A Second Daniel: The Jew and the "True Jew" in *The Merchant of Venice*

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1. Two recent studies of Shakespeare and early modern attitudes towards Jews come to remarkably different conclusions on the question of whether or not *The Merchant of Venice* is an anti-Jewish play. James Shapiro's richly historical *Shakespeare and the Jews* offers fascinating evidence about the scope and complexity of anti-Jewish attitudes embedded in the "cultural moment" of Shakespeare's play (Shapiro 10), but he shies away from directly accusing either playwright or play of promoting or trading on anti-semitism, claiming that such terms are "anachronistic . . . inventions of nineteenth-century racial theory" and thus, "fundamentally ill-suited for gauging what transpired three hundred years earlier" (11). The objection is important; modern discourses about race are significantly different from their early modern religious forbears. However, this does not render questions like "Is the play intentionally anti-Jewish" irrelevant. Does the play invite us to share Antonio's attitudes toward Jews? Does it mean us to regard Shylock (and so revile Shylock) as a "typical" Jew? Shapiro shows us a "cultural moment" of late Elizabethan anxiety about national and religious identities, anxieties that very often surfaced as reactionary xenophobia and both anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic paranoia. We might reasonably and profitably ask whether or not the play exploits these anxieties and phobias, and if so how? Does the play endorse the anti-Jewish attitudes that according to Shapiro helped shape a nation's anxious search for Englishness?

2. Martin Yaffe's *Shylock and the Jewish Question* throws itself headfirst into the counter-intuitive claim that the play is intentionally and even obviously pro-Jewish, that the play invites us to revile Shylock, not as a typical Jew, but as a "bad Jew." Yaffe's argument assumes, without offering any historical evidence, that both playwright and audience would have regarded Shylock as a Jew who has abandoned traditional Jewish moral teaching and assimilated himself to the mercenary ways of Venetian capitalism. He is bloodthirsty and merciless because he is a materialist usurer, even a precursor of the modern secular liberal, not because he is a Jew. Of course I agree with Yaffe that stereotypes of Jews as merciless, bloodthirsty, and carnal-minded are all rooted in flagrant misconceptions of traditional Hebrew and Jewish teachings, but I simply cannot bring myself to imagine that either Shakespeare or his audience was free of such misconceptions. Shapiro's book offers more than enough evidence to the contrary.

Shylock as a "Bad Jew"

3. Though I think Yaffe's overall thesis unsound, even obtuse, its perspective sometimes prompts more interesting, even more accurate, readings of key passages
in the play than traditional perspectives have. Yaffe's reading of Shylock's "I am a Jew" speech, for example, is in at least one important respect more historically correct than the one Shapiro's concluding remarks imply (Shapiro 228). Shapiro echoes the time-honoured reading of this speech as a moving appeal to universalist humanism; but we too easily forget how it might have sounded to a Renaissance Christian humanist:

I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. 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. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction. (Merchant 3.1.49-61)

Shylock claims that Christians and Jews are not much different from each other, that they share an underlying carnal humanity. In Yaffe's words, "Shylock argues that Jews and Christians are alike in a low but undeniable respect: having eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, and so forth, their behaviour is equally subject to the overriding needs and susceptibilities of the human body. Conditioned alike, they may therefore be expected to act alike" (Yaffe 63-64). Shylock preaches a kind of humanism, but it is a far cry from the neoplatonic Christian humanism of, say Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who taught that humanity is not so much a matter of shared physiology, but of shared godlikeness -- "the intimate of the gods, the king of the lower beings, . . . the marriage song of the world, on David's testimony but a little lower than the angels" (Pico 223). Shylock's humanism is more like the modern secular humanism implicit in the excuse, "after all I'm only human." On this score, Yaffe is precisely right; an audience that warms to Portia's mercy speech would regard Shylock's carnal humanism--revenge for revenge--as something very low indeed.

