

Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci

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## **Introduction**

This thesis critically examines the depiction of Jewish women in the literature of sixteenth century England. This thesis is inspired by Theodore Lessing's essay on self-hating Jews in *Der jüdischer Selbsthaß*<sup>1</sup> (1930). The main focus will be on Jessica from *The Merchant of Venice* (1598) and Abigail from *The Jew of Malta* (1589). It has been the subject of discussion whether these Renaissance writers, who are considered to be the greatest minds of their time, were able to surpass the xenophobia and cramped bigotry of the Middle Ages and provided a more humane picture of a discriminated and generally hated minority. However, in most such analyses, Jewish women have been completely overshadowed by their male counterparts because they do not display any stereotypical features. While most analysis are focusing on their traditional gender roles, they have been rarely discussed in terms of their Jewishness.

In this thesis, it will be argued that unlike in the previous centuries, the image of sixteenth century Jews is very diverse. They can be merciful, cruel and in case of Jessica and Abigail even anti-Semitic. Although the Elizabethan authors based their characters on old myths and superstitions, they also add new characteristics to a Renaissance Jew in the characters of the women. Due to these un-stereotypical characteristics they are often not classified as a Jewish prototype.

The objective is not to place a peripheral character into the centre of the plays, but rather to fill in gaps in the analysis and provide a more complete picture of the myth of a Renaissance Jew. It will be argued that the prototype of sixteenth century fictional Jewish women is an anti-Semite, their Jewish self-hatred is a part of their Jewish experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Loan translated as "Self-hating Jew."

The structure of this thesis is divided into four major parts. The first part is a brief historical overview that provides a general historical context in which the plays were written. This section is a summary of the important historical facts and events that may be important for the interpretation of the Medieval and Renaissance plays.

The second part titled “Demons, Prophets and other Jewish Stereotypes” illustrates the development of the Jewish character over the span of three hundred years from the thirteenth to sixteenth century, which is the time shortly preceding the English Edict of Expulsion, until the end of the Elizabethan era. This section provides possible reasons why Jews as fictional characters never vanished from the literary scene, despite the fact that they were virtually non-existent in the sixteenth century England. As will be argued in the thesis, this issue is connected to the function of a Jewish character, which was changing according to the current English political and social situation.

The third chapter is titled “The Image of Women as New Christians in English Drama.”<sup>2</sup> In this chapter it will be argued that Jewish female characters face double discrimination from Jews with respect to their sex, and from Christians in terms of their race. It is this double discrimination that gives grounds for strong aversion towards their own ethnic group, their self-hatred. The section “Jewish Women as a Mirror to Gentile Society” aims to explain the purpose of an anti-Semitic Jew in Elizabethan plays, as opposed to a stereotypical orthodox Jewish character and it will be argued what addition this approach brings to the interpretations of the plays. The last section is a conclusion that summarizes the most important arguments of this thesis and suggestions for possible future research.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “New Christian” is borrowed from Peter Berek’s “The Jew as Renaissance Man” and it designates people, who were not born into a Christian family but converted to it. See Peter Berek, “The Jew as Renaissance Man” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51 (1998): 131, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/2901665?seq=2#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2901665?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents).



# **1. Historical Overview**

Anti-Semitism appears to be a worldwide phenomenon that spans over the biggest part of Jewish history, always taking new forms, and it occurs wherever the Jewish people live, as Erich von Kahler observes in his *Judentum und Judenhass* (1991). Although it is presently most commonly associated with the WWII, anti-Semitism started in the 6th century B.C. with the Jewish Babylon exile.<sup>3</sup> As this section demonstrates, despite of the changes in societies, rises and falls of empires, it has always been present for various reasons. As Erich von Kahler illustrates, it appears in new forms and at the same time, it keeps a part of the previous form.

Before the Babylon exile in 586, Jews lived as a tribe that was involved in wars with other tribes. However, Erich von Kahler argues that these wars were not a result of any special kind of anti-Semitism since such wars were frequent during this time. Their persecution by other nations began with the downfall of Israel after the year 586 B.C. Before the Babylon exile, the Jahwe cult was mostly common among upper classes, but among lower social classes it intermingled with other local cults<sup>4</sup>. It was after they lost their land that the cult spiritually unified their nation regardless of the social class.

Although the loss of their land resulted in a formation of a spiritual bond, it was not the only force that held their community together. As Hermann Sinsheimer mentions in his *The History of a Character of The Myth of the Jew* (1947), "They were held together by the strongest imaginable force: God, faith and tradition combined. [...]"<sup>5</sup>

A particular kind of racial enmity towards the Jews started with the Greeks and Romans. Erich von Kahler describes the irritation with which they treated Jewish customs, rituals and traditions because their own social and political system was

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<sup>3</sup> See Erich von Kahler, *Judentum und Judenhass* (Wien: ÖBU, 1991), 7.

<sup>4</sup> See von Kahler, *Judentum und Judenhass*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Hermann Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947), 27.

based on philosophy and logic, thus they ridiculed what they could not comprehend. There were many strange formalities that influenced their everyday lives, such as food restrictions or keeping the Shabbat,<sup>6</sup> circumcisions etc. The Greeks perceived themselves as the bringers of civilisation and culture and they could not comprehend why this tribe was so resolutely unwilling “to be civilized” by them. These conflicts, however, were perhaps with some exceptions relatively minor.

The Romans, who strived for world domination, intended to break the spiritual power of this nation by shaming them in every possible way, in extreme cases the Jews were even forced to attend the Dionysian orgies. They were forbidden certain rituals under the death penalty, the Torah rolls were burned, their Jewish eating habits were ridiculed and they were also forced to eat food that was not considered kosher etc<sup>7</sup>.

With this historical background, the Jewish people entered Europe. After the destruction of the Jewish State they scattered across the world, but their communities never assimilated and remained “foreign bodies within the anatomy of medieval Europe,”<sup>8</sup> as Sinsheimer argues. Whereas the Greek and Romans reacted to the Jewish culture with ridicule, Christians feared them with cramped bigotry. Christians never forgave the Jews for the Biblical Crucifixion of their Messiah because according to the *New Testament*, they demanded it from Pontius Pilatus. It was not Jesus that the Jews were associated with but Judas, who according to the Bible betrayed and sold the Biblical Messiah.

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<sup>6</sup> In particular, the fact that once a week they were not available for business and for the Greek, on such day they were completely useless.

See von Kahler, *Judentum und Judenhass*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> See von Kahler, *Judentum und Judenhass*, 14-16.

<sup>8</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 28.

## 1.2. Usury and The Significance of the Jewish community for the English Economy

According to Peter Berek, Jews were forced to convert to Christianity in 1497, and some "New Christians" started leaving the inhospitable environment of the Iberian countries and settled in England. They played an important role in trade between Portugal and England. There was no language barrier to overcome and some of them had relatives in Portugal who participated in the trade.<sup>9</sup>

Although they were hated and feared by Christians, the presence of Jews was an important economic factor for English economy, because for many years they were the only people who could officially take interest from usury. Therefore, the most common depiction of a Jew in later Renaissance literature was a usurer. Paradoxically, this profession only contributed to their misfortunate reputation.<sup>10</sup> According to Martin Hilský and his *Shakespeare a jeviště svět* (2010), usury was forbidden by the *Bible* as a sin.<sup>11</sup>

Martin Hilský describes usury as something similar to banking. However, what we know today as a common practice was considered highly immoral in the past. Initially, Jews also considered usury to be sinful since it was prohibited by the *Old Testament*. According to Deuteronomy xxiii: 19-23, *The Fifth Book of Moses*, Jews were prohibited to take any kind of interest in the form of food or money for a loan from a fellow-Jew.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the range of professions that Jews were allowed to engage in was very limited in Europe. In fact, the money-lending was one of the few professions that were open for them and therefore, the circumstances gradually pressured the rabbis to loosen the restrictions due to a loophole in the

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<sup>9</sup> See Peter Berek, "The Jew as Renaissance Man," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51 (1998):132, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/2901665?seq=2#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2901665?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents).

<sup>10</sup> See Martin Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět* (Praha: Academia, 2010), 154.

<sup>11</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 154.

<sup>12</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 153- 154.

text since Deuteronomy xxiii: 19-23 allowed to take interests from a foreigner, and Europeans could be considered foreigners by the Jews.<sup>13</sup>

The perception of usury in the Christian world would later follow the same direction. With time it became an economic necessity especially with the Jewish expulsion, even Christians practiced usury, although until 1571 it was done only unofficially. The Church acknowledged the economic benefits of it and even supported taking interests in some cases, arguing that “a foreigner” was anyone who was a non-believer,<sup>14</sup> such as Muslims or Jews.

The fact that Jews stood outside of Christian laws contributed to their reputation as inferior, outcasts from Heaven. Since people believed that Heavenly laws did not apply to the Jews, it was easier to moralize their mistreatment. For instance, monarchs often seized property of the Jews and burdened them with heavy taxations.<sup>15</sup> The English aristocracy treated the Jews as a commodity that could be sold or traded<sup>16</sup> and with their banishment, England lost a good source of income.<sup>17</sup>

This historical fact also projected into the Renaissance plays. For instance, when Barabas and other usurers in *The Jew of Malta* were confiscated their property, he proclaimed that “religion/ Hides many mischiefs from suspicion,”<sup>18</sup> referring to his own villaneous plans to murder his enemies as well as to Ferneze, who moralized the confiscation of the Jewish property. Although Jewish usurers were perceived as human predators, it was often the case that they were the

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<sup>13</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 154.

<sup>14</sup> The difference is that in the Old Testament the Jews could take interest from a foreigner, but not from a “brother.” The New Testament does not differentiate between brothers and foreigners because theoretically it assumes that everyone is a brother.

See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 154.

<sup>15</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 155.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Henry III sold the Jews to his Brother Richard.

See Bernard Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock* (New York: Random House, 1962), 24.

<sup>17</sup> See Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock*, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Ernest Rhys, ed., “The Jew of Malta,” *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, by Christopher Marlowe (London: J. M. DENT and Sons, 1912), 174.

victims of the system of usury, because the Christians, and especially the rich ones, refused to return the money that was lent to them.<sup>19</sup>

There were some misconceptions of Jewish usurers that were based more on people's superstitions and bigotry rather than on facts. The first myth is that they would become rich on the expense of Christians, which, according to Martin Hilský, was a common misconception, because more often the Christians became rich from usury and not the Jews.<sup>20</sup> The Christian usurers had no scruples to claim very high interest rates, some records even showed that bankers claimed interests of two hundred sixty six percent, which is significantly more than what the Jewish usurers requested from their debtors.<sup>21</sup> The usury was only permitted in 1571, and shortly after it was institutionalized into banks.

## 1.2. The Myth of Human Sacrifices In England

Despite the above mentioned contribution to the economical growth, the Jews were scorned and isolated from the mainstream society. It is this isolation and the ignorance of the general public that gave grounds to many myths concerning this minority. Sinsheimer mentions that there was a general fearful curiosity about the Jewish community, outsiders did not know what was happening within the Ghetto walls and people speculated what kind of rituals may be practiced.<sup>22</sup>

One particular case empowered these superstitions, the supposed child sacrifice of Norwich from 1144, which is described in Bernard Grebanier's *The Truth About Shylock* (1962). The Jews were supposed to have picked a child named William from Norwich for a ritual murder that was performed in a particularly

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<sup>19</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 155.

<sup>20</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 155.

<sup>21</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 155.

<sup>22</sup> See Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 34.

sadistic manner.<sup>23</sup> It was said that they crucified the child and, after his burial, “many miracles are reported to have taken place at his grave.”<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps even more damaging to their reputation was the incident that occurred in 1255 in Lincoln. Bernard Grebanier describes the incident in the following way: “A great many Jews from other towns had convened at Lincoln for important festivities: the daughter of an honored scholar, the Chief Rabbi of Lincoln, was to be married”<sup>25</sup>

By an unlucky coincidence, a little boy named Hugh had accidentally fallen into a cesspool in a yard of a Jew before the wedding ceremony and he remained there for nearly a month, until his body was discovered only one day after the wedding. When the body was discovered, naturally, the Jewish community feared that they would be held responsible for the boy’s death and they placed the body elsewhere to avoid suspicions. Regardless of their desperate attempt, when the body was discovered, the general public assumed that the Jews came to Lincoln to sacrifice a Christian child for Pesach fest, although it was already August, month after the usual Easter time.<sup>26</sup>

When Henry III of England (1207 – 1272) was informed about this incident, he saw an opportunity to make a profit of this situation and enrich himself. Therefore he ordered that not only those who attended the wedding festivities, but that all Jews who lived in England should submit themselves to a trial and later they were imprisoned. The wealthy Jews were permitted to ransom themselves out of the jail.<sup>27</sup>

Hermann Sinsheimer also mentions a child sacrifice accusation towards the Jews of Northampton, which occurred in the second half of the thirteenth century. As a punishment, the accused people were tortured to death by having their bodies

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<sup>23</sup> See Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> See Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> See Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock*, 24.

torn by horses.<sup>28</sup> These stories had a long lasting aftermath and they became an inspiration for poems and ballads, such as Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Prioresses Tale," written in the fourteenth century, or "The Ballad of the Little Hugh." These works were a historical misrepresentation because they were built upon imagination rather than on facts. Nevertheless, the fictional stories established the Jews as anti- Christs and child murderers.

