttes, *Dyets Dry Dinner* (London, 1599), sig. k8r: "their complexion is passing melancholious, their colour swart, and their diseases very perilous," all conditions Buttes attributed to their diet. This association of Jews with melancholy was entirely in keeping with Renaissance and medieval humoral theories about Jews. See, for example, the oft reprinted pseudo-Aristotelian compendium *The Problemes of Aristotle* (London, 1597, STC 764, reel 167), D1r–v. Compare Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1628), 57. For medieval antecedents, see, for example, Peter Biller, "Views of Jews from Paris around 1300: Christian or 'Scientific'?" in *Christianity and Judaism: Papers Read at the 1991 Summer Meeting and the 1992 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society,* ed. Dianna Wood, 187–207 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). Bernard of Gordon's well-circulated medical handbook, the *Lilium medicine,* attributed Jewish melancholy to a lack of physical labor. For an exploration of the theme of melancholy, love, and Judaism in Castilian literature contemporary with Shakespeare, see Roger Bartra, "Melancolía y Christianismo en el Siglo De Oro: Mito, Erotismo y Tristeza Judía," *Vuelta* 250 (1997): 11–20.

14. The allusion here is to Matt. 16:25–26: "Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it. . . . For what shall it profite a man, though he should winne the whole worlde, if he lose his

own soule?" (I am citing from the *Geneva Bible,* London, 1584). On Shakespeare's extensive use of this translation (as well as others), see Richmond Noble, *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1935). On biblical (and particularly Pauline) allusions in *Merchant,* see Steven Marx, "The Merchant of Venice and Paul's Letter to the Romans," in S. Marx, *Shakespeare and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

15. These exchanges are patterned on Matt. 6:16-21 and 23:1-36. Note that in act 2, Gratiano will promise to act precisely in this way at Portia's court, "like one well studied in a sad ostent" (2.2.175-83).

16. Among those who read the line in the light of Luke 18:9-13, see Lewalski, "Biblical Allusion," 39, for whom Antonio becomes "a perfect embodiment of Christian love." Among critics more aware of the misanthropic attributes ascribed to publicans in texts such as Matt. 5:39-47 (attributes very similar to those associated with Judaism), see Joan Ozark Holmer, *"The Merchant of Venice": Choice, Hazard, and Consequence* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 151-53. She associates the word with usury. The hypothesis that the line was meant to describe Shylock is from H. B. Charlton, *Shakespearean Comedy* (London: Methuen, 1969), 138, cited in Edward Andrew, *Shylock's Rights: A Grammar of Lockian Claims* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 41. For an interesting reading of Antonio's "fawning" that stresses both the love and the economic interest in it, see Lars Engle, " 'Thrift Is a Blessing': Exchange and Explanation in *The Merchant of Venice,*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (1986): 20-37, at 28.

17. Vincent Ferrer, *Sermons,* vol. 5, ed. Gret Schib (Barcelona: Barcino, 1984), 147. For a twelfth-century example from an equally distinguished preacher, see Bernard of Clairvaux, Ep. 363, in which he asks if Christian moneylenders should be called baptized Jews rather than Christians. Brant's quotation appears in Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschiff. Faksimile der Erstausgabe Basel 1494,* ed. Dieter Wuttke (Baden-Baden: Verlag Valentin Koerner, 1994), chap. 93: "Gar leydlich wer der Juden gsuch/Aber sie mögen nit mer bleyben/Die Christen Juden/sie vertreiben/Mit Juden spieß die selben rennen/Ich kenn vil die ich nit will nennen."

18. Our knowledge of the play *The Jew* comes from Stephen Gosson's *The School of Abuse* (1579), ed. Edward Arber (London: Murray and Son, 1868), 40, one of Shakespeare's possible sources for the device of the three caskets. The anonymous treatise *The Death of Usury, or the Disgrace of Usurers* (Cambridge, 1594), is a good example of an attempt to distinguish between Christian and "Jewish" moneylending practices.