4. What Yaffe does not notice, for it hardly supports his argument, is that Shakespeare's audience would also have recognized in this speech the "carnal" mind they believed typical of all Jews. The carnal attitude Yaffe would attribute to Shylock's (and Venice's) "newly prominent" commercialism (Yaffe 82), a contemporary audience would have regarded as a Jewish attitude. Indeed, one of the play's chief themes is that commercialism, especially the emergent practice of favouring merchant law over common law and equity, and the general cultural slide towards the idolatries of the marketplace, all threaten traditional values much in the way Jews had long been regarded as a threat to Christianity. The play uses the Jew and the Merchant as complementary figures of each other; exaggerated mercantilism is made to look Jewish and the mythic bloodthirsty Jew is refigured as a business machiavel.

5. Yaffe also makes a very good point about Shylock's being bad at Bible interpretation. Yaffe regards Shylock as a "bad Jew," which in his book means an assimilated Jew. Shylock has "departed from the ways of his forbears" (Yaffe 62) and become a moneygrubbing Venetian financier. Although he still calls himself a Jew, he long ago stopped following the ancient laws of the Torah; indeed he cannot even read Torah profitably because he tends to read the scriptures "rather as a
sourcebook for the creative businessman" (Yaffe 63). An allegedly telling example of Shylock's perverse assimilationist hermeneutics is his attempt, in Act 1, scene 3 to read the story of Jacob and Laban from Genesis 30-31 as a biblical endorsement of usury. Yaffe correctly observes that traditional rabbinic commentary explicitly agrees with Antonio's (supposedly the Christian) reading of the Jacob and Laban episode -- that Jacob used no guile or sharp practices in his dealings with Laban, but simply followed the Lord's commandments and allowed circumstances to be "sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven" (1.3.89). Shylock's reading is not, then, a traditional Jewish interpretation of Jacob's thriving, but a money-grubbing Venice-assimilated apostate's self-interested perversion of the story.

6. I agree, of course, that Shylock's reading of Genesis is not a typically rabbinic or even Jewish reading, but I think Yaffe is wrong about Elizabethan Protestant audiences. They probably would have regarded Shylock's self-serving hermeneutics as typically Jewish, and the play clearly invites us to think so. The typical Elizabethan Protestant would have offered quite a different account of Shylock's, or any Jew's, hermeneutic myopia -- the widely held conviction that Jews simply cannot read the scriptures properly. In particular, it was believed they stubbornly read the Bible's promises in carnal senses rather than the spiritual senses which the Holy Spirit intended. Shakespeare's audience would probably have seen Shylock's carnal and self-serving reading of Genesis as typical of all Jews, since they generally believed that all Jews since Christ's advent had willfully given up their place in God's Church, God's Israel, and had become stubborn unbelievers, unable to read their own scriptures profitably. In short, all Jews were believed to have "departed from the ways of [their] forbears". To Elizabethan Christians, that was virtually the definition of a Jew.

Early Modern Protestant Versions of the Jew

7. I find Yaffe's misreadings of the "I am a Jew" speech and Shylock's hermeneutic myopia especially interesting because they pay attention to features of the play other critics ignore. Yaffe misreads these features because he has little sense of the powerfully ambivalent role played by the figure of the Jew in the Elizabethan Protestant imagination. When English Protestants read their Bibles, they read the patriarchs and prophets not just as figures of themselves; they thought of Moses, David, Ezekiel, and Daniel as co-religionists, members of God's Church. The ancient Israelites, taught Luther, Calvin, and the Geneva Bible annotations, were God's pre-advent Church. The "Old Testament" Israelites, especially the patriarchs and heroes, were widely regarded as proto-Christian members of the true Church, elect from the beginning. But the post-advent Jews represented the worst form of stubborn and graceless apostasy. Except for the Pauline assurance that many of them would turn Christian at the last moment of history, these Jews stood for everything a Christian was not -- selfish, impious, carnal-minded, stubborn, vindictive, merciless, envious, bloodthirsty, narrow-minded, and devoted to this world rather than to the world to come.