### 1.3. The Banishment

The aggression towards the Jewish community increased before their banishment and it escalated to such an extent that sometimes they would ask the authorities for permission to leave England.<sup>29</sup> They were banned from England by Edward I on 18th July 1290, their property that they could not take with them was confiscated. They were not re-admitted until the year 1655.

According to Martin Hilský, with some exceptions, their exile was almost complete. During the reign of Henry VIII (r. 1509-1547) there lived around one hundred Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origins, which is a negligible amount considering the number of the total population. They were called Marranos, which translates as "pigs" or "hogs", they came to England after the expulsion from Iberian countries to seek safety in England.<sup>30</sup>

Since people strongly opposed Judaism, these Marranos were allowed to stay in England under the condition of converting to Christianity, although they still occasionally secretly continued with Jewish religious celebrations. To put it in Peter Berek's words, "Marrano condition was the most important quality of Jewishness in Elizabethan England. This is not so much to characterize the self-perceptions of Jews in England under Elizabeth and James as it is to suggest how they must have

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<sup>28</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 38.

<sup>29</sup> See Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 151.

appeared to the Christians amongst whom they lived.”<sup>31</sup> However, conversion did not solve the religious and racial intolerance. The converted Jews would deny that they are Jews and pray with other Christians in the church, but people could be never sure whether what the Marranos displayed was real or whether their real life took place in secrecy. Peter Berek divided the converters into two groups. The “New Christians” were the Jews who converted to Christianity and eventually assimilated into the mainstream community whereas the Marranos officially converted to Christianity but secretly continued their Jewish traditions.<sup>32</sup>

Henry III established an institution in 1232 that was called “The House of Converts” for those who wanted to convert to Christianity, his enterprise was without great success.<sup>33</sup> Considering the small amount of Jews in England, they became exotic, unfamiliar. Therefore, in people’s mind myth and reality intermingled. During the sixteenth century the most of Jewish communities in the west were diminished. After the year 1570 they started returning to the western countries.

A preface to *The Merchant of Venice* that was written in Nazi Germany states the following: “Shakespeare created the greatest Jewish character since the Bible. [...] In doing so, Shylock has to be treated, not only as a fictitious character, but also as a figure in Jewish history.”<sup>34</sup> The preface that served as a Nazi propaganda, however, is very far from the truth. To paraphrase Bernard Grebanier, the word “Jew” may have been used in a very loose sense, it could have included anyone who did not have a respectable position in the society, such as foreigners, Christian usurers, dissenters etc.<sup>35</sup> Grebanier’s argument suggests that Jewishness was not well defined in Shakespearean times. Based on this argument, it might be deduced that people wrote about Jews without knowing what a Jew really is. The post-war

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Berek, “The Jew as Renaissance Man,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51 (Spring, 1998), 134, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/2901665?seq=2#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2901665?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents).

<sup>32</sup> Berek, “The Jew as Renaissance Man,” 132.

<sup>33</sup> See Hermann Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947), 38.

<sup>34</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> See Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock*, 31.



critics, such as Sinsheimer, tend to argue that Jews survived in England only as ghosts in old literary works and stories carried by foreign merchants. A dividing line will be drawn between history and fiction.

Although there were recorded attempts to convert Jews, Judaism and Jews were so closely related in European people's minds, that they had difficulties believing that a Jew could become a Christian. Martin Hume mentions the exemplary case of Roderigo Lopez, a Portuguese Jew and the personal doctor of Queen Elizabeth, who was arrested for the alleged planning to assassinate the queen for the Spanish king Philip II in 1594.<sup>36</sup> Historians came to the conclusion that he was a scapegoat in political intrigues. In his essay "The So-Called Conspiracy of Rui Lopez," Martin Hume claims to have presented new evidence that suggests that although he was a double agent who profited from working for England and Spain, Rui Lopez did not intend to murder the queen.

According to *The Tudors: The Kings And Queens Of England's Golden Age* (2011) by Jane Bingham, the 16th century was a time of political and religious instability, when England went back and forth between Catholicism and Protestantism, and each time the dominant religious party demonized the competing religious branch. For instance, Mary I Tudor, also known as "Bloody Mary," was zealous to eradicate Protestantism in England, publically killing hundreds of innocent people. The ambitions of Mary I were unfulfilled when her half-sister Elizabeth established Protestantism as a national religion after Mary died. These two religions coexisted in England, although not on good terms. In all this religious confusion, Shakespeare and his contemporaries started writing about people who belong to a third conflicting religion, Judaism. The next section seeks to address the question of what purpose fictional Jews and Judaism have in this socio-political context.

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<sup>36</sup> See Martin Hume, "The So-Called Conspiracy of Dr. Ruy Lopez," *Jewish Historical Society of England*, vol. 6 (2006): 32-55, accessed July 2, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29777649>.

## **2. Demons, Prophets and other Jewish Stereotypes**

This section seeks to illustrate the evolution of the myth of a Jew as well as his changing function in the literary works. It will be displayed how writers depicted the Jews in their works throughout the period from the 13th century, the time shortly preceding their expulsion, until the end of the 16th century.

The hostilities that Jews were subjected to manifested in Medieval and Renaissance arts and writings. Bernard Starr, the author of "The Ethnic Cleansing of Judaism in Medieval and Renaissance Art," illustrates in his article how it was possible to disassociate Jesus, who was supposed to be orthodox practicing Jew, from his Jewishness. He argues that in the view of Europeans, Jesus was a Christian whose holiness opposed the villainy of Jews. Bernard Starr noted, that this division is especially apparent in Medieval and Renaissance art and he points to paintings such as *Mary Magdalene Encountering the Risen Jesus* by Fra Angelico (1394-1455), which depict Jesus and his family as white and blonde Europeans.<sup>37</sup>

The second notable characteristic is that the fictional characters continued developing more or less independently from the non-fictional community. The ghost-like, nameless characters, deprived from any human attributes like the Jews in "The Ballad of the Little Hugh" grew over time into complex characters, and this development continued during the time when Jewish community was virtually non-existent in England. Although the depictions of villains are still less than flattering, characters grew into reasoning human beings, who can feel hate and love, offence as well as remorse.

From the point of view of literary history, a Jew was a demonic character who was mostly associated with Judas. According to the *New Testament*, Judas was a usurer, an anti-Christ, a traitor, and therefore people associated Jews with all these

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<sup>37</sup> See Bernard Starr, "The Ethnic Cleansing of Judaism in Medieval and Renaissance Art," *The Huffington Post*, June 3, 2013, accessed May 20, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernard-starr/the-ethnic-cleansing-of-j\\_b\\_2811847.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernard-starr/the-ethnic-cleansing-of-j_b_2811847.html).

characteristics. Grebanier points out that in some mystery plays it was not rare to emphasize that Judas was closely connected to them by exaggerating his stereotypical Jewish features, for instance his big nose and long beard.<sup>38</sup> In order to make it distinctive on the first sight that they were evil, in miracle plays such as *The Betraying of Christ*, Judas wore the same red wigs that actors wore in other plays when they impersonated the Devil<sup>39</sup>.

The plays that associated Jews with Devils and Judas were based on the *New Testament*. However, *Old Testament* emphasized that the people of Israel were exceptional among other nations and that they were chosen by God. Thus, some miracle plays that were inspired by the *Old Testament*, depicted Jews as wise prophets, such as Moses. This dual image may seem paradoxical. However, “in the view of the medieval and post-medieval audiences, the Children of Israel had nothing in common with The Jews.”<sup>40</sup> According to Sinsheimer, this was a common historical distortion and misconception, because Moses and the Children of Israel were elevated while the Jews were scorned.

One of the popular stories of the thirteenth century was known as “The Wandering Jew.” The title refers to the fictional gate keeper of Pontius Pilatus.<sup>41</sup> The Jew was cursed by Heavens to wander the Earth as an outcast for offending Jesus Christ. Stories like this established the Jews as the enemies of God and mankind.

What terrified the Christians and triggered their imagination more than “The Wandering Jew” were the alleged murders of children described previously in the chapter “The Myth of Human Sacrifice.” Since the alleged child murders happened in England, people believed that the Jews would represent an eminent danger if they were near them or their children. The Medieval writers added new details and scenes of miracles to their stories, depicting the Jews quasi as Satans.

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<sup>38</sup> See Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock*, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 42-43.

<sup>41</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 40.

As an exemplary story may be mentioned “Ballad of Little Sir Hugh,” written in the 13th century, or “The Prioress's Tale” from *The Canterbury Tales* written in the 14th century by Geoffrey Chaucer. The literary works follow a similar story line. The stories are based on two extreme polarities of piety and villainy, each represented by the saint-like Christian children, the physical representation of innocence, and devilish Jews.

What may be conspicuous is that in both plays the Jewish characters were completely dehumanized to the extent that they are not even designated any names. The fact that they do not have any names suggest an over-generalisation that any Jew could be a murderer. In “The Ballad of Little Sir Hugh,” the antagonist is referred to as “Jew's daughter.” When she sees the little Sir Hugh, under a pretext she lures him into her house: “And then he saw the Jew's daughter/ At the window looking out./ Throw down the ba, ye Jew's daughter,/ Throw down the ba to me!”<sup>42</sup> The Jew's daughter, however, answers in the following way: “Never a bit, says the Jew's daughter,/ Till up to me come ye.”<sup>43</sup>

The trusting boy follows the Jew's daughter into the house, where he suffers tortures: “She's led him in through ae dark door, / And sae has she thro nine [...]”<sup>44</sup> The tortures inflicted on the little child are described in detail as “She's laid him on a dressing table./ And stickit him like a swine. / And first came out the thick, thick blood, And syne came out the thin,/And syne came out the bonny heart's blood;/ There was nae mair within.”<sup>45</sup>

The Jewess and her motivations for the murder remain a mystery, as we are provided no information about it. However, the mysteriousness of the character signifies one important historical fact. The historical Jews became so alienated to the English society that they became almost mythological ghoulish-like figures, to put it in Sinsheimer's words, and they were portrayed as if their natural behaviour was

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<sup>42</sup> Mary Ellen Brown, *Child's Unfinished Masterpiece: The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 256.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, *Child's Unfinished Masterpiece: The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 256.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, *Child's Unfinished Masterpiece: The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 256.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *Child's Unfinished Masterpiece: The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 256.

to murder the innocent. In Sinsheimer's words, the Jewish people were "stripped of the last shred of reality. A few names of streets, places or districts, a few other words, were the only remaining evidence of the historical existence of the Jews, of their having once been there. The rest was popular or poetical fantasy which made ghosts and ghouls of men."<sup>46</sup> The horror of the crime may be enhanced by the fact that a woman attacked a child, which completely contradicts the medieval concept of a woman.<sup>47</sup>

The second work that will be analysed is Chaucer's story "The Prioress's Tale." It seems that the writer distanced himself from the historical events, and therefore he set the tale away from England into a faraway land in Asia. The fact that the plot is set in a foreign land may give the impression to the medieval reader that such cases of murders must be frequent, thus placing the issue of Jews and Judaism not only on national, but also on global level.

The story is based on a dual polarity between good and evil, which has a clear dividing line that is emphasised by the fact that the Christian child can communicate with saints, while the Jews are Satan's accomplices and are easily manipulated by him: "Oure firste fo, the serpent Sathanas,/ That hath in Jewes herte his waspes nest,/ [...]"<sup>48</sup> These lines are the perfect example of a historical anachronism, because Jesus and his family were Semites and Christianity was based on Judaism.

"The Prioress's Tale" emphasizes the physical and spiritual purity of the Christian, making the crime of the murderous Jews even more horrifying: "O martir soulded to virginitee,/ Now maystou singen, folwinge evere in oon/ The Whyte Lamb celestial –quod she-/ Of which the grete evangelist Seint John/ In Pathmos wroot, which seith that they that goon/ / Biforn this Lamb and singe a song al newe, / That nevere fleshly, women they ne knew."<sup>49</sup> The words "martyr",

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<sup>46</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> In the Middle Ages women were associated with chivalry, gentleness, beauty and motherly instincts.

<sup>48</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988), 211.

<sup>49</sup> Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, 211.

“virginity”, “Lamb (God),” “celestial” that describe the little boy are important keywords in Christianity, representing religious ideals.