19. On John Shakespeare, see David Thomas, ed., *Shakespeare in the Public Record,* (London, HMSO, 1985), 2-3. Among the many works on the usury debates in this period, see Norman Jones, *God and the Moneylenders: Usury and the Law in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989). The debate took place against the backdrop of an explosion of lawsuits for debt, on which see J. H. Baker, "The Superior Courts in England, 1450-1800," in *Oberste Gerichtsbarkeit und zentrale Gewalt im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit,* ed. B. Diestelkamp, 83 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1996). For a treatment of *Merchant* in the context of the evolving legal and contractual practices of the credit economy, see Charles Spinosa, "Shylock and Debt and Contract in *The Merchant of Venice,*" *Cardoza Studies in Law and Literature* 5 (1993): 65-85. Francis Bacon's report is in his *De usura sive foenore,* in *The Works of Francis Bacon,* vol. X (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1824), 107: "Foeneratores pileis luteis indui opertore, quia judaizant."

20. "Profitable members" is from the anonymous treatise *A Breefe Discourse, Declaring and Approuing the Necessarie and Inuiolable Maintenance of the Laudable Customs of London* (London, 1584), cited in Markku Peltonen, "Citizenship and Republicanism in

Elizabethan England," in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage,* ed. M. van Gelderen and Q. Skinner, 2 vols., 1:85-106, at 89-90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Robert Greene defended London's self-governance by drawing an explicit comparison between its merchant oligarchy and Venice's in Robert Greene, *The Royal Exchange: Contayning Sundry Aphorismes of Phylosophie, and Golden Principles of Morall and Naturall Quadruplicities* (London, 1590), sig. ¶2v. "Commodity of His Countrie" is from the English translation of the treatise by the Venetian Francesco Sansovino, *The Quintessence of Wit, Being a Corrant Comfort of Conceites, Maximes, and Poleticke Deuises,* trans. Robert Hitchcock (London, 1590), fol. 88v.

21. This was a canonical view in the Middle Ages: "homo mercator vix aut nunquam potest Deo placere. Et ideo nullus Christianus debet esse mercator, aut, si voluerit esse, proiiciatur de ecclesia Dei." Compare *Decretum Gratiani,* Prima Pars, Dist. 88, c. 11.

22. In medieval English letters the association of merchants with covetousness and usury was a commonplace, even among writers who defended merchants' role in Christian society. See, for example, William Langland, *Piers Plowman,* 100.9.22-42, and John Gower, *Mirour de l'Omme,* 7285-7320, 25192-212. In the early seventeenth century, the words "Merchant" and "Jew" were still sometimes used as near synonyms, as did Henry Blount in his ascription to the Egyptians of "a touch of the Merchant, or Iew": Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant,* 2nd. ed. (London, 1636), 113-22. The rate of expansion of English commerce in Shakespeare's day is difficult to assess. Keith Wrightson argues for rapid growth producing a transformation of "earlier economic values": Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 204. On these questions, see especially Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3-91.

23. Shakespeare's interest in law and the language of law has often been noted. See B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare's Legal Language* (London: Athlone, 2000); B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Constance Jordan and Karen Cunningham, eds., *The Law in Shakespeare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

24. In addition to those in the previous note, Venetian political treatises translated in Shakespeare's day include Gasparo Contarini's *The Commonwealth and Gouernment of Venice* (1599), whose translator, Lewes Lewkenor, argued that Venice should serve as an example for other commonwealths to imitate (sig. A 2v-3r, 4v). Others, such as Simon Harward, disagreed and preached sermons against taking foreign governments (and particularly those of aristocratic governance) as examples for England and its monarchy (Markku Peltonnen, "Citizenship and Republicanism in Elizabethan England," in Martin van Gelderen, ed., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 85-106). On Venice as a stage for European political thought, see more generally D. Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate: Reality Versus Myth* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), chap. 1; W. Bouwsma, "Venice and the Political Education of Europe," in *Renaissance Venice,* ed. J. Hale, 445-66 (London: Faber, 1973); B. S. Pullan, "The Significance of Venice," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 56 (1974): 443-62. For a later period, see D. Wootton, "Ulysses Bound? Venice and the Idea of Liberty from Howell to Hume," in *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776,* ed. D. Wootton (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 341-67. For Shakespeare's particular constructions of Italy, see the essays assembled in M. Marrapodi et al., eds., *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