8. Examples of these attitudes towards Israelite and Jew can be found almost everywhere in early modern religious discourse, but they are especially prevalent in reformation commentaries on the Book of Daniel. The book of Daniel and contemporary commentaries upon it are important here because Shakespeare's play so loudly and complexly invokes the stories and teachings of the ancient Hebrew prophet. In the trial scene, Shylock expresses his delight at young Doctor Balthasar's (Portia's) summary judgment in his favour by dubbing him "a Daniel
come to judgment, yea, a Daniel" (*Merchant* 4.1.218). As Shapiro (and Lewalski before him) observes, "editors of the play uniformly note that the characters are alluding to the apocryphal story of Susannah and the elders" and that "the explanations go no further" than this (Shapiro 133). Lewalski also observed, in 1962 (Lewalski 327-43), that the name Portia borrows for her disguise as a young law clerk, Balthasar (or as the Geneva Bible spells it, "Beltesházár"), was the name assigned to Daniel by Ashpenaz, King Nebuchadnezzar's "chief of the Eunuches" when Daniel and three other children of Israel's royal household were taken from Israel to live in captivity in Babylon (Daniel 1:7).

Thus, though Shylock probably alludes to the story from the book of Susanna when he praises Portia as "a Daniel come to judgment, yea, a Daniel," his allusion is already undercut and displaced by Portia's assumption of Daniel's Babylonian name as part of her disguise as judge. Her gesture alludes, not to the apocryphal Book of Susanna, but to what Christians considered the canonical book of Daniel. Only there is the prophet referred to by his Babylonian name. Portia, then, stands for one sort of Daniel, and Shylock invokes quite another; Graziano, probably unwittingly, calls attention to the differences between the two.

9. In what remains of this paper I will try to show in detail how Portia's Daniel represents the Daniel who was crucial to the Reformation notion of the converted, or Christian Jew as opposed to the blind and stubborn Jew, that Shylock betrays himself as precisely such a blind and stubborn Jew who effectively misrecognizes Daniel even as he invokes him, and that the play invites its audience therefore to revile Shylock as a typical Jew -- myopic hermeneut, stubborn misbeliever, graceless and merciless dog -- for whom forced conversion is too good a treatment. The play implies that Portia, disguised as Balthasar/Daniel, plays the role of a true Jew, that is, the Jew who recognizes Jesus as Messiah. It also implies that stubborn, misbelieving Jews like Shylock are not, properly speaking, Jews at all, but more truly like Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians, the pagan idolaters who are the bad guys in the book of Daniel. Shakespeare does invite us to revile Shylock as a "bad Jew," but not in the way Yaffe maintains; to an Elizabethan audience all Jews except those who, like Daniel, acknowledge Christ as Messiah, are "bad Jews."

**Daniel as Christian Jew, the "True Jew"**

10. Calvin wrote commentaries on nearly every book of the Bible, but his commentary on Daniel, one of the Bible's shorter books, requires two large volumes in the Calvin Translation Society series. Andrew Willet's *Hexapla in Danielem* also runs to two large volumes, much longer than his more well-known *Hexapla in Genesin*, even though the book of Daniel is about one quarter the length of Genesis. The English version of the Geneva Bible prints copious annotations around each of Daniel's twelve chapters. Protestants in Europe and in England were obsessively fascinated with the prophetic book of Daniel. The "Argument" that introduces the Geneva version of the book of Daniel indicates why: "The great prouidence of God, and his singular mercie toward his Church are most lively here set forthe." Of all the prophets God has sent for the comfort of "his Church," Ezekiel and Daniel were particularly "adorned with such graces of his holie spirite, that Daniél aboue all other had most special reuelations of suche things as shulde come to the Church, even from the time that thei were in captiuitie, to the last ende of the worlde, and to the general resurrection." By "the Church" here is meant God's chosen people from the time of Abraham to the apocalypse, treated as a single predestined people throughout history from the old covenant to the new. To early modern Protestants, Daniel is a crux, textual and historical, in the saga of God's true Church. This is because they believed that Daniel foretold, not darkly or allegorically, but plainly...
and self-consciously, the exact number of years that would pass before the advent of "the sonne of man," or Jesus Christ. Daniel foresaw the cessation of the ceremonies in the temple, implying that Christ's sacrifice on the cross rendered temple sacrifice redundant. "Moreover," says the Geneva introduction, Daniel