Chaucer’s Jews slip into the supernatural as they are able to converse with Satan, who spoke to them “O Hebraik peple, alas!/ Is this to yow a thing that is honest,/ That swich a boy shal walken as him lest,/ In youre despyt, and singe of swich sentence/Which is agayn oure laws reverence?”<sup>50</sup> As soon as they heard Satan's speech, the Jews seized the child and cut his throat. After this, a miracle occurred that was similar to the ones that could be found in the *Bible*. The boy lives with his fatal injury a little longer so that he can sing praises to the Holy Mother:

My throte is cut unto my nekke-boon,  
Seyde this child, and as by wey of kinde,  
I sholde have deyed, ye, longe tyme agoon,  
But Jesu Crist, as ye in bokes finde,  
Wil that his glorie laste and be in minde;  
And for the worship of his moder dere  
Yet may I singe O Alma loude and clere.<sup>51</sup>

The reason behind the emphasis on the goodness of Christians and the villainy of Jews may be a strong religious propaganda that elevates and propagates Christianity and its values and it is probable that it is an attempt to eradicate any competing religion. This argument could be supported by the argument that the child does not use the few moments he has left in this world to speak to his own mother but he spent it to worship Mary, the mother of Jesus. This might be interpreted in the following way, nothing in this world is superior, even one's own mother, to worshipping the Heavens. Although the child dies, the good is victorious over evil, because the miracle is a good proof that the child will be richly rewarded in the afterlife and the onlookers who saw the miracle witness that.

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<sup>50</sup> Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, 211

<sup>51</sup> Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, 213.

Gradually, the literary Jews gained a secular character since their crimes were reduced from child ritual murder to money-lending. Nevertheless, there might be an analogy drawn between usury and cannibalism. For instance, Shylock as a usurer is believed to “feast upon a Christian” in a financial sense, since taking interests was considered a form of economic parasitism.

The change of motives may suggest that the aim of the plays ceased to be religious promotions but they became an opportunity for social and economic commentary. One of the most notable changes, which support this argument, is that human virtue is no longer connected to any particular religion. Whereas the dividing line between wrong and good was clearly distinctive in the works about child murders, this dividing line becomes rather fuzzy in late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Jews sometimes display surprising signs of humanity<sup>52</sup> and Christians, on the other hand repeatedly hide their crimes behind the veil of Christianity.

During Elizabethan times England economically thrived, mercantilism was becoming an important sector for English economy and England was heading towards capitalism, according to *The Tudors: The Kings And Queens of England's Golden Age* by Jane Bingham. However, with capitalism comes greed and rapacity, which also projected into the works of late Elizabethan literary era, such as *The Three Ladies of London* (1584) by Robert Wilson. A Jewish usurer was the physical manifestation of capitalism. However, even he had some moral restrictions in the play, and there remained some unmaterialistic things that he valued more than money, which was an unusual trait for a Renaissance fictional Judaist.

The allegorical nature of the work is suggested by the names of the actors, which are Dissilusion, Usury, and Conscience etc. Mercadorus, a London merchant who is in service of Lady Lucre, borrowed 2, 000 ducats from a Jew named Gerontus and he did not intend to return his money. Gerontus addressed Mercadorus on behalf of the money when they met again in Turkey: “Surely if we that be Jewes should deale so one with other, We should not be trusted againe of our own

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<sup>52</sup> With respect to the time when they were written.

brother; But many of your Christians make no conscience to falsifie your fayth and breake your day."<sup>53</sup>

Gerontus appears to be rather patient with his debtor and comes three times for his money without enforcing the law. However, when he senses that his debtor is not intending to return his money, he threatens Mercadorus with jail. This is when Mercadorus reveals his true intentions: "Me will not pay de one peny: arrest me, doo, me do not care. Me will be a Turke, me came hedar for dat cause: Darefore, me care not for de so much as two strawes."<sup>54</sup> Turkey was an Islamic country and was widely known as the propagator of Islam since the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Mercadorus words suggested that he would rather be a Muslim. As a favour from The Judge of Turkey, in case of a conversion he would be released from his former debts and liabilities. However, this act would be considered as heinous not only towards Gerontus, but also towards Christianity because apostasy is considered a deadly sin.

Gerontus, who valued men over money, did not have a vindictive personality and he reacted in the following way: "This is but your wordes, because you would defeate me: I cannot thinke you will forsake your faith so lightly. But seeing you drive me to doubt, Ile go about it presently."<sup>55</sup>

Mercadorus, on the other hand, valued nothing more than his capital, which in legal terms he stole from the Jew, and as he mentioned above, he would risk his soul for a profit, yet Mercadorus regards himself superior to Gerontus. This delusional conviction is illustrated by the following lines, "Mary, farawell and be hangd, sitten, scald, drunken Jew. I warrant yee me shalbe able very well to pay you,"<sup>56</sup> It could be observed that there is a division between religion and moral values in the sixteenth century, which was inseparable in the previous centuries.

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<sup>53</sup> Robert Wilson, "The Three Ladies of London," *Five Old Plays: Illustrating the Early Progress of the English Drama*, ed. John Collier (London: Shakespeare, 1851), 209.

<sup>54</sup> Wilson, "The Three Ladies of London," 221.

<sup>55</sup> Wilson, "The Three Ladies of London," 221.

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, "The Three Ladies of London," 221.



Before The Judge of Turkey, Mercadorus placed his hand on Koran and repeated after the Judge that he renounced before the whole world his duty to his prince, his honour to his parents and his good will to his own country and that he officially abandoned his Christian faith. The terrified usurer stops him and remits him all his debts. Only then Mercadorus said "Seneor no: not for all da good in da world me forsake a my Christ."<sup>57</sup> Although Mercadorus presents himself as a pious Christian after he had been pardoned, it remains a question whether he would have proceeded in his apostasy vows if Gerontus did not release him from his debt.

Although the Jewish characters appear humanized in comparison to the previous centuries, Shylock and Barabas are not completely disassociated from the Devil. As Martin Hilský argues, both plays are the continuation of the morality plays, where the Devil, with his comical sidekick Vice, play a central role. The Vice is replaced by the Jew's servants Ithamore and Launcelot, who are constantly making jests on their master's expense.<sup>58</sup>

Jews in literature begun displaying some signs of humanity in Elizabethan Era, however, it does not necessarily entail that writers were trying to defend their reputation. A "Jew" was still an insult, as can be seen from the following lines from *The Merchant of Venice*: "Let me say amen betimes, lest the devil cross my/ prayer, for here he comes in the likeness of a Jew."<sup>59</sup> The word "Jew" could be simply used as a synonym for "scum of the society", as can be seen in North's *Diall of Princes* (1568): "Let him take heed also that he do not call his servants drankards, thieves, villains, Jews, not other such names of reproach."<sup>60</sup> As Hermann Sinsheimer argues, "the interference is not so much that the reputation of the Jews was high as that of the Christian merchants was extremely low."<sup>61</sup>

Another notable shift is that the plays of the sixteenth century is that literary works connected to Jews do not take place in England but in Mediterranean

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<sup>57</sup> Wilson, "The Three Ladies of London," 228.

<sup>58</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 163.

<sup>59</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Lonon: Penguin Books, 1967), 110.

<sup>60</sup> Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock*, 43.

<sup>61</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 51.

countries. The reason for this shift could be found in Jewish and English history. There were Jewish communities in Mediterranean countries, and these countries were associated with merchants who traded with England.

The name *The Three Ladies of London* might relate to the author's view on the moral state of English merchants, since Meracodus is a London merchant in service of Lady Lucre. Shakespeare does not mention England in his play. However, with reference to Sinsheimer, Shakespeare's other plays that take place in Italy have no character with an outstanding personality who would have an English name. Shylock, however, is an anglicised version of Shelach.<sup>62</sup>

Sinsheimer mentions that "Incidentally, the very similar-sounding word Shycock, taken from the popular cockfights was, according to the Oxford Dictionary, also used for a cautious and cowardly person [...]"<sup>63</sup> He argues that the character's name might be a response to one particular event, the trial of the infamous Jewish physician: "Finally, it is not to be excluded that the name might contain some allusion to Roderigo Lopez, who had certainly lived up to the meaning of the word Shycock."<sup>64</sup> The anglicized name might provide evidence that the social does not touch only Malta but mainly England.

Moreover, Shakespeare's plays often take place in foreign countries - Italy, Denmark or even Bohemia. Nevertheless, the themes and motives need not necessarily be limited to these particular countries because Shakespeare was concerned with universal topics— love, hate, revenge etc. Similarly, the theme of greed, the corruptive power of money and hypocrisy in *The Merchant of Venice* can allude to people's questionable values in general.

Capitalism appears to be the central topic also in other Elizabethan plays. The victims of Jews are no longer innocent children but capitalistic merchants, whose actions provoke the Jews to revenge. This Christian aggression can be illustrated in

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<sup>62</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 87.

<sup>64</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 88.

*The Merchant of Venice* with respect is Antonio's behaviour, who desperately needed to borrow money for his friend. However, the fact that he came to the much hated Jew to borrow money for interest could be a sign that his Christian friends do not want to lend him the money because they would not benefit from it. From the relationship between Antonio and Shylock it is evident that there is a one-sided dependency between them. Shylock did not depend on the interests that he took from Antonio since he had other sources of income. However, the happiness of Bassanio depended on Shylock's loan and the play would have not had a happy ending if not for Shylock's loan. This might be seen as a sign that the Christians needed the usurers. They hypocritically supported the sins of others and perceived that there is nothing wrong with it while scorning the Jews for complying with their economic needs, as Antonio's speech suggests:

You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,  
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,  
And all for use of that which is mine own.  
Well then, it now appears you need my help:  
Go to, then; you come to me, and you say  
'Shylock, we would have moneys:' you say so;  
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard  
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur  
Over your threshold: moneys is your suit  
What should I say to you?<sup>65</sup>

Shylock's arguments and conditions do not seem unrealistic and unfeasible, this way both would profit. The usurer and the profit-seeking merchants appear to be similar in nature since Bassanio called his newly wedded wife a Golden Fleece.

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<sup>65</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 83.

Shylock lent money in return for interest and Bassanio invested the money he borrowed for a lucrative courtship. Thus, both men are very similar in this sense.

In this light, Antonio could be hardly considered a victim. Needless to say, Shylock's choice of punishment for Antonio was inadequate, for nothing can justify a murder attempt. However, unlike in previous centuries, the Jew is not a villain for the sake of villainy but in his own mind he is the executor of justice and his actions are legal and in accordance with local laws.

In Shakespeare's imagination, a place that permits usury would also legalize exchanging a life for money. As Edgar Rosenberg argues in *From Shylock to Svengali* (1960), from cutting out the Christian's heart, it was only a step to feeding on it; and occasionally the charge of mutilation carried with it obscure implications of cannibalism.<sup>66</sup>

The Jews do not act on Satan's command but oftentimes, the lack of respect for Jews prompts the clash between gentiles and Jews. This objective self-criticism creates a realistic environment where also the Jewish characters appear more realistic and human. Marlowe's play *The Jew of Malta* does not favour any particular religion, as Barabas' words suggest: "Ay, daughter; for religion/ Hides many mischiefs from suspicion."<sup>67</sup> These lines could apply to him or any other character in the play, Jew or Gentile.

The name of the antagonist is conspicuously similar to the Biblical figure from *the New Testament*. According to the Bible, at the trial of Christ, on the occasion of a Jewish holiday, Pilatus promised to release one prisoner. He granted the Hebrews the choice between two prisoners, Jesus and Barabbas. The Jews chose Barabbas to be freed and Jesus to be crucified. The main idea behind the story of the

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<sup>66</sup> See Edgar Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali; Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960), 25.

<sup>67</sup> Ernest Rhys, ed., "The Jew of Malta," *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, by Christopher Marlowe (London: J. M. DENT and Sons, 1912), 174.

crucifixion is that according to Christian belief, God chose His son to be sacrificed for the good of the whole world, he suffered for all sinners.

The idea of sacrificing a Jew for the wellbeing of a multitude could be also found in the *Jew of Malta*, though on a much smaller scale. When Ferneze announces that the tribute that Malta pays to Turkey must be paid from the money of Jews, Barabas argues with him in the following way:

Bara. Will you, then, steal my goods?  
Is theft the ground of your religion?  
Fern. No, Jew; we take particularly thine,  
To save the ruin of a multitude:  
And better one want for a common good,  
Than many perish for a private man<sup>68</sup>

It seems that there is a parallel between the *Bible* and the play not only with respect to the Biblical name. Recent theories suggest that Barabbas might have been a rebel that could be involved in a conspiracy against the Romans, therefore the Jews chose him over Jesus. However, in the past people believed he was a criminal. The play seems to reflect the Biblical scene where a choice has to be made between Barabas the criminal and the wellbeing of the Christians of Malta. The idea of sacrificing a Jew for the wellbeing of a multitude reflexes on this play, but this time, the sinner is chosen over a Christian. Considering the importance of the money to Barabas, this would be a tremendous sacrifice seen from his point of view. However, unlike in the *Bible*, the Jew was not willing to make the sacrifice like Jesus did and instead he takes revenge on the Christians.

The difference between the sixteen century works and the works of the previous centuries is that Christians do not show much commitment to their own religion in comparison to the Jews of Elizabethan Era. This is displayed in all three

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<sup>68</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 169-170.

plays that will be analysed in this paper. The *Old Testament* forbids eating pork. Leviticus 11:7-8 in the *Old Testament* states that it is unclean to eat pork. However, while Shylock keeps the food restrictions, Christians do not. This is apparent from Shylock's monologue when he is invited to dinner: "Yes, to smell pork, to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into. I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you."<sup>69</sup> This monologue illustrates the author's awareness of how committed the Jews are to their religion, it dictates every aspect of their lives, even the very nutrients that they draw their energy from.