25. Useful summaries of Shakespeare's investment can be found in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems,* 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), 2:170–74; Park Honan, *Shakespeare: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 394–98. Two of the theatrical impresarios with whom Shakespeare was associated are known to have bonded players. See Bernard Beckerman, "Philip Henslowe," in *The Theatrical Manager in England and America,* ed. Joseph W. Donohue Jr. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 19–62; William Ingram, *A London Life in the Brazen Age: Francis Langley, 1548–1602* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 155. Langley was the owner of the Swan theater, in which *The Merchant of Venice* may have first been staged. Henslowe's diary documents as well his role as a moneylender: Philip Henslowe, *Diary,* ed. R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961). For more documentation of the economic infrastructure of the theater in Shakespeare's day, see William Ingram, *The Business of Playing: The Beginnings of the Adult Professional Theater in Elizabethan London* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992). See more generally Luke Wilson, *Theater of Intention: Drama and Law in Early Modern England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000). Marc Shell coined the term "verbal usury" in his exploration of related questions: Marc Shell, "The Wether and the Ewe: Verbal Usury in *The Merchant of Venice,*" in *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

26. A good survey of the many attacks on theater in this period can be found in Jonas A. Barish, "Puritans and Proteans," in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 80–131. Jean-Christophe Agnew stresses that both theater and market raised similar questions of "representation and misrepresentation": Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 11. Appropriately enough, William Prynne, whose *Histriomastix* (1633) qualifies him among the most rabid opponents of theater, also produced tracts against Judaizing (e.g., *A Short Demurrer to the Jewes,* 1656).

27. Another important context would be that of debate about the obligations that bound citizen and sovereign. On this subject, see Constance Jordan, *Shakespeare's Monarchies* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), and William Kerrigan, *Shakespeare's Promises* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). Though the historicist approach nowadays scarcely needs defending, an early and much-cited advocate of interpreting *The Merchant of Venice* as a response to the transformation of English and Italian credit economies was Walter Cohen: see, for example, Walter Cohen, "*The Merchant of Venice* and the Possibilities of Historical Criticism," *English Literary History* 49 (1982): 765–85; Walter Cohen, *Drama of a Nation: Public Theatre in Renaissance England and Spain* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 195–211.

28. Shakespeare has just reminded us a few lines before, and will remind us again, that Jacob had indeed "stolen" his father Isaac's blessing from his older brother Esau (the spiritual ancestor of the gentiles, according to biblical interpretation of the day). Shylock first marks Jacob's deception of Isaac in act 1, scene 3, lines 67–69, and Shakespeare restages it in act 2, scene 2, lines 31–108, Launcelot's "confusion" of his blind father Gobbo. The implications of this restaging are important but beyond my reach here. Shylock's economic argument is as significant as his exegesis, since the assimilation of the production of capital to agricultural reproduction plays a prominent role in economic theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Marx noted in his notes for book 4 of *Capital* ("Theorien über den Mehrwert," in *Werke,* 26.1:319). Compare L. Dumont, *From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 40–41.

29. There is some irony here, in that Bassanio is receiving metal (ducats) in exchange for the pledge of his friend's flesh. We may see a comment here on the controversial practice of standing surety, a practice condemned not only by Luther (in *Von Kaufshandlung und Wucher* [1524]; see *Luthers Werke, Weimarer Ausgabe* 25:298–305) but by plenty of Shakespeare's contemporaries. W. H. Auden, for example, cites Sir Walter Raleigh's advice: "Suffer not thyself to be wounded for other men's faults, or scourged for other men's offenses, which is the suretyship for another. . . . From suretyship, as from manslayer or enchanter, bless thyself." (Auden, *Dyer's Hand,* 231). Conversely, numerous critics have pointed out that although Antonio does not ask Bassanio for monetary interest in exchange for his money, he craves emotional interest in the form of Bassanio's love, breeding friendship from metal, so to speak.