sheweth Christes office and the cause of his death, which was by his sacrifice to take awaye sinnes, and to bring everlasting life. And as from the beginning God euer exercised his people vnder the crosse, so he teacheth here, that after that Christ is offred, he wil stil leaue this exercise to his Church vntil the dead rise againe, and Christ gather his into his kingdome in the heauens. ("The Argvment" preceding Daniel in Geneva Bible [1560])

Daniel tells the world of his vision of God's providential plan for the salvation of his Church, from the Babylonian captivity to the apocalypse. In other words, the prophet Daniel comprehended the Gospel centuries before the birth of Christ, and even met the pre-incarnate Christ as "the sonne of man" in a vision, and preached this gospel to a largely unresponsive Israel. He is thus a pivotal figure in the history of God's true Church, the first Jew to become a Christian. Those who reject or misread Daniel's prophecy, then, are apostate Jews, complacent in captivity, the forerunners of the Scribes and Pharisees.

11. Early Protestant commentaries on Daniel always point out that stubborn Jews refuse to regard Daniel as a prophet or his book as canonical. Andrew Willet, like most Protestant commentators, notes that "The Iewes doe derogate much from the authoritie of this booke, not counting it among the Propheticall writings" (Willet 7). He opines that Jews have denied Daniel the authority of a prophet because they stubbornly resent Christ and the gospel in general. This denial, Willet implies, has grown firmer throughout history. "Elder Iewes" respected the book much as they did the other non-Mosaic books and wrote commentaries on it, but "the later Rabbines doe deny the booke of Daniel to be authenticall, and therefore do seldom reade it," and the reason for this is "because Daniel doth so evidently point out the time of the Messiah his comming" (7). Jews in general, implies Willet, have abandoned their heritage in God's true Church, ignored his special prophets, and denied his Messiah. Calvin's comments on this Jewish perversity are typical; according to his reading of Daniel 9:11, Israel's apostasy is not so much a matter of disobeying the law as refusing to hear the gospel from God's prophet:

In revolting, he says, so as not to hear. By these words Daniel expresses the determinacy of the people, implying this was not occasioned by either error or ignorance; nay even sloth was not the cause of Israel's wilful blindness and inattention to God's precepts, but was only the beginning of this act of rebellion. In revolting, therefore, so as not to hear thy voice. (Commentaries on Daniel 2.162)

Giovanni Diodati, the uncle of John Milton's best friend, Charles, wrote in his Pious Annotations upon the Holy Bible that Daniel predicts Christ's redemptive death as "more cleerly shewn to him, then to any other Prophet" and adds that another point of the prophecy is "foretelling also that Christs Kingdome should be exercised, in justly punishing the Jewish Nation for their incredulitie and rebellion." Protestant commentaries uniformly read Daniel as foretelling Christ's redemption of "the elect" Jews and the damnation of the stubborn Jews. On Daniel 12:1, Diodati comments, "God shall deliver his elect out of the general reprobation, and extermination of the Jewish nation." Daniel was read as a wholesale indictment, by one of their own prophets, of Jews who deny Christ, even to the
point of justifying their "general reprobation and extermination."

12. The enormous and hugely popular *Annotations upon all the books of the Old and New Testament* summarizes "the Propheticall part" of Daniel this way:

Daniel's wisedome doth clearly shine forth, in shewing when the mystery of Mans Redemption should be wrought; and Ceremonies, and legal Sacrifices should cease, and be abolished, to give way to the service of God in Spirit and Truth; namely when the Messiah was slain. . . [It] also tells the time precisely when the Messiah, by his death, should purchase for his Church spiritual deliverance, and set up his Spiritual, and everlasting Kingdom, by causing and meriting Salvation and Eternal felicity to all both Jewes and gentiles which were of the Election of Grace. Foretelling likewise the finall and fatal judgment of God to be executed by the Romans upon the Jewish Nation, for denying the Holy One of Israel, and betraying the Lord of life to be killed by the Romane power.