Christians base their values more on *the New Testament*, but *the New Testament* does not cancel out the laws of the *Old Testament*. Jesus as a Jew probably did not eat pork but Christians do not follow his example. The pork became a widespread cuisine for European Christians. Thus, the Christians characters reproached Shylock for refusing to accept their Messiah, but at the same time the Christians were not fully dedicated to their own religion.

Another notable similarity between all three plays that might be relevant to mention is, when Christians interact with each other, they often show more virtue than when interacting with someone of other faith. When dealing with the outcast Jews they seem to display their true nature. The Gentile characters put aside their Christian Code when interacting with sinners, and they begin to resemble the Jewish behaviour. This becomes apparent in relation to money. The author's intent is perhaps to illustrate the corrupting power of money and demonstrate how capitalists may morally resemble the much hated Jews.

Christopher Marlowe illustrated how capitalism could take over all aspects of life, even religion. It seems like a harsh criticism of Catholic priests, since Malta was Catholic, as Anna Beskin notes in her thesis "Good girl, bad girl: The Jew of Malta

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<sup>69</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 80.

and *The Merchant of Venice*" (2007).<sup>70</sup> As has been mentioned above, the Protestant England was not at good terms with Catholicism. The Catholic Church was reproached by the Protestants for its attitude towards wealth, the church and its priests were accused to be greedy and corrupt, which could correspond to the priest's behaviour in this play. It seems however, that the friars are humiliated by the author not only because of their greed for money, but because their ego and a sense of superiority prevents them from recognizing that they sin. In other words, though they have the same traits as Barabas, they dismiss that they have any faults in them while Barabas knows and embraces his villainy.

Their self-righteousness could therefore be used to mock the speaker: "Friar Barn. Stay, wicked Jew; repent, I say, and stay. Friar Jac. Thou hast offended, therefore must be damn'd."<sup>71</sup> Their foolishness is also scorned by Machiavelli, who seems to be a minor character but whose words seem to give tone to the whole play: "I count religion but a childish toy, And hold there is no sin but ignorance."<sup>72</sup>

*The Merchant of Venice* is to a great extent influenced by *The Jew of Malta* in terms of religion and money as well as by Machiavelli's speech discussed above. Barabas confronts Ferneze for using his religion as a tool to dispossess him: "What, bring you Scripture to confirm your wrongs?/ Preach me not out of my possessions."<sup>73</sup> In *Merchant of Venice* there is a similar situation when Antonio is offended that a Jew should use the Bible to justify usury: "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."<sup>74</sup> These two claims bridge the gap between greedy Christian merchants and Jews, they became more similar to each other.

Antonio from *The Merchant of Venice* proclaimed that life is a stage and everyone plays a role in it. Nevertheless, on stage actors can play more roles at once

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<sup>70</sup> See Anna Beskin, "Good Girl, Bad Girl: The Jew of Malta and The Merchant of Venice," (Tampa: MA thesis, University of South Florida, 2007), 27.

<sup>71</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 201.

<sup>72</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 162.

<sup>73</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 170.

<sup>74</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 82.

and it was nothing unusual for the characters in a play to wear a disguise.<sup>75</sup> Arguably, there is a parallel between Antonio's claim and the behaviour of some characters in both plays. For instance, the friars in *The Jew of Malta* play a double role depending on the people in their environment.

When interacting with Christians they appear as pious men eager to defend Abigail before her father. Their interaction illustrates how comfortably people can slip out of their roles as Christians when it serves their purpose. Before a Judaizing Jew, whom they consider a sinner, they put aside their veil of Christianity and reveal their true nature. He pretends repenting his sins and appears to be willing to donate his wealth to the Church. The friars do not want to share the promised profit and therefore they start arguing:

Friar Jac. O Barabas, their laws are strict!

Bara. I know they are; and I will be with you.

Friar Barn. They wear no shirts, and they go barefoot too.

Bara. Then 'tis not for me; and I am resolv'd

You shall confess me, and have all my goods.

Friar Jac. Good Barabas, come to me.

Bara. You see I answer him, and yet he stays;

Rid him away, and go you home with me.<sup>76</sup>

The last motive that will be discussed in this thesis is revenge. Before the sixteenth century the standpoint of Jewish characters towards revenge was unequivocal, it was their inseparable prerequisite. In the late Elizabethan era the Jews become bipolar in this sense. For Barabas and Shylock it becomes the highest priority that is valued more than any wealth or fatherly love "I would my daughter

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<sup>75</sup> For instance, gender crossdressing occurred very frequently in Shakespearean plays. Women were prohibited from acting in theatre. Female roles were played by boys who tried to look like women. These female characters sometimes disguised themselves as men, which is, in fact, a double crossdressing.

<sup>76</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 202.



were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!”<sup>77</sup> Also Barabas’ obsession with wealth is ridiculed when in a comical manner he hugs and kisses his regained bags of gold and said:

My gold, my fortune, my felicity,  
Strength to my soul, death to mine enemy;  
Welcome the first beginner of my bliss!  
O Abigail, Abigail, that I had thee here too!  
Then my desires were fully satisfied:  
But I will practice thy enlargement thence:  
O girl! O gold! O beauty! O my bliss!<sup>78</sup>

Both Barabas and Shylock use the collected money to take revenge on Christians who wrong them without sparing any costs. Shylock for instance, would rather acquire Antonio's flesh than multiple his debt, as Jessica reports: “That he would rather have Antonio’s flesh Than twenty times the value of the sum/That he did owe him [...]”<sup>79</sup> These stereotypes prevailed from the Medieval poems like “The Ballad of Little Hugh.” It may be of relevance to note that the revenge and hatred is mutual. In the text above Shylock appeals on Bassanio, arguing that they resemble each other in physiology, bodies and souls. Therefore, their reaction to offense would also be resembled. He says “If a Jew wrong a Christian,/ what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge!”<sup>80</sup>

The word “revenge” could be a multiple allusion. Firstly, the merchants of Venice reproach Shylock for exploiting Christians and Antonio takes revenge on

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<sup>77</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 112.

<sup>78</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 179.

<sup>79</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 123.

<sup>80</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 111.

Shylock by spitting on him and calling him a “cut-throat Jewish dog.”<sup>81</sup> There is also a different kind of revenge that Shylock may refer to. The following extract from *The Merchant of Venice* is deemed as one of the most impressive speeches of Jewish Renaissance characters. Shylock argues with the Christians:

I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs,  
dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with  
the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject  
to the same diseases, healed by the same means,  
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as  
a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?  
if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison  
us, do we not die?<sup>82</sup>

The Jews appear only to continue the closed cycle of never-ending revenge, prompted by the Christians who use any opportunity to seize the property of Jews under the pretext of punishment for Jesus’ crucifixion. The reader might find this sense of moral satisfaction taking revenge in Christians Lancelot Gobbo, who tells Jessica that she was born doomed because of her parents although she argues that she longs for redemption. This, ironically, was written during the time when the Portuguese, Spanish and Italian Christians went on missions in Asia to convert pagans from exotic countries to Christianity. Compared to older works such as the “Pioress’ Tale,” the victims of the Jewish villains followed the example of their Messiah and praised the mother of Jesus instead of cursing their tormentors.

However, the characters in *The Merchant of Venice* appear to be less concerned in correction of the sinners than getting moral satisfaction in punishing the Jews. This is particularly evident when the Christians interact with Jewish women, who are

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<sup>81</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 83.

<sup>82</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 111.

eager to convert.<sup>83</sup> Also Shylock, who uncompromising in the customs of his religion, reproaches the Christians who do not obey the prohibition of eating pork<sup>84</sup>: “Yes, to smell pork; to eat of the habitation which/ your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into. I/ will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you,/ walk with you, and so following, but I will not eat/ with you, drink with you, nor pray with you.”<sup>85</sup>

It could be also noted that Shylock has an exceptional knowledge of the *Bible*. He uses its text to justify usury and provides an example of Jacob, who multiplies his profit from sheep. When Christians argue with Jews, they never use any particular section of the Bible against them, whereas Shylock frequently uses references in the *Bible*. For instance, Antonio does not refer to Deuteronomy, where it is specifically mentioned that usury is a sin. Also Gobbo argues with Jessica that she is doomed both ways because her parents are Jewish. Nevertheless, he does not support his claims with any particular text from the *Bible*, which makes Gobbo’s argument ambiguous.

Antonio dismisses Shylock’s argument of Jacob’s sheep quickly: Was this inserted to make interest good?/ Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?<sup>86</sup> His brief answer might be attributed to unwillingness to discuss religious matters with a villain but also to the fact that Shylock provides examples of his own biblical ancestors, this reminder that Christianity is related to Jews could have made Antonio uncomfortable and thus he answered only briefly.

In the end the protagonists officially permit Shylock to receive his bond of Antonios’ flesh, only under the condition that it must be the exact amount that was set in their contract. If more or less flesh is taken, it would be considered a murder and Shylock would face a death penalty. Therefore, Shylock withdraws his contract.

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<sup>83</sup> This aspect of the clash between Jews and Gentiles will be discussed in more detail in the section The Image of Jewish Women as New Christians.

<sup>84</sup> Shylock probably also refers to the fact that Kosher food is defined in the Old Testament, but the New Testament does not negate the old prohibition. The seven deadly sins from the Old Testament are still abided while other prohibitions that are in conflict with the ancient European traditions are ignored.

<sup>85</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 80.

<sup>86</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 82.

By releasing him and converting him to Christianity the Christian protagonists appear to disprove Shylock's initial statement that "if a Christian/ wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by/ Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you/ teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but/ will better the instruction."<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, what on the first sight seems like Christian charity could be also a sign of victory and revenge. This may be deduced from Portia's and Lancelot's treatment of Jessica, who intended to become a Christian wife to Lorenzo. She seems to be unable to surpass her habitual anti-Semitism and she addresses the newly baptised bride: "But who comes here? Lorenzo and his infidel!"<sup>88</sup>

Similarly, Launcelot approaches Jessica to inform her that she is doomed regardless of her faith: "He tells me flatly there is no mercy for/ me in heaven, because I am a Jew's daughter, and he/ says, you are no good member of the commonwealth,/ for in converting Jews to Christians, you raise the/ price of pork."<sup>89</sup> Thus, according to Launcelot, the sins of the forefathers are transferred onto the children, as he claims: "Yes, truly, for look you, the sins of the father/ are to be laid upon the children."<sup>90</sup>

This illustrates that the European society needed the Jews for their economy because they would provide loans for businesses. However, they needed to stay outcasts. Moreover, Lancelot questions the very essence of their religion, power of God, which is in Christian belief limitless. According to the Bible, the belief in Jesus can heal illnesses and even resurrect people from death, yet Launcelot seems to doubt that he can save Jews.

Nevertheless, the belief of children inheriting their father's sins applies only to Jews but not to Christians. After all, even the English queen would not be able to go to Heaven for her father Henry VIII, who beheaded most of his wives.

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<sup>87</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 111.

<sup>88</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 120.

<sup>89</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 129.

<sup>90</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 129.

Thus, the mercy that the protagonists paid Shylock at the end of the play might seem to be superficial. Though the Bible commands do not judge lest you be judged, Lancelot, Portia and Antonio already made their verdict. Christians do not grant redemption to Jews and Shylock's forced conversion is a sign of humiliation, submission and punishment rather than charity.

Gerontus and other minor characters, however, present a completely distinct picture. As was mentioned above, Gerontus did not take revenge on Meracodus for the insults. Moreover, other Jews in *The Jew of Malta* complied Ferneze and submitted their property to him, they did not join Barabas in the conspiracy against the Christians. He was obliged to look for his accomplices outside of his ethnic group, which displays that Barabas is exceptional among multitude.

Thus, in the sixteenth century there is no uniform image for an Elizabethan Jew. The wide variety images between old archetypical villain and a New Christians illustrates that Jewish characters are flexible, and therefore they would be a suitable tool for satire. Their interaction with Gentiles provide a more unified image of merchant Christians, which might not be a coincidence because England was engaged in trade with the Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy. As previously mentioned, England was also slowly becoming more capital-based country and the plays might be also a possibly omniscient glimpse into the future of England.

In summary, certain Jewish stereotypes are predominant over centuries in some characters, while other deviate from Jewish archetypes, and in some ways they may appear as "un-Jewish". The reason behind the flexibility of Jewish characters is their absence in England. Thus, they could become anything the writers want them to be. Their function was multiple and their image had such a wide variety that it cannot be narrowed into a uniform image, they were villains as well as protagonists, however, their function seems to have one element in common. They seem to be suitable means for satirizing society, and from this thesis it can be deduced that this is the reason why they did not disappear from literature with their expulse.

One feature all Jewish characters have in common is their ability to display the shortcomings of Christian of the society. The target of criticism appears to be the capitalization of the Church as well as the corruptive powers of money on merchants. It appears, however, that Jessica and Abigail do not fit this frame since they have little to do with money. The next section, however, will illustrate that although in manners they rarely resemble their fathers, their function as also allude to the corrupted society.