30. In Aristotle's hierarchy, the management of household and agricultural estate is most honorable, retail trade and exchange is "justly censured," and the worst is lending at interest (1258b1–5). Luther's quotation is from his *Tischreden,* 6 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912–21), vol. 5, no. 5429: "Pecunia est res sterilis." The common medieval tag was "pecunia pecuniam parere non potest." There were, however, other traditions available in the Middle Ages: see, for example, Peter John Olivi, "On Usury and Credit," in *Medieval Europe,* ed. Julius Kirshner and Karl F. Morrison, University of Chicago Readings in Western Civilization, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 318–25. And early in the fifteenth century Bernardino of Sienna spoke of "quandam seminalem rationem" inherent in money as capital. Francis Bacon criticizes the Aristotelian position on the unnaturalness of interest in his *De usura sive foenore.*

31. The view that merchants and moneylenders treat their customers as enemies has both classical and biblical roots. For the classical, see David Nirenberg, "The Politics of Love and Its Enemies," *Critical Inquiry* (2007): 573–605. The Hebrew Bible's prescriptions about lending are at Deut. 23:19–20, 28:12, and Lev. 25:35–37. Aquinas's summary is from *Summa Theologica* 2.2.Q.78.i. A good survey of this history is provided by Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). The first edition of Nelson's work inspired Auden's essay.

32. Quite "Christian": Morocco's desire for outer and inner conformity was in fact an apocalyptic ideal expressed in early Christian texts like II Clement to the Corinthians 12:2–3, and the Gospel according to Thomas. An art historian might add that the casket's "scroll" is also an allusion to "Jewish" hermeneutics, since scrolls were frequently opposed to Christian books as an iconographic device to identify Jews in late medieval and early modern art. "Vessell of golde" is from History 32 of the *Gesta Romanorum,* in the English edition of R. Robinson (1595 [Bodeleian, Douce R4]).

33. Modern critics seem to have missed the humor, though the use of "hood," "cowl," and other items of clothing as puns for foreskin was noted by F. Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and their Significance,* 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1989). Rubinstein cites LeClerq's translation of Rabelais as an analogue, for example, "Priapus doffed his hood, discovering a red flaming face" (128, sub "Hood"). In Spanish poetry such puns—as well as comments about the "cut" of clothing to imply circumcision—were so common as to necessitate word lists: see, for example, Alicia Puigvert Ocal, "El léxico de la indumentaria en el *Cancionero de Baena,*" *Boletín de la Real Academia Española* 67 (1987): 171–206.

34. Compare the Jew Barabas's reaction to his daughter's conversion in *The Jew of Malta:* "Oh my girl,/My gold, my fortune, my felicity . . ./O girl! O gold! O beauty! O my bliss!" (2.1.47–54). Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta,* in *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays,*

ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); references are to act, scene, and line number of this edition. Echoes of Marlowe in Shakespeare have been well studied. See, among other works, Nicholas Brooke, "Marlowe as Provocative Agent in Shakespeare's Early Plays," *Shakespeare Survey* 14 (1961), 34–44; Maurice Charney, "Jessica's Turquoise Ring and Abigail's Poisoned Porridge: Shakespeare and Marlowe as Rivals and Imitators," *Renaissance Drama,* n.s. 10 (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1979), 33–44; M. C. Bradbrook, "Shakespeare's Recollections of Marlowe," in *Shakespeare's Styles: Essays in Honour of Kenneth Muir,* ed. Philip Edwards, Inga-Stina Ewbank, and G. K. Hunter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 191–204; James Shapiro, "'Which Is *The Merchant* Here, and Which *The Jew*?' Shakespeare and the Economics of Influence," *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1988): 269–79; Thomas Cartelli, "Shakespeare's *Merchant,* Marlowe's *Jew:* The Problem of Cultural Difference," *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1988): 255–60.

35. I defer to my treatment of act 5 the much-debated question of whether in the play the perils of communication apply only to Venice or extend to Belmont as well. For a treatment of the place of contract theory in the sectarian debates of the period (and particularly of English Protestant covenant theology), see David Zaret, *The Heavenly Contract* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Samuel Ajzenstat analyzes the play in terms of an opposition between conditional (justice-oriented) and unconditional (love/gift-oriented) notions of contract and exchange, mapped onto the opposition between Jew (conditional) and Christian (unconditional). See David Zaret, "Contract in *The Merchant of Venice,*" *Philosophy and Literature* 21 (1997): 262–78.