Many Protestants believed that Christ's second coming would be immediately preceded by a mass conversion of Jews, but we are mistaken if we think they meant all Jews. Calvin, for example, taught that only those Jews "elect" from the beginning of the world would be saved. Commenting on Daniel 9:27, he says quite bluntly, "I have no hesitation in stating God's wish to cut off all hope of restoration from the Jews, whom we know to have been blinded by a foolish confidence, and to have supposed God's presence confined to a visible temple. As they were thus firmly persuaded of the impossibility of God's ever departing from them, they ought to be deprived of their false confidence, and no longer deceive themselves by such flattering hopes" (*Commentaries on Daniel* 2. 228-29). And on Daniel 9:26: "Two points, then, are to be noticed here; first, all hope is to be taken from the Jews, as they must be taught the necessity for their perishing; and secondly, a reason is ascribed for this, namely, the determination of the Almighty and his inviolable decree" (*Commentaries on Daniel* 2. 224).

13. According to Calvin, any Jew who had heard the gospel according to Daniel and persisted in denying both Christ and his prophet must perish; God decrees it. Shakespeare's play shows us a Jew who hears the gospel according to Portia, speaking as Balthasar, a Daniel in disguise. He misrecognizes Daniel as a clever young judge rather than God's prophet; he refuses to hear the teaching of mercy and redemption and grace. He therefore deserves to perish. This is the anti-Jewish logic of the play.

14. Luther's English disciple, George Joye, compiled in 1544 *The Exposicio[n] of Daniell the Prophete*. There he repeats Melancthon's caution about how properly to read biblical prophecies like Daniel's: readers "muste loke whycche parte containeth the lawes, whycche preache the promises and the gospell" (A8v). Though we normally expect to find "lawes" in the so-called "Old Testament" and gospel promises in the New, the point here is that Daniel preaches literal gospel promises in his prophetic book and the pertinacious "Jewes" simply refuse to "get it."

As what can be sayde clerelier and evidentlyer agaynst the Jewes, then that Daniel affirmeoth Chryste to muste have ben borne duryng yet the common weal of Moses? Wherefore that horrible destruccion of Jerusalem and ruyne of the whole lande of Juda now paste

.M.CCCC.lxxiii. yeres do testifie Chryst to be borne, & it refuteth
According to this reading Daniel preaches Christ and "his mercy," the end of sacrificial ritual, and the destruction of the temple centuries before "the one like the sonne of man" condescends to become incarnate as Jesus Christ (Daniel 7:13). Much like Paul who bragged that his authority as apostle derived from the "risen" Christ rather than the earthly Jesus, Daniel is here understood as an apostle to Israel authorized by the pre-incarnate Christ, appearing to him in visions as "the sonne of man," or "the similitude of a man" or as "Michael" (Daniel 8:15, 10:13, 21; 12:1).

Early modern Protestant commentaries regarded Daniel as literally, not figuratively, preaching the gospel (Daniel 10:1 note b); Calvin, for example, claims that Daniel received interpretations of his visions directly "from Christ's lips" (*Commentaries on Daniel* 2. 111) Of Daniel 7:27, Calvin says, "almost all, except the Jews, have treated this prophecy as relating to the final day of Christ's advent."

All Christian interpreters agree in this. . . . As to the Jews, theirs is no explanation at all, for they are not only foolish and stupid, but even crazy. And since their object is the adulteration of sound doctrine, God also blinds them till they become utterly in the dark, and both trifling and childish; and if I were to stop to refute their crudities, I should never come to an end. (*Commentaries on Daniel* 2. 72)