What makes the female characters outstanding is that they are technically outsiders, they reject Judaism which was a part of their cultural identity, yet they do not become entirely intergrated into the maistream society. However, in their manners they are closer to the Christians than to their fathers. Therefore, the satire targets the same issue but from a different perspective. The mistreatment of Shylock or Barabas could always be somehow justified because they are villains. The Jewish female characters imitate the Christians, which, as will be presented in the next section, presents a less flattering image.

It could be argued that a Renaissance Jew still remains a myth to this day as he was a myth in the sixteenth century. The physical absence of a Jewish community enabled the writers to create such a character that would become whatever the writers want them to be. The result is a very diverse image that due its ambiguity may be interpreted in many ways and it is still debated what is the definition of a Renaissance Jew. According to Sinsheimer, during the WWII Shylock and Barabas were used as an anti-Jewish propaganda, arguing that "Lorenzo must not marry the terrible Jewess, Jessica, because it would be *Rassenschande*<sup>91</sup>- and cut it in such a way that Shylock's arguments were glossed out."<sup>92</sup> The war left behind a traumatized society even on academic ground that seems attempt to make amend by taking a more humanistic approach. This signifies that the image of Jews continues changing with time.

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<sup>91</sup> Loan translated as "disgrace of the race" (own translation).

<sup>92</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 141.

### **3. The Image of Women as New Christians in English Drama.**

This section focuses on the analysis of Jewish female characters in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Jew of Malta*. What seems to be peculiar about Jewish women is that since they appear to be closer to Gentiles in their manners than to stereotypical Jews, they are misfits within the Jewish community. Therefore, they are not often discussed in terms of their Jewishness. However, at the same time they are discriminated by the Gentile society. Thus they are placed on the verge of both worlds. This chapter does not focus on determining whether the characters are good or bad, but rather on the Jewish aspect of their identity. It will be argued that their acceptance of negative assumptions of the anti-Semites is a verdict upon their own identity and their desperate attempts to deny this identity by anti-Semitism only emphasizes its inescapability. Thus, it will be argued that anti-Semitism is a part of the image of Elizabethan fictional Jews.

This chapter illustrates the characteristics of Jewish female characters that led them to be Christened and anti-Semitic. The last section of this chapter will provide a possible explanation for the genesis of anti-Semitic Jews as well as their functions in plays. It will be argued that Abigail and Jessica carry the burden of being women in an anti-Semitic and patriarchal society. The following subsections will discuss the psychological impact of this discrimination and their coexistence with the Christians.

#### **3.1. Blood, Sex and The Double Burden of Jewish Women in a Patriarchal Gentile Society**

Women were in the past generally considered gentle fragile beings associated with love, purity, beauty, submission but also with emotional inconsistency, according to *Watkins Dictionary of symbols* (2011). All these characteristics, which could be also found in female Jewish characters of Elizabethan era, completely

overshadowed any Jewish stereotypical feature. However, in this thesis the focus of attention will be on the Jewish rather than on their gender roles as the focus will be.

Edgar Rosenberg argues that the daughter's anti-Jewishness is a final verdict over their father's villainy.<sup>93</sup> However, it could be argued that the issue is a somewhat more complex. As has been mentioned before, the Jewish race became alienated to gentiles and it was a mystery what was happening behind the ghetto walls. Shakespeare as well as Marlowe's imagination provide a glimpse from within those ghetto walls. While the wealthy Barabas or Shylock manage to provide himself a comfortable existence due to their wealth, Jessica and Abigail are placed in power of these villains, despite the fact that the women morally exceeded them.

The critics often point to the distinct character traits of Jessica and Abigail however, both have one factor in common: they were ostracised by Gentiles, objectified by men, possessed by Jews and mocked by slaves or servants. Their apostasy is a result of the disillusionment with the powerlessness of her sex and race, rather than the belief in the villainy of their father. This situation is not the result of their own actions and there is little to be done to change it. Thus, the Jewish anti-Semitism is a reaction to hopelessness, it serves as a "scapegoat" to their bad living conditions; it is the only thing that keeps them away from the majority for which they are longing.<sup>94</sup>

In Shakespearean Venice or Marlowe's Malta, money plays such a significant role that even outcasts could become rich, and therefore powerful. Peter Berek argues, that "Jewishness is part of the essence of his villainy, the energy underlying the plays anti-Semitism arises less from beliefs about Jews than from anxieties about self-fashioning. Jewishness becomes a trope for anxiety about social change."<sup>95</sup> However, Shakespeare and Marlowe portray Jewishness as a haunting experience, it

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<sup>93</sup> See Edgar Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali; Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 88.

<sup>94</sup> See Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers), 159–68, 186–200.

<sup>95</sup> Peter Berek, "The Jew as Renaissance Man," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 51 (Spring, 1998), 138, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/2901665?seq=2#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2901665?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents).



is impossible to escape regardless of the effort of an individual, which questions the Renaissance image of a self-fashioned person, respectively, self-fashioning is limited only to men.<sup>96</sup>

In Marlowe's case, it adds to the shock value that Abigail remained loyal to her father until he killed her, her innocent faith in him only emphasises the villainy of his crime. However, for Abigail her anti-Semitism served to heal her emotional wounds. The Jewish anti-Semitism in Shakespeare is not so much the admittance of the villainy of Shylock as the attempt to de-Judaize herself in order to fulfil her ambitions, and therefore it might be better to analyse her behaviour in terms of practicality rather than her goodness.

Jessica's marriage to a Gentile merchant, Lorenzo, might be seen as a practical matter. It might be argued that Jessica did not marry Lorenzo for love, but for the benefit of being protected by a Christian. In the Middle Ages, women in general were the property of their male legal guardians, who would be their fathers, husbands or some other male relative. Thus, the wards were associated with the good or bad reputation of their legal guardians. As John Dover Wilson observes in *Life in Shakespeare's England* (1926) "Wives in England are entirely in the power of their husbands, their lives only excepted. Therefore, when they marry, they give up the surname of their father and of the family from which they are descended, and take the surname of their husbands [...]"<sup>97</sup> This may lead to the assumption that the Jewish women are the lowest link in the hierarchy chain in terms of sex and race.

It may appear that Jessica is concealing her true intention from the audience since her actions contradict her own speech. She expresses her longing to become a Christian. However, her religious epiphany could be doubted, since she decided to hesitate with the conversion until her wedding, unlike Abigail who went to see the priests as soon as she realized that she wanted to be a Christian. This argument

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<sup>96</sup> Perhaps the enterprise would have been more successful if it was attempted by Barabas or Shylock, since they would be protected by their wealth, which is adored by the capitalistic Christian characters.

<sup>97</sup> John Dover Wilson, "English Women," *Life in Shakespeare's England; a Book of Elizabethan Prose* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1926), 8-9.

suggests that Jessica has it in her habit to make deceitful speeches. In relation to this, it could be also argued that Jessica's marriage is an attempts to re-define herself, to create a new identity as a Christian through her fiancée, as her words suggest:

Alack, what heinous sin is it in me  
To be ashamed to be my father's child!  
But though I am a daughter to his [Barabas] blood,  
I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,  
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,  
Become a Christian hand thy loving wife.<sup>98</sup>

The word "strife" could be understood as double entendre that may allude to acting disrespectfully to her parent, which represents for Jessica a moral and religious dilemma. Being ashamed of one's father in Christianity and Judaism is considered a sin because "The Ten Commandments" in the *Old Testament* order children to treat their parents with respect. By renouncing her father, she appears to believe that she can eradicate her moral dilemma and her "strife" would end, as the following lines may suggest: "Farewell; and if my fortune be not crost,/ I have a father, you a daughter, lost."<sup>99</sup>

The other possible relation of the word "strife" could be in the preceding sentence "I am a daughter to his [Barabas] blood,/ I am not to his manners,"<sup>100</sup> which refers to her struggle to disassociate herself from Shylock's adverse reputation. Being a woman, she had very limited possibilities of how she could establish herself as an individual person without being associated with her father. In this way, she attempted to erase her past for a better future. Although she defied everything that Christians hated in Jews, she was not to exceed her father.

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<sup>98</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 94.

<sup>99</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 98.

<sup>100</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 94.

A few characters seem to show Jessica genuine sympathy after she renounced her Jewishness and became New Christian. For instance, Salerio argues with Shylock "There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than/ between jet/ and ivory; more between your bloods than there is/ between red wine and Rhenish."<sup>101</sup> However, Jessica's relationship with Lancelot, appears to differ from her relationship with other characters. At the beginning he appears to be her intimate friend even before the conversion: "Adieu! tears exhibit my tongue. Most beautiful/ pagan, most sweet Jew! if a Christian did not play/ the knave and get thee, I am much deceived."<sup>102</sup> Jessica understands Lancelot's speech as a compliment and she returns it with kind words "Farewell, good Launcelot."<sup>103</sup> However, it is a question whether Lancelot intended these words to be a compliment.

Hermann Sinsheimer once made a remark on Shakespeare's treatment of the lower class: "he hardly touched the people, in the sense of the lower and middle classes. When they do take the stage, he makes no secret of his low opinion of them. He is interested in them only as accessories, as stage padding, as the subjects of paltry jokes and minor intrigues, interludes in the affairs of the great."<sup>104</sup> The modern reader may wonder, how it is possible that a low servant makes such a chivalric speech and shows a Jewish woman such kindness in times when majority of Europeans were anti-Jewish.

Arguably, it could refer to Lorenzo, who in literal sense takes Jessica away from Shylock's house. However, the past tense might appear as an anachronism. As the plot unravels, the reader might find that the wording "get thee" might have a second meaning, it shows that the compliment is, in fact a harsh and worldly joke. Here he uses the very same wording "get thee" for the second time in the sense of "beget," "to father." Thus, it is only another way of expressing his hopes that Jessica' mother

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<sup>101</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 110.

<sup>102</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 94.

<sup>103</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 94.

<sup>104</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 27.

committed adultery with a Christian: "Marry, you may partly hope that your father got you/ not, that you are not the Jew's daughter."<sup>105</sup>

Jessica protested against Lancelots' arguments and said: "I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian."<sup>106</sup> Her argument is based on misconceptions about religion and women's position in society. People become Christian through their own endeavour and effort, through their lifestyle and the belief in Jesus. Her distorted belief that she would automatically follow her husband into heaven regardless of her lifestyle is as erroneous as her hopes that her marriage will provide her social security. Jessica appears to believe that she is being made into something by Lorenzo, that she is a product of her husband, who makes her into whatever he is. As it is proved, her Jessica underestimates the unbreakable bond of blood between her and Shylock.

Based on the above-mentioned information, it could be deduced that for Lancelot the sin of Jessica's mother would have not been as relevant as having a Christian father. The dominance of the male blood relative is connected with the Medieval theory of Preformationism. According to this theory, sperm already contains a tiny human being, mothers only provide the environment where the homunculus can grow.<sup>107</sup> Aristotle, who was a representative of a competing theory, argued that "the female parent contributed only unorganized matter to the embryo. He argued that semen from the male parent provided the "form," or soul, that guided development."<sup>108</sup> The above mentioned theories provide a glimpse at the emphasis of fatherhood-fathers could give a soul to their children, or they could create a miniature human being and pass it to the female carrier etc. These theories

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<sup>105</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 129.

<sup>106</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 129.

<sup>107</sup> Although a systematic theory of Preformationism was developed in the first half of seventeenth century, the idea that semen contained all of the important characteristics, and it only need a place where it can grow goes as far back as Aeschylus (525 - 455 B.C) or Euripides (480 - 40 B.C.)

<sup>108</sup> Lois Magner and K. Lee Lerner, "Embryology - History of Embryology as a Science," *Science Encyclopedia*, accessed June 24, 2015, <http://science.jrank.org/pages/2452/Embryology.html>.

give gravity to Shylock's words when he proclaims that Jessica is his property, his blood.

The theme of blood and flesh reappears frequently in *The Merchant of Venice* and it seems to have a crucial significance. According to *The Watkins Dictionary of Symbols*, blood is an important element of life and the container of the soul.<sup>109</sup> According to Lancelot and other characters, Jewish blood is not equal to Getile's blood, and therefore human souls are not equal because some go inherently to Heaven and some go inherently to Hell, as Lancelot argues: "Yes, truly; for, look you, the sins of the father/ are to be laid upon the children: therefore, I/ promise ye, I fear you."<sup>110</sup>

Lancelot's suggestion that sin is inherited through blood produces the imagery of souls not having any shape, that they are liquid like blood. The sin from Shylock's soul would intermingle with his daughter's blood. Therefore, Jessica finds herself stranded in an inescapable situation that cannot be changed, one way of facing the issue is finding a scapegoat. Unlike Jessica, Shylock makes great profit from being Jewish. He is allowed to make profit in areas that are open only to him and his kinsmen. The only thing that limits his freedom is Christianity, therefore he hates Christians although he is willing to make business with them. Therefore, the relationship of Jewish as opposed to Christians is profit based. I suggest that a Renaissance Jewish-self hater is a person who does not have a profit or other benefit out of his Jewishness. It could also be a person who uses one's anti-Jewishness as therapeutic means to cope with a difficult life situation.