36. On the move toward the "chancering" of this type of bond, see Edith G. Henderson, "Reliefs from Bonds in the English Chancery: Mid-Sixteenth Century," *American Journal of Legal History* 18, no. 4 (1974): 298–306. Shakespeare was not the only author of his day to use the example—which was in his source stories—for this purpose. Alexander Silvayn, in the 95th Declamation of his *The Orator* (trans. Lazarus Piot [London, 1596]), also used a speech by a Jew "who would for his debt have a pound of flesh of a Christian" in order to explore the powers of contract "to binde" "not only the whole body but also the senses and spirits." Luke Wilson offers another important legal context in his "Drama and Marine Insurance in Shakespeare's London," in *The Law in Shakespeare,* ed. Constance Jordan and Karen Cunningham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

37. Cic. *De Off.* 3.31.111, in *Remains of Old Latin,* vol. 3, ed. and trans. E. H. Warmington, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb, 1967), 512–13. Cicero, it should be noted, claims to have lived through a period of juridical revolution that transformed the Law of the Twelve Tables from a foundational text to a forgotten one: "when we were boys we used to learn the Twelve as a ditty, ordained by fate; no one learns them now" (Cic. *De Leg.* 2.23.59).

38. Gellius, *Noctes Atticae,* 20.1.48–52:

> Sed eam capitis poenam sanciendae, sicuti dixi, fidei gratia horrificam atrocitatis ostentu novisque terroribus metuendam reddiderunt. Nam si plures forent, quibus reus esset iudicatus, secare, si vellent, atque partiri corpus addicti sibi hominis permiserunt. XLIX. Et quidem verba ipsa legis dicam, ne existimes invidiam me istam forte formidare: "Tertiis" inquit "nundinis partis secanto. Si plus minusve secuerunt, se fraude esto." L. Nihil profecto inmitius, nihil inmanius, nisi, ut reapse apparet, eo consilio tanta inmanitas poenae denuntiatast, ne ad eam umquam perveniretur. LI. Addici namque nunc et vinciri multos videmus, quia vinculorum poenam deterrimi homines contemnunt, LII. dissectum esse antiquitus neminem equidem neque legi neque audivi, quoniam saevitia ista poenae contemni non quitast.

Compare Gai. *Inst.* 4.21, 3.78; Gai. *Dig.* 42.1.4.5, 50.16.234.2; Gell. *Noctes Atticae* 20.1.19, 15.13.11; Quintil., *Institutio Oratoria* 3.6.84; Dio Cass. fr. 12., all in *Remains of Old Latin,* 438–41.

39. Tertullian *Apology* 4.

40. The first critical attempt to reconstruct the Twelve Tables was carried out decades before Shakespeare wrote his play, by (among others) A. du Rivail in the early sixteenth century. It is, however, irrelevant to my argument whether Shakespeare knew of these or not. Nor am I suggesting (as H. J. Griston did in *Shaking the Dust from Shakespeare* [New York: Cosmopolis, 1924]) that Shakespeare set his play in Roman times and under Roman law. On the Twelve Tables as a myth of origin created by later Roman lawyers, see M. T. Fögen, *Römische Rechtsgeschichten: Über Ursprung und Evolution eines sozialen Systems* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 63–79; and M. T. Fögen, "Das römische Zwölftafelgesetz: Eine imaginierte Wirklichkeit," in *Die Kodifizierung und Legitimierung des Rechts in der Levante im 6./5. Jh. V. Chr.* [2004 Symposium, University of Frankfurt]. William Blackstone gave this law a place in his genealogy of English legal thought first published in 1765–69, as did Max Weber in his more general historical sociology of economic life: see William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England,* 4 vols. (New York: Oceana, 1966), 2:472–73; Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), 413–56.

41. Among the many who have commented on the mirroring implied in this line, see Richard Halpern, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 184.

42. The attempted murder charge added by the doctor of law follows that of a popular ballad of the day, the "Ballad of Gernutus," about a Jew who wanted to take a pound of flesh from his debtor. The ballad's ending makes clear the moral that Christian lenders act in the same way: "Good people that doe heare this Song, for truth I dare well say,/That many a wretch as ill as he doth live now at this day." English and Scottish Ballads, vol. 8, ed. Francis James Child (Boston: Little, Brown, 1860), 53, lines 65–68.