Fourteen hundred and seventy-four years ("MCCCC.lxxiii") of salvation history, says Melancthon, testify to the truth of Daniel's visionary gospel; it is a gospel that came straight from the heavenly Son of God. What's more, in Daniel 9:1-19, commentators understood Daniel's famous prayer for forgiveness on behalf of Israel as addressed to Christ in Christ's own "expresse name" (Joye B1). The Geneva notes to Daniel 1:7 also insist that Daniel's prayer on behalf of an apostate Israel is consciously addressed to Christ, glossing "Lords sake" as "That is, for thy Christs sake in whom [thou] wilt accept all our praiers." If Daniel prayed in Christ's name for forgiveness of Israel's sins, then Jews who do not recognize Daniel as a prophet-apostle and his teachings as gospel promises are perverse, stupid, crazy, mad, and cursedly pertinacious; as such they deserve "extermination." This is what the book of Daniel signified to many early modern Protestants.

15. When, therefore, Portia assumes the name Balthasar for her disguise as Bellario's law clerk, and assumes the post as special judge in "this strict court of Venice" -- that is, a special court where merchants may expect summary judgment on contract enforcement regardless of their "nation" -- Shakespeare invokes the popular Daniel lore of the age. This Daniel lore is precisely the discourse through which Bible-reading Englishmen and women thought about Jews. Portia thus not only preempts Shylock's allusion to Daniel, she preemptively corrects it. He (and ages of Shakespeare editors) alludes to the clever young judge of the story in Susanna who turns the Elders' perjuries against themselves, but Portia as Balthasar already stands for the prophet Daniel as Protestants understood him from the canonical scriptures: one who preaches Christ crucified, risen and come again, a sufficient sacrifice for all sins; the end of temple worship in types and shadows; the vanity of legal righteousness, and the necessity of praying for forgiveness and mercy "for thy
Christ's sake," and in his name. In effect, the English Protestant's Daniel implies an "Old Testament" indictment of stubborn Jews; if he could believe in Christ even before Jesus's advent, based simply on prophetic visions, then the post-advent Jews who do not believe have no excuse. Shylock misrecognizes the Daniel he invokes; he therefore misses the point of Daniel's prophecy. That, in the minds of Shakespeare's contemporaries, is what makes him a "bad Jew," that is, a non-Christian Jew.

**Misrecognizing Portia**

16. Portia stands at the hub of a web of misrecognitions that generate this play's ironic humour and much of its anti-Jewish energy. But Shylock is not the only one who misrecognizes Portia. So also do Antonio and the Duke. The Duke mistakes her disguised sex for beardless youth. Thinking she is young, the Duke expects a certain kind of legal bias he had hoped to avoid in sending for "learned Bellario." At first his fears look justified, but this apparently young Doctor turns out to be the only one capable of turning the case before this "strict court of Venice" from a civil merchant affair to a very traditional criminal matter based on laws that underwrite very old and bigoted notions of nation and citizenship. We are thus invited to read the Venetians' misrecognition as an index of their blindness, though it is blindness of another sort than Shylock's, for it is neither pertinacious nor willful; they are deceived, but Shylock refuses to see or listen to Portia's teaching about mercy.

17. Understanding how the Duke and the Venetians misrecognize Portia requires that we know something about how cases in merchant law were handled in sixteenth-century Venice, or at least the way Englishmen, anxious about legal innovations designed to enable emergent capitalist practices, feared they were handled. Walter Cohen reminds us that "To the English, and particularly to Londoners, Venice represented a more advanced stage of the commercial development they themselves were experiencing" (Cohen 75). B. J. Sokol, writing about allusions to and anxieties about "the Law Merchant" in the play, concludes "it is likely that in the Elizabethan imagination mercantile law would seem Italian. The legendary image of Venetian commerce clearly impressed Shakespeare and his audiences, and this is joined with a contemporary belief that the Venetian state firmly applied laws equally to all" (Sokol 63). Various characters in the play -- Salerio (*Merchant* 3.2.277-78), Antonio (3.3.26-31), Shylock (4.1.37-38, 100-101) -- formulate and re-formulate the legal stone that presumably blocks any possible comic resolution: Venice's strength as an international commercial center depends upon its reputation for upholding merchant and financial contracts regardless of the contracting parties' nation. Antonio puts it this way:

> The Duke cannot deny the course of law,  
> For the commodity that strangers have  
> With us in Venice, if it be denied,  
> Will much impeach the justice of his state;  
> Since that the trade and profit of the city  
> Consisteth of all nations. (3.3.26-31)

In their legal philosophy, then, Antonio and the Duke are in the uncomfortable position of basic agreement with Shylock. This is why the Duke spends so much private effort trying to get Shylock to settle out of court, and why his first public statements in the trial scene once again press for settlement without trial (4.1.16-33).