As has been mentioned above, in Medieval European's imagination, a Jew would always become rich on Christian's expenses. The only people who would not make any profit or benefit from their Jewishness are females, who carry the burden of the whole society. After all, as a Jew and a woman, Jessica ranks hierarchically lower than Shylock, one of the most hated member of the society. As Rosenberg argues in *From Shylock to Svengali; Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction*, Shylock's

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<sup>109</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 129.

<sup>110</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 129.

daughter Jessica is his most valuable commodity, after his wealth.<sup>111</sup> The double burden of Jewish women is that they are discriminated in terms of race as well as their sex. In the sixteenth century, Jews were not granted a happy ending and dominant women were usually not rewarded.

Although Jessica claimed that her manners do not resemble Shylock's manners, both have dominance as their distinctive trait. There appears to be a power imbalance in her relationship with Lorenzo, and Jessica seems to have the upper hand, which is apparent from Lorenzo's dialogue with his comrades: "I must needs tell thee all. She hath directed/ How I shall take her from her father's house,/ What gold and jewels she is furnish'd with,/ What page's suit she hath in readiness."<sup>112</sup> The preceding lines illustrate that he enthusiastically fulfils all her wishes. Later he adds "Come, go with me; peruse this as thou goest:/ Fair Jessica shall be my torch-bearer."<sup>113</sup> Torches illuminate paths for travellers so that they do not lose their way, and Lorenzo follows Jessica as if she was a torch, giving her great responsibility.

In this play Shakespeare refers on more than once to Greek mythology and it might be relevant to look at the imagery of a torchbearer from mythological perspective. From symbolic point of view, the torchlight might be a sign of Lorenzo's amorous intentions, which might be the reason behind his submission. In mythology, Eros and Aphrodite as well as their attendants carried a torch of sexual desire, according to *The Watkins Dictionary of Symbols* Therefore, it could be argued that Lorenzo is attracted by Jessica, who represents Aphrodite, and his decisions are strongly influenced by his sexual desire for her. In addition, according to Martin Hilský, Shylock's daughter Jessica is associated with black colour.<sup>114</sup> The black lady is seductive and exotic, but black is also a colour that may be a sign of danger or grief, which may foreshadow an upcoming misfortune.

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<sup>111</sup> See Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali; Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction*, 88.

<sup>112</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 96.

<sup>113</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 96.

<sup>114</sup> Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 573.

It may be argued that in the past, and perhaps in some parts of the world even to this day, cross-culturally women were not associated with good leadership qualities, partially because they were associated with emotional inconsistency and fragility, as has been discussed previously. In mythologies worldwide, a dominant woman in a relationship foreshadowed a misfortune. One famous example generally known to Europeans is the story of the very first sin from *Genesis*. In the Garden of Eden, Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit. Adam, who loved Eva, followed her example and ate from the fruit as well.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, God outcast both of them from the Garden of Eden. Also Shakespeare had such stories in his drama repertoire. For instance, in *Macbeth*, a dominant woman pressured her husband to actions that led him to his demise. Those women could be called “femme fatal,” men who relied on excessively dominant women were often led to their destruction. To follow a black torch bearing woman, thus, is a presage of doom.

Nevertheless, Lorenzo who would be considered superior to Jessica in sex and social status in the sixteenth century, puts his life into the hands of and a Jewish woman. Although Lorenzo’s and Jessica’s escape is successful, from a long term perspective it does not seem that their relationship would be prosperous. An analogy could be drawn between the torchlight and Lorenzo’s plans. The torch fire lights only a small part of the path, the end of the path is hidden in the darkness. Similarly, Lorenzo appears to be not fully aware of the consequences of his actions, for him the journey with Jessica was, in figurative sense, a step into the darkness. This might be the pretty follies to which Jessica refers: “But love is blind and lovers cannot see / The pretty follies that themselves commit.”<sup>116</sup>

Their later failure in marriage might be, arguably, a punishment from the providence for the mismatch in gender roles, which could have made Lorenzo look somewhat womanish and Jessica too dominant. The initial mismatch is, in the context of the sixteenth century, a distortion that deepened in the course of their marriage. It is apparent from their later conversations, when Lorenzo asks Jessica to

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<sup>115</sup> See Genesis 3:1-13.

<sup>116</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 131.

join him for dinner, she answers him "Nay, let me praise you while I have a stomach,"<sup>117</sup> implying that it would cause her nausea to praise him after dinner. The last information provided about this marriage couple is in the fifth act, where a bittersweet atmosphere suggests an unhappy love.

Lorenzo starts the scene with poetic words which, as Martin Hilský suggest in *Shakespeare a jeviště Svět* (2010), may sound like some Belmont bel canto:<sup>118</sup> "The moon shines bright: in such a night as this, / When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees."<sup>119</sup> However, the lyricism and harmony of this scene is mingled with distorted and cacophonous tones. Nights often favour lovers, however, Lorenzo and Jessica no longer exchange their love vows, instead they speak of unhappy treacherous lovers: "Troilus methinks mounted the Trojan walls/And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents, / Where Cressid lay that night."<sup>120</sup> Troilus, according to Greek mythology gave his love to Cressid, who betrayed him. The Trojan walls fell, which contributed to his destruction. Jessica answered with a reference to another unhappy love story of Medea who was betrayed by her lover.

However, their exchange of rhymes of unfruitful love is only an introduction to the core of their problem, which Lorenzo and Jessica soon reveal: "In such a night/ Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew/ And with an unthrift/ love did run from Venice/ As far as Belmont."<sup>121</sup>

It has been previously discussed that Jessica's stay with her father did not provide her any benefits, therefore, she left this unthrift love. However, Lorenzo argues that Jessica's love for him was also unthrift because their marriage did not protect her from the racial enmity that she received in Belmont. It might be deduced that Lorenzo blames Jessica's acquisitiveness for their failed marriage.

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<sup>117</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 131.

<sup>118</sup> See Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 206.

<sup>119</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 151.

<sup>120</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 151.

<sup>121</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 151.



Jessica responds to Lorenzo, arguing that he promised he loved her and she suspects that his vows were false: "In such a night/ Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well,/ Stealing her soul with many vows of faith / And ne'er a true one"<sup>122</sup> It appears that both have more arguments to present. However, Jessica stops their conversation, saying that her emotional wounds were deeper than Lorenzo's, but they should not show it to a third person: "I would out-night you, did no body come."<sup>123</sup>

To illustrate the burden of double discrimination of Jewish women, Portia and Jessica could be compared. Portia let her father decide about the manner in which her husband should be chosen. The suitors arrived to her home to choose her. As Portia mentioned herself, she had no power over the choice of her own husband and he put her faith entirely into men's hands. Therefore, she found happiness in her marriage.

Jessica, on the other hand, took her own actions and in attempt to improve her chances for a more respectable position in society, she directed her future husband to steal her from her home, it is also likely that she decided how the stolen money would be spent, which will be discussed later in this thesis. Since the plan was constructed by a woman, it would inevitably fail. As Portia's failure to acknowledge Jessica's christening suggests, for some characters anti-Semitism became more a habit than conscious reasoning. When she saw the newly wedded, she exclaimed: "But who comes here? Lorenzo and his infidel!"<sup>124</sup>

It is very likely that Shakespeare's play was inspired by *The Jew of Malta*, both plays display many similarities. However, Barabas' daughter Abigail appears to be very distinct from Jessica. Abigail's distinctive trait is submissiveness. Abigail's father Barabas promised her to two men as a wife, Lodowick and Mathias. Although Abigail loved only Mathias, Barabas ordered her to be friendly with both men and she obeyed him despite her own wishes. Her childlike ignorance prevented her from

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<sup>122</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 151.

<sup>123</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 151.

<sup>124</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 120.

comprehending that she was being used for Barabas' revenge, and her simplicity seems to appeal to him as she initially followed him without questioning his authority. As long as Barabas's possessed her, he appears to be a loving father.

His love for Abigail cooled suddenly when she began showing the first signs of free will and to question the motives for his actions. His answer to her questions was uncompromising: "What's that to thee?"<sup>125</sup> When Abigail opposed him saying that she would chose the man whom she loved, he began to perceive her a nuisance and he ordered Ithamore "—Go, put her in." This expression usually collocates with objects rather than human beings, which perhaps illustrates Barabas' attitude towards his daughter. The rival lovers fought in a duel and died by each other's hand. Following this, Abigail left Barabas' and became a nun. As Abigail broke free from his possession, he denounced her as his child and instead adopted the slave Ithamore as his son. His distinct treatment of his newly adopted son Ithamore, who receives Barabas's trust, money and freedom, may be seen as a manifestation of Barabas' misogynist nature. He grants his son, a former slave, the freedom that he denied to Abigail.

It may be possible that Marlowe hyperbolizes Abigail's devotion to her father as a mockery of womanly weakness. Marlowe takes traits that were traditionally attributed to women, and he exaggerates them. He places Abigail in a hopeless situation and the reader can observe her desperate attempt to escape from the inescapable. She could not rely on her father, but outside of her home she had no connections and no shelter.

Beskin argues that "no matter which corrupt patriarchal system claims Abigail's allegiance, she always evokes the audience's sympathy."<sup>126</sup> Despite this argument, Abigail is criticized by some scholars for her passivity and repression of her own judgement for her father's benefit, which causes the death of the man she

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<sup>125</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 190.

<sup>126</sup> Anna Beskin, "Good Girl, Bad Girl: The Jew of Malta and The Merchant of Venice," (Tampa: MA thesis, University of South Florida, 2007), 31.

loved. Her being easily manipulated is often attributed to her simplicity and lack of identity.

It could be argued that the author's harsh treatment of Abigail is punishment for her assertive behaviour and her failure to develop a personality. For instance, Ian McAdam in *The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe* (1999) argues that "Her decision to surrender prematurely her personal struggle in favour of the Son that gives eternal life has a personal disastrous effect: she in effect sells her human birth right (for identity) for a mess of deadly pottage."<sup>127</sup>

Perhaps McAdam's argument is based on the fact that for many people, the nunnery is hardly an environment for self-expression, and the nuns who are Jessica's mentors do not reveal any particular signs of a strong identity. However, it could be also argued that the nunnery was for Abigail a place of freedom. This argument might seem paradoxical considering that nunneries are generally associated with self-repression and self-denial, since the nuns are obliged to abandon everything secular in their present lives and instead they are expected to concentrate on their afterlives.

In her thesis "Good girl, bad girl: The Jew of Malta and The Merchant of Venice" Anna Beskin focuses on the gender issues of Jewish women. She emphasises the innocence and traditional gender characteristics of Abigail and she attributes Abigail's escape into the nunnery to her innocence: "Following the traditional inlaw feminine principles, Abigail actively isolates herself from men and—taking her vow of celibacy more seriously than the other nuns—maintains her virginity until death."<sup>128</sup> This might be the right approach to the question why Abigail chose apostasy. However, it must be also considered that if Abigail intended to leave her home, she did not have any other alternative choices.

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<sup>127</sup> Ian McAdam, *The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1999), 170.

<sup>128</sup> Beskin, "Good Girl, Bad Girl: The Jew of Malta and The Merchant of Venice," 27.

Abigail is associated with innocence. It is often placed in opposition to experience and it is interlinked with ignorance. As long as Abigail is in power of her father, she is kept in ignorance and she is inexperienced and naïve. However, through her pain and grief Abigail gains experience and knowledge and she becomes more sceptical about the world. Nevertheless, with all the knowledge and experience, there is little Abigail can do to survive without her father's financial support, since her options as a Jew and woman are very limited. There are not many financially independent women mentioned in the play apart from the prostitute Bellamira, and there are few professions that an outcast woman without any connections could do.

Although Abigail gains experience through pain and grief, she cannot assert herself as an individual in a house of a misogynist father, nunnery is a place of isolation, away from all these social pressures. Thus, in a very limited world and for a short period of time, Abigail becomes free. Thus, in a limited world of closed nunnery Abigail would have more freedom than on the outside world. As to her religious epiphany, it appears that Christianity does not make her a good person since she was able to recognize good from wrong before she converts to Christianity.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Women in the Renaissance: Italy, France, and England* (2007) "The vast majority of women's work continued to be low status, badly paid or unpaid, frequently shifting, and perceived as marginal."<sup>129</sup> Therefore, by becoming a nun Abigail might have escaped from a life as a prostitute. Also Ian McAdam acknowledges the practicality of Abigail's retreat into the nunnery: "She retreats back to what was in fact her original home, which the imagery of the play has associated with the womb."<sup>130</sup> After the trust in the only parent and her closest person was broken, Abigail lost all the sense of stability and security. Therefore, it

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<sup>129</sup> Diana Maury, *Encyclopedia of Women in the Renaissance Italy, France, and England* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 397.

<sup>130</sup> Ian McAdam, *The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1999), 169.

would be reasonable to assume that the in search of comfort she turns to the familiar environment of the nunnery.<sup>131</sup>

However, his argument that Abigail avoids developing a personality and therefore she retreats into the nunnery where she does not need an identity might be questioned. As Anna Beskin argues, “although it is clear to the audience that Barabas would not let her marry a Gentile, so strong is Abigail’s love for Mathias that I believe she would have defied even her father to marry him.”<sup>132</sup> In fact, Abigail did try to defy her father when she said that she would make the rival lovers friends again, which is a sign of identity that questions McAdams’ argument. The fact that she intended to reduce her father’s wrongdoings displays signs of individual thinking and acting. I suggest that it is not that Abigail did not have a developed identity, but in her environment and with her social background there was no space to assert herself.