43. I myself am not so sure that Shakespeare's contemporaries would have noticed the cruelty of this mercy. For example, the commutation of death sentences for Jews and Muslims who converted was a venerable and uncontroversial practice in Christian Europe.

44. For divergent opinions about whether or not a clear difference emerges between Shylock and Antonio over the course of the play, and hence between "Christian" and "Jew," compare Richard Halpern's sense of a vanishing difference with Sylvan Barnet's conviction of a widening one; see Halpern, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns;* Sylvan Barnet, "Prodigality and Time in the Merchant of Venice," *PMLA* 87 (1972): 26–30. Portia's "Jewing" of Shylock has long been noticed by many critics. For an early example see, for example, the anonymous essay "Shylock the Jew-ed," *Temple Bar* 45 (1875): 65–70.

45. These words have potentially "commercial" etymologies, for example, the plausible derivation of interpretation from *inter* + *pretium.* On the Indo-European root **mei* and its Latin derivatives *munus, munera,* gifts that establish obligation (whence "communication"), see Emile Benveniste, "Gift and Exchange in the Indo-European Vocabulary," in *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971), 271–80.

46. Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning/De augmentis scientiarum* 6.1, in *Works,* 9:110. In his *New Organon* Bacon used the phrase "Idols of the marketplace" to describe the dangerous attraction of words with unclear or nonexistent referents, which he claimed everywhere afflicted the philosophy of his day: *Novum Organum,* bk. 1, secs. 59–60, ed. Thomas Fowler, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1889), 233–37. The characterization of these semiotic errors in terms of money and market is important and closely related

to the meaning of Judaism in Christian philosophies of language, but it is a little outside the scope of my argument here.

47. Cic. *De Off.* 1.4.12; Cic. *De re publica* 3.3.2 (compare *De Off.* 1.16.50).

48. Hugo Grotius, *De jure belli ac pacis* (1625), bk. 2, chap. 16 ("De interpretatione"), here 2.16.1.1-2, in *The Rights of War and Peace,* vol. 2, trans. Richard Tuck (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 848. His search for a law binding even on those who deny the existence of God is mentioned in the "prolegomena," chap. 11. His chapter on the keeping of promises (3.19) is also relevant here, for example, 3.19.1.3. For an interesting reading of Grotius within the context of the increasing importance of contract theory in England, see Victoria Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640-1674* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

49. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* 5.36. The idea of metaphor as a semifraudulent transaction is of course much older than Hobbes. My favorite example comes from Albert of Monte Casino in the eleventh century: "it is the function of metaphor to twist, so to speak, its mode of speech from its property; by twisting, to make some innovation; by innovating, to clothe, as it were, in nuptial garb; and by clothing, to sell, apparently at a decent price." ("Suum autem est metaphorae modum locutionis a proprietate sui quasi detorquere, detorquando quadammodo innovare, innovando quasi nuptiali amictu tegere, tegendo quasi praecio dignitatis vendere." *Alberici Casinensis Flores rhetorici,* ed. M. Inguanez and H. M. Willard [Montecassino, 1938], 45.

50. The "old proverb" Launcelot imparts is "The grace of God is gear enough," drawing on 2 Cor. 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for thee" (AV). On the "theological poetics" of grace invoked by some late medieval and Renaissance defenders of secular poetry, see Nirenberg, "Figures of Thought" and the bibliography contained therein.

51. For a suggestive reading of act 5 as fulfillment of the Elizabethan audience's "contractual" expectations of comedy, see Lynda E. Boose, "The Comic Contract and Portia's Golden Ring," *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1988): 241-54.

52. Or as Sir Philip Sidney put it more crudely, Christians "be flat contrary" to the Jews because the latter "take the sign for the thing signified." See Philippe de Mornay, *A Woorke Concerning the Trewnesse of the Christian Religion, Written in French, Against Atheists, Epicures, Paynims, Jewes, Mahumetists, and Other Infidels,* trans. Sir Philip Sidney and Arthur Golding (London, 1587), 581-82. Contemporaries might have heard echo here of Christian eucharistic debates. As Bishop John Jewel would put it a good while later, in differentiating the Church of England from the papists, "three things herein we must consider; first, that we put a difference between the sign and the thing itself that is signified." *A Reply to Mr. Harding's Answer,* in *Works of John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury,* ed. J. Ayre (Cambride: Parker Society, 1845-59), 1:449.