Thus, in a society that represses women’s individuality the claim that Abigail’s harsh faith is a punishment for her lack of personality seems unjustified. Abigail seems to be a victim of circumstances who after hamartia is trapped in a chain of events without a chance to escape her faith, which makes her downfall tragic. These events were partially affected by her gender and her ethnicity.

Jessica and Abigail view their own Jewishness as the only enemy that is responsible for their misfortunes. In the following section it will be argued that behind an Elizabethan Jewish woman is an Anti-Semite, a by-product of racial and sexual discrimination.

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<sup>131</sup> See McAdam, *The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe*, 169.

<sup>132</sup> Beskin, "Good Girl, Bad Girl: The Jew of Malta and The Merchant of Venice," 27.

### 3.2. The Jewish Stereotypes and Self-Hatred and Women In The Sixteenth Century

This section demonstrates the manner in which Jewish self-hatred manifest itself in the plays of sixteenth century. Theodor Lessing, a twentieth century author, wrote *Der Jüdischer Selbsthass* (The Jewish Self-hatred), where he coined the term Jewish self-Hatred. The term designates a paradoxical phenomenon when some Jewish people hate their own ethnicity and they have anti-Semitic tendencies. The term was coined in the historic context of the 20th century, however, as will be argued in this thesis, the concept of anti-Semitic Jews is not entirely new and Lessing was not the first person to capture this paradoxical phenomenon. Shakespeare, and to a lesser extent also Marlowe, preceded him by hundreds of years.

The above mentioned arguments illustrate the grounds on which Jewish self-hatred is based. It has been argued that fictional Jewish characters of the sixteenth century divided into two opposing directions. The orthodox Judaizing Jews and Jewish self-haters. Male and female characters in both plays cope with being strangers in a foreign land in a distinct way, Shylock reproaches the Christians for despising him, as his speech suggests: “But wherefore should I go?/ I am not bid for love; they flatter me:/ But yet I'll go in hate, to feed upon/ The prodigal Christian.”<sup>133</sup>

In both plays the Judaizing Jews embrace their Jewish identity because they profit from their can profit from it, they would not be able to do usury if they converted to the mainstream religion. The Jewish self-haters are those people who could not benefit in any way from their original religion or ethnicity. Therefore, it might not be surprising that a prototype of a Jewish anti-Semite is a Jewish woman. They were not allowed to do monetary business, and moreover, they had to face a discrimination on two fronts, for being women and Jewish at the same time.

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<sup>133</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 96.

For Jessica renouncing her ethnicity is a way of lessening her burden of discrimination by half. Beskin argues that it is hard to sympathize with Jessica because she steals from her father.<sup>134</sup> It may be possible that Jessica's wasteful way of life is an attempt to tease her father and also a display that, in Salanio's words, "the bird was/ fledged; and then it is the complexion of them all/ to leave the dam."<sup>135</sup> The elopement represents also an adventure when she takes a vacation from her tedious conservative Jewish lifestyle that her father forces on her. As she once said to Lancelot, "a merry devil, Didst rob it of some taste of tediousness."<sup>136</sup> In comparison to this, the Christian society represents for Jessica a more exciting world. Shylock demonstrates tediousness of his house on the following lines:

Lock up my doors; and when you hear the drum  
And the vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife,  
Clamber not you up to the casements then,  
Nor thrust your head into the public street  
To gaze on Christian fools with varnish'd faces,  
But stop my house's ears, I mean my casements:  
Let not the sound of shallow foppery enter My sober house.<sup>137</sup>

However, it could be also argued that Jessica merely imitates Christian behaviour, and therefore it is nothing unusual to take away Jew's property. It has been mentioned in the historical overview that Christians often took Jew's property for their purposes, or when they were lent money by Jewish usurers, they did not return them. Within the second half of the sixteenth century alone there are three Jewish characters – Gerontus, Barabas and Shylock, whose possessions got confiscated or stolen by Gentiles. The theft scene is the first step in creating Jessica's new identity in her new life. She takes the Jew's money that was considered ill-

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<sup>134</sup> Beskin, "Good Girl, Bad Girl: The Jew of Malta and The Merchant of Venice," 41.

<sup>135</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 110.

<sup>136</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 93.

<sup>137</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 97.

gotten, which is an imitation of what is usually done by Gentiles. At the time of her theft, one of the Christians uttered supportive words: "Now, by my hood, a gentle and no Jew."<sup>138</sup>

It has been illustrated that Jews were perceived as a physical manifestation of capitalism and Shylock often speaks about thrifts, and scorns prodigals. As Edgar Rosenberg points out in his anthology of essays *From Shylock to Svengali* (1960) the Jewish men were usually portrayed wealthy but also half-starved.<sup>139</sup> It might be perceived as a possible sign of a distorted view of Christianity when Jessica becomes a prodigal herself and spends in one night fourscore ducats. Although the haste and manner in which Jessica abandons her father may seem childish and immature, she also appears to take rational steps to publically distance herself from her family background.

Marriage in the Renaissance was a matter of practicality, a financial transaction. Beskin claims that by renouncing her father, Jessica blocks Shylock's access to her money: "Not following this mold, Jessica, takes control of her financial future and does not allow her father to benefit monetarily from her marriage."<sup>140</sup> However, this interpretation, arguably, contradicts Jessica's attitude towards money. If she was concerned about financial matters, she would not have perhaps spent excessive amounts of money for a monkey.

Jessica's motivation for her spending spree could be attributed to her aversion of being associated with Jewishness and therefore she attempts to do something that is not stereotypical. Jessica forfeits all the stolen goods, which could be arguably be seen as an investment. After all, a thrift is not only reduced to money, if her prodigal lifestyle would attract people's attention away from her Jewishness and improve her social status, then perhaps it would be worth the investment. Thus, she attempts to act un-stereotypical.

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<sup>138</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 100.

<sup>139</sup> Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali; Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction*, 31.

<sup>140</sup> Beskin, "Good Girl, Bad Girl: The Jew of Malta and The Merchant of Venice," 34.



Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that Jessica makes an attempt to break free from her cultural heritage and her past by, figuratively speaking, trampling on her deceased mother's memory. Jessica breaks the almost sacred mother-daughter bond and traded her mother's precious ring for a trinket: "One of them [merchant] showed me a ring that he had of your/ daughter for a monkey."<sup>141</sup> Anna Beskin argues that Jessica gave away her ring not for its insignificance but because it was important to her father. She points to the fact that turquoise rings were very expensive and it was believed that the stone itself had magic powers. Beskin points to John Gross, who said that "Disposing of the ring was heartless. It is as though Jessica were trying to undo her parents' entire marriage at a stroke."<sup>142</sup>

There is no evidence in the text that would suggest that Jessica was abused mentally or physically by her father, and therefore such a negative reaction towards her father would be irrational. I suggest that it is not her father that Jessica hates, but her own Jewishness that was passed onto her by both her parents. After she had disconnected herself from Shylock, who passed onto her blood that she considered low-quality, she attempted to break the bond between her and her mother. This gesture may suggest displeasure or even hatred for both her parents who passed to her Jewish blood, the carrier of sin.

Despite of Jessica's attempt to imitate Christian behaviour, Portia addresses the newly wedded couple as "Lorenzo and his infidel," to avoid calling Jessica by her name. The meaning of Jessica's name is crucial for understanding her whole character. Her Jewish legacy lies not only in the blood of her parents that she hates, but the meaning of her name is self-reflexive and designates her identity. Nowadays Jessica is a frequent name, and it has been long forgotten that it was introduced by Shakespeare in the sixteenth century as an anglicised Jewish name.

When he first introduced it, the name must have sounded exotic and appealing at the same time. As Hermann Sinsheimer points out in *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, "Shelach [Shylock] is the ancestor of

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<sup>141</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 110.

<sup>142</sup> Beskin, "Good Girl, Bad Girl: The Jew of Malta and The Merchant of Venice," 38.

three brothers Abraham, Nahor, and Haran. Haran has two daughters, one of whom is called Jiska. Jiska Italianized gives Jessica. Both Shelah and Jiska are thus descendants of Shem- 'Semites.'"<sup>143</sup> Thus, calling Jessica by her name is the same as calling her a Semite. Thus, regardless of Jessica's actions, Portia reduced her identity to the mere meaning of her name, "the Jew."

Portia's attitude towards Jessica may reflect current events in Elizabethan England. After all, an allusion could be drawn between Portia's failure to acknowledge Jessica's christening and the historical case of Roderigo Lopez, who announced during his public execution his love for the queen and Jesus, but the public reacted with laughter and mockery, exclaiming that he is a Jew.

The trait of an anti-Semitic Jew could be also observed to a smaller extent in the character of Abigail. As Edgar Rosenberg argues, in *The Merchant of Venice* Marlowe started a tradition of Jewish children rebelling against their parents, which would later become a literary prototype. "The economic rivalry among the Jews in literature is an emphatically Victorian phenomenon, but the clash between the generations is as old as Marlowe."<sup>144</sup>

When Abigail was betrayed by her father, she exclaims that there is no pity in Jews. However, her statement denies itself because Abigail is a Jew and she is forgives her father immediately. It may be rather conspicuous how easily Abigail forgives Barabas for abusing her. Some critics describe her as an infinitely devoted daughter. However, I suggest that it was the anti-Semitism that released him of any guilt in her eyes. She first expresses disillusionment with her father: "Hard-hearted father, unkind Barabas! [...]"<sup>145</sup> However, she soon redirects her anger towards his Jewishness: "But I perceive there is no love on earth,/ Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks."<sup>146</sup> By putting the blame on the Jewish villainy the guilt of her father is lessened and therefore Abigail can forgive Barabas.

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<sup>143</sup> Sinsheimer, *Shylock: The History of a Character, or the Myth of the Jew*, 87.

<sup>144</sup> Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali; Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction*, 279

<sup>145</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 194.

<sup>146</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 194.

Thus, Abigail could make a closure of a difficult or tragic situation by finding a convenient culprit. Thus, Abigail's hatred soon redirected towards Jewishness instead of her father. This seems to be a satisfactory solution since the Jews already were scapegoats for Christians for various reasons.

In Renaissance the theatre thrived and it was an effective way to satirize society. However, Marlowe was a popular writer who was well aware of what was going to sell to the public. Therefore, he makes a harsh satire in a gentle way through Abigail. The following section will illustrate the role of an anti-Semite Jew in the plays of late sixteenth century

### **3.3. Jewish Women as a Mirror to Gentile Society**

The previous sections analysed the characters of Jewish women and it has been argued, that their self-hatred should be subcategorized as a Jewish literary stereotype because those Jewish characters who cannot benefit from usury and who are genuinely oppressed, would hate their own ethnicity. The mere idea of a poor Jew may have appeared absurd to a medieval reader, since it was believed that Jews are usurers who got rich on Christians expense. It has been argued that women do not fit this frame, and therefore they developed into the opposite direction than their fathers.

However, the question remains, why did English writers in such a short period of time needed peripheral characters such as an anti-Semitic Jewess. In case Shakespeare wanted to point at poor social conditions of women, there would be better candidates, for instance Portia.<sup>147</sup> Edgar Rosenberg argues, that "the intention is also to isolate him completely from the possibility of any sympathetic human involvement, deprive him of his last domestic ties, and leave him free to engage in his diabolic activities unhampered by human commitments and restrictions. For

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<sup>147</sup> Portia has no power over the choice of her own husband and when Bassanio wins her hand in a guessing game, her property transfers to him.

Marlowe and Shakespeare, the desertion of the Jewess is the final judgement upon the villainy of the Jew. ”<sup>148</sup> It is possible that Shakespeare and Marlowe wanted emphasise that the Jewish villains are thoroughly evil, since even their own family members wanted to keep distance from them.

As has been argued in “Demons and Prophets and other Jewish Stereotypes,” the Jews and capitalistic merchants of Malta or Venice are very distinct and at the same time, they share some traits in common, especially in relation to money. It is a question to what extent the Elizabethan audience was irritated by these parallels, but by hyperbolizing the negative Jewish stereotypes, it is easy to sympathise with capitalistic Venetians.

Martin Hilský suggested that the fact that Jews, devil-like creatures could beget angel-like daughters might be a glimpse of hope that Christianity could possibly be a way to salvation even for Jews.<sup>149</sup> However, it has been argued that Jessica is far from being angel-like. In *The Jew of Malta*, Abigail was guided to Christianity through the friars. However, neither the friars, nor any other Christian character was worth imitating. Since Jessica despises her own Jewishness, she tries to imitate the Christians, thus she serves as a mirror to the Christian society. When an outsider imitates what he sees, it might reveal more than an insider could reveal.

Antonio reproached the Jews for usury that is prohibited by the *Bible*, arguing that the interest that they take is ill-gotten money. However, Jessica’s and Lorenzo’s relationship might reveal that usury was more common than the Christians would realize. In Belmont, Lorenzo confronted Jessica because he believed that she married him for out of reason and not for love: "In such a night/ Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew/ And with an unthrift/ love did run from Venice/ As far as Belmont."<sup>150</sup> His suspicions might be justified, since it appears that Jessica hoped to improve her social status with the marriage, and in exchange she would give Lorenzo her body

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<sup>148</sup> Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali; Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction*, 88.

<sup>149</sup> Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťe svět*, 162.

<sup>150</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 151.

and soul. However, the marriage did not provide her with the security that she expected and their marriage soon degraded.

Nevertheless, Harold Bloom reminded the reader in his book *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Merchant of Venice – New Edition* (2010) that “happiness accrues and passion grows by a form of natural interests.”<sup>151</sup> He argues that love is not a question of aesthetics but it is a kind of investment. Jessica expects Lorenzo's protection and it has been argued that he was following Jessica as the torch of sexual desire. Thus, Jessica exchanges sex for protection. This illustrates that lovers give, but they also expect to receive something in return. Thus, from this point of view everyone who is capable of love is a usurer.

The similarity between usury and love could be also illustrated on the relationship between Portia and Bassanio. Their marriage appears to be portrayed as a materialistic exchange. Bassanio borrowed money from Antonio and he hoped to invest money into courting Portia, then to receive it back with profit, which could be illustrated on the following lines: “How's the great merchant Antonio doing? I know he'll be happy to hear of our success. We're like the ancient hero Jason, we went looking for the Golden Fleece and we won it!”<sup>152</sup>

This illustrates Lorenzo scolded Jessica for something that is natural for Gentiles although Jessica's behaviour is only a mirror to the Gentile society. The question that arises, however, where is the boundary between interests from usury and marriage deals. Based on this argument, it could be said that Shakespeare questions the whole profit-based capitalistic society, where everyone who is trying to make profits. One important aspect to remember is that Shylock the usurer is an important link in the chain of transactions. If there was no usury, Antonio could have not invested in his friend Bassanio, who in turn would have not been able to court Portia.

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<sup>151</sup> Harold Bloom, *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Merchant of Venice - William Shakespeare* (New York: Infobase Pub., 2010), 127.

<sup>152</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 76-77.

This was the manner in which Jewish anti-Semitism mirrors the society economically. The second aspect of Christian society that seems to be the target of satire in both plays is religion. Although Christians presented themselves as superior to Jews by birth, they very quickly descended in their moral standards in case of a benefit. Jessica and Abigail, were repulsed by their own Jewishness, and it leads them to renouncing Judaism, which is a revolt against their own cultural heritage. Both women were initiated into the new religion by other Christians, who have the moral obligation to provide them with the best example. However, if they succeeded is questionable.

Jessica remains a Judaist until Lorenzo elopes with her, he is the medium between Jessica and her new religion. However, Jessica begins her life as a Christian with a sin, she steals her father's gold and jewels, with Lorenzo's great encouragement: "Beshrew me but I love her heartily,/ For she is wise, if I can judge of her,/ And fair she is, if that mine eyes be true,/ And true she is, as she hath proved herself,/ And therefore, like herself, wise, fair and true,/ Shall she be placed in my constant v soul."<sup>153</sup> While Lorenzo knew that this deed is unjust, he became an accomplice in the crime. Later, he admits that it was a theft but he puts the blame on Jessica, his torch bearer, denying his participation: "In such a night/ Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew [...]"<sup>154</sup> This illustrates that the mainstream society treats their religion with a certain flexibility, but they would not permit such a flexibility to New Christians. It must be also noted, that Jessica committed these sins not because of her "Jewishness," but because she was trying to immitate Christian behavior.

In *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe hyperbolizes the negative aspects of religion. The friars from Malta appear virtuous when among Christians. However, radical changes could be noticed when the friars interact with Jews, whom they consider sinners. No one revealed their true nature so thoroughly like Barabas, who promised both friars his property in return for his conversion. This triggered a great reaction in both men, who did not want to share the credit for converting a great and sinner and

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<sup>153</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 59.

<sup>154</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Lonon: Penguin Books, 1967), 131.

bringing new financial resource for the church. The comparison of Abigail to the clergymen, however, might have put the whole institution of church to shame. It appears that a New Christian is more faithful to God than the experienced friars.

In contrast to the friars, Abigail follows the example of her Messiah and forgives those who wronged her.<sup>155</sup> She lives in accordance to “Ten Commandments” in the *Old Testament* that preaches to honour one’s parents and forgiveness. In her final moments Abigail’s thoughts are directed towards her murderer, which could be compared to the Biblical crucifixion scene of Jesus Christ, who, according to the *Bible* prayed for his tormentors at the moment of his death. Similarly to Jesus, she becomes a Jew who was murdered, according to some Christians, by other Jews.

Martin Hilský argued, that the fact that a devilish Jew could have an angel-like daughter might be the sign that good might be a product of evil.<sup>156</sup> Based on his argument, it could be assumed that people from families that passed their Christian beliefs from generation to generation do need not necessarily become good Christians.

Ian McAdam’s claims that Abigail becomes a nun in order to avoid finding her own identity and sells herself for a pot of poisonous pottage.<sup>157</sup> McAdams attributes Abigail’s harsh faith to Marlowe’s disillusion with Christian faith and to the fact that Jessica chose to rely on God instead of relying on herself.<sup>158</sup> This argument appears to be based on the author’s effort to find a justification and understand the reasons behind the unjust death of Abigail. However, Abigail’s death appears to fulfil an important function that creates the same effect as many child sacrifice stories. It is the ultimate chance to display their faith and fortitude, since her eyes were directed to Heavens at the time of her death. The death of an innocent evokes emotions,

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<sup>155</sup> Although she justifies her father’s actions through anti-Semitism.

<sup>156</sup> Hilský, *Shakespeare a Jevišťě svět*, 162.

<sup>157</sup> Ian McAdam, *The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe* (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1999), 170.

<sup>158</sup> McAdam, *The Irony of Identity: Self and Imagination in the Drama of Christopher Marlowe*, 169.

instead of quietly disappearing from the stage with the nuns, the martyred Jewess is likely to be remembered.

Machiavelli's initial speech proclaimed: "I count religion but a childish toy,/ And hold there is no sin but ignorance."<sup>159</sup> The friars confirmed Machiavelli's claim and religion proved to be a mere profession and a source of income to them. *The Merchant of Venice* portrayed a ferocious world where the characters tried to become rich on someone else's expense and where the most intelligent and powerful crush the weaker members of society. Such a world, as Abigail shows, does not have a place for innocence and naiveté.

Beskin argues that "Abigail, a virgin nun, becomes the good Christian, who is then killed by her own father, the evil Jew."<sup>160</sup> However, Marlowe, who does not portray religion in a favourable light, seems to imply that virtues are not inherently bound on religion, social status or race. Abigail knew what love is because she loved Lodowick enough to defy her bellowed father and she tried to compensate for her father's wrongdoings. Therefore, religion does not improve her morals nor does it protect her from her father's wrath.

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<sup>159</sup> Rhys, "The Jew of Malta," 164.

<sup>160</sup> Beskin, "Good Girl, Bad Girl: The Jew of Malta and The Merchant of Venice," 29.



## **4. Conclusion**

The main objective of this thesis is the analysis of Jewish characters in English drama of sixteenth century. Firstly, it provides a short overview of the evolution of Jewish characters between the thirteenth and sixteenth century. It displayed the development of both male and female character that took different directions. The second part of the thesis is dedicated to female Jewish characters and their survival strategies in a patriarchal Gentile society. Since men and women had different positions in the medieval society, their reactions to social pressures differ greatly from each other.

Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare started a literary tradition of Jewish children opposing their parents, which continued for centuries. This thesis illustrated that initially, the conflict was based not only on the clash between the old and young generation, but also on the conflict between the Jewish self-haters who were denied any possible opportunity to self-fashioning because of their sex and race, and those Jews who had power over the weaker members of the Jewish society. It has been argued that Jewish self-Hatred is based on the inability to benefit in any possible way from belonging to this particular ethnicity.

The analysis part is divided into four parts that discuss the double burden of female Jews in literature and their natural responses to oppression. The subsequent part is titled "Jewish Self-Hatred," which is a term coined in the twentieth century, but it has been argued that this phenomenon is not new, but it has been captured as far as in the sixteenth century. It is a paradoxical reaction to racism. It has been illustrated why Jewish self-hatred as a psychological self-defense mechanism could be found in the female characters, but not in male characters.

The final part of the analysis section is the interpretation of the role of Jewish anti-Semites in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Jew of Malta*. In the introduction it has been argued that the Jewish community was expelled from England and the writers could make the Jewish characters whatever they wanted them to be. Although the female and male characters are portrayed in a very distinct ways, the analysis displayed that both fulfil the same function, they both mirror the society and

display the dark side of human nature, Although each character does this in a different way.

This thesis may be a contribution to the academic world because it analyses the aspects of Jewish characters that have been neglected. The analyses of both Jessica and Abigail mostly aim at their gender roles rather than their roles as Jews. The thesis seeks to compensate this neglect and it provides a modern interpretation of woman Jewish characters and their roles as anti-Semites who mirror the Gentile society of the sixteenth century.

As a possible future research topic, I propose an analysis from a longer time prospect. Later in the Jewish character development, there are conflicts in Jewish families among fathers and sons, who are financially and socially more independent. It could be analysed whether the Jewish self-hatred continued in these characters or whether it is only an attribute of 16th century women.

## 5. RESUMÉ

Ve své diplomové práci se soustřeďuji na vyobrazení židovských žen v anglické literatuře druhé poloviny šestnáctého století. Hlavní důraz bude kladen na postavy Jessicy z Shakespearova *Kupce benátského* a Abigail ze hry *Maltský žid*.

Inspirací mi byla esej německého spisovatele Ericha von Kahlera „Judentum und Judenhass“, kde je zachycen paradoxní fenomén nesnášenlivosti některých židů vůči vlastnímu židovství. Ve své práci poukazuji na skutečnost, že Erich von Kahler nebyl první, kdo přišel s tímto paradoxem. Wiliam Shakespeare a Christopher Marlowe to udělali téměř o pět set let dříve. Uvádím, že Juisches Selbsthass, doslova přeloženo jako židovská sebenesnášenlivost, je reakcí těchto fiktivních postav jak na sexuální diskriminaci ze strany křesťanů a také židů, tak na rasovou nesnášenlivost.

První kapitola této práce poskytuje stručný historický kontext vzniku postavy Žida. Druhá kapitola zobrazuje vývoj této postavy v průběhu tří set let- mezi třináctým až šestnáctým stoletím, tedy doby, kdy židé byli oficiálně vyhnáni z Anglie. V této části se ukazuje, jak se mýtická postava Žida vyvíjí nezávisle na skutečné židovské komunitě. Třetí část se zabývá analýzou ženských postav, poukazuje na faktory, které ovlivnily postoje těchto žen vůči své vlastní rase.

Čtvrtá kapitola poskytuje možnou odpověď na otázku, proč se renesanční spisovatelé rozhodli vytvořit postavu „antisemitského“ žida v době, kdy žádná velká židovská komunita v Anglii neexistovala. Je pravděpodobné, že tak učinili mimo jiné proto, aby zdůraznili krutost otců Jessiky a Abigail. V této kapitole poukazuji na to, že obě - Jessica i Abigail napodobují křesťanskou kapitalistickou společnost a odráží morální degradaci této společnosti. Poslední závěrečná část je shrnutím podstatných bodů této práce.

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## 7. ANOTACE

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*Název práce:* Obraz Židů v anglické literatuře 16. století.

*Vedoucí práce:* David Livingstone, Ph.D.

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*Klíčová slova:* židovská sebesnášenlivost v postavách žen, Der jüdischer Selbsthaß, teorie osobnosti židovských žen v 16. století.

*Popis:* Tato práce poukazuje na faktory, které ovlivnily postoje Jessiky (*Kupec benátský*, William Shakespeare) a Abigail (*Maltský žid*, Christopher Marlowe) vůči své vlastní rase. Argumentuji zde, že paradoxní fenomén nesnášenlivosti žen vůči vlastní etnické příslušnosti je jednou z charakteristických rysů postav Židů v 16. století. Uvádím, že židovská sebesnášenlivost je reakcí těchto fiktivních postav jak na sexuální diskriminaci ze strany křesťanů a také židů, tak na rasovou nesnášenlivost.

## **8. ABSTRACT**

*Author:* Viktorija Šamrajeva

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*Title:* The Image of Jews in 16th Century English Literature

*Supervisor:* David Livingstone, Ph.D.

*Number of Pages:* 60.

*Key Words:* The reaction of Anti-Semitism to changing circumstances, Jewish self-Hatred in female characters.

*Description:* The main objective of this thesis is the analysis of Jewish characters in English drama of the sixteenth century. This thesis illustrated that the conflict among Jews was based not only on the clash between the old and young generation, but also on the conflict between the Jewish self-haters who were denied any possible opportunity to self-fashioning because of their sex and race, and those Jews who had power over the weaker members of the Jewish society.