53. Love's role in Shakespeare's economics is a topic in itself. See, for example, John Russell Brown, "Love's Wealth and the Judgement of *The Merchant of Venice,*" in *Shakespeare and His Comedies* (London: Methuen, 1957), 62-75.

54. James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 159, calls the allusion to Medea "the slightest hint of the possibility" of Jessica's relapse into Judaism and suggests an echo with John Studley's 1581 translation of Seneca's *Medea.*

55. Thomas Calvert, "Diatriba of the Jews' Estate," preface to *The Blessed Jew of Marocco; or a Blackamoor Made White, by Rabbi Samuel [Samuel Marochitanus], a Jew Turned Christian* (York, 1648), 216, cited by Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews,* 165.

56. Lorenzo's musings on the "music of the spheres" echo commonplaces of Renaissance Neoplatonism and Neopythagoreanism from which Shakespeare elsewhere marks some

distance (e.g., Cloten's speech in *Cymbeline,* act 2, scene 3, lines 11-31, but cf. *Twelfth Night,* act 2, scene 4, 1-22). For a selection of key texts, see Joscelyn Godwin, *Harmony of the Spheres: A Sourcebook of the Pythagorean Tradition in Music* (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions International, 1993). For its English poetic reception, see James Hutton, "Some English Poems in Praise of Music," *English Miscellany* 2 (1951): 1-63. On the implications of this passage for Jessica's conversion, see Mary Janell Metzger, "'Now by My Hood, a Gentle and No Jew': Jessica, *The Merchant of Venice,* and the Discourse of Early Modern English Identity," *PMLA* 113 (1998): 52-63; and Marc Berley, "Jessica's Belmont Blues: Music and Merriment in *The Merchant of Venice,*" in *Opening the Borders: Inclusivity in Early Modern Studies; Essays in Honor of James V. Mirollo,* ed. Peter C. Herman, 185-205 (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999). For a more optimistic but less convincing view, see Camille Slights, "In Defense of Jessica: The Runaway Daughter in *The Merchant of Venice,*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31 (1980): 357-68.

57. Such is René Girard's argument in "'To Entrap the Wisest': A Reading of *The Merchant of Venice,*" in *Literature and Society,* ed. Edward W. Said (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); revised and expanded in René Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 243-55.

58. Jacques Derrida quoted in Elizabeth Weber et al., *Questioning Judaism: Interviews by Elisabeth Weber,* trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 43, not, however, writing about Shakespeare: "the experience of language is from the outset an experience of circumcision (cutting and belonging, originary entrance into the space of law, non-symmetrical alliance between the finite and the infinite). And so in quotation marks and with all the necessary rhetorical precautions, a 'Jewish experience.'"

59. The choice is not between, on the one hand, a straightforward opposition between Jewish legalism and Christian love that "ends with harmony and perfect love," as Frank Kermode suggested, and, on the other, "an ironic comedy" without resolution, as A. D. Moody counterargued. There is irony, but that irony has its limits, and the Jewish shape those limits take preserves the plausibility of Christian claims to love. The debate between Kermode and Moody is reprinted in Barnet, *Twentieth Century Interpretations,* 97-108. It is curious that Shakespeare's irony is itself represented as "Jewish," even Shylockian (though of course with a positive valence), and this by even the most sophisticated critics (e.g., Halpern, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns,* 219 n. 114, 220, 226). The continuing "Jewishness" of irony in contemporary critical discourses demonstrates how entangled our reading practices remain within Christian hermeneutic structures.

60. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations,* bk. 1, chap. 5. Compare this conclusion to the rather different argument of Stephen Greenblatt, who sees Shakespeare deploying a constant insistence on the difference between Christian and Jew in order to imagine the perfectibility of the Christian world, by contrast with Marlowe's *Jew of Malta,* in which all differentiation is dissolved in order to expose the relentless hypocrisy of the world. See his "Marlowe, Marx, and Anti-Semitism," *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978): 291-307.

61. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* trans. John Cummings (London: Blackwell Verso, 1972), 187.