18. Gasparo Contarini's *Commonwealth and Government of Venice* is full of pride for...
Venetian internationalism, an internationalism that evoked admiration, envy, and trepidation from English readers. When Lewes Lewkenor's translation was published in England in 1599, several English poets, including Edmund Spenser, contributed prefatory sonnets. Spenser regards "Fayre Venice, flower of the last worlds delight" as the third and last "Babel," after Babylon and Rome. Venice is "next to them in beauty . . . /But farre exceeds [them] in policie of right." Like the other two Babels, the poem suggests, Venice, too, will self-destruct, and its innovative internationalist policies will be partly to blame.11 Another poem, by I. Ashley, compares Venice to Narcissus, and predicts its ruin in its pride. All these prefatory poems say something about Venice's innovative politics, law, and mercantile power. They all profess admiration for Venice's progressive policies, but also suggest there is something too worldly, too proud, carnal, and vaguely idolatrous about this third Babel of a city.

19. Contarini's text offers detailed accounts of Venetian innovations in merchant law. He opens by boasting that visitors to Venice are amazed at the city's "wonderful concourse of strange and forraine people, yea of the farthest and remotest nations, as though the City of Venice onely were a common and general market to the whole world" (Contarini 1). To support the development of international commerce, Venice instituted a whole set of new civil magistrates called the "New Auditors" with specialized responsibilities, "divided according to the qualitie of the causes and of the persons" (106). Cases about property were assigned to one auditor/judge while cases about "other contracts, or bargaines" to another. Likewise, cases between citizens were assigned separately from cases between strangers, "or one with another strangers and citizens together" (106). Yet another new division of magistrates was called "Judges or Consuls of the marchauntes": "These doe in their Judgements use a speedier dispatch then any other of the civil magistrates: which was so ordayned, to the ende that marchauntes, whose affaires might otherwise receyve great detriment and hinderance, with lingering and delayes might not be deluded or entertainyed with long expectation of their right" (107).

20. I do not want to suggest that Shakespeare precisely modelled his trial scene on actual Venetian civil procedure. The end of the scene, where the civil court prosecutes and decides a criminal charge, argues otherwise. The point is that Venice, as Spenser's poem suggests, had a reputation for a civil court system peculiarly solicitous of merchants' "right" to a speedy judgment on principles that favoured liberty of contract. When the Duke warns the court that "Upon my power I may dismiss this court/ Unless Bellario, a learnèd doctor/ Whom I have sent for to determine this,/ Come here today" (Merchant 4.1.103-106), we are witnessing the sort of specialized civil procedure Contarini outlines. The Duke does not sit as judge in this court because it was customary to invite a "forraine" judge from one of the mainland Italian cities to sit in judgment over cases involving foreigners (Contarini 18). The Duke would invite a specialist in such contracts from among the lists of "New Auditors" for merchant cases; the trial is expected to take place without delay and issue in a summary judgment.

21. Because this is such standard procedure, Shakespeare's Duke is already quite certain what the result will be, and though as Duke he can intervene whenever he pleases, he is loath to do what Bassanio asks -- "Wrest once the law to your authority./ To do a great right, do a little wrong" -- even to save Antonio (4.1.210; 3.2.277). Whether we see Bassanio directing this plea to Balthasar as the appointed judge in this case, or to the Duke in his special authority, Portia's response is allowed to stand:
It must not be. There is no power in Venice 
Can alter a decree established. 
"Twill be recorded for a precedent, 
And many an error by the same example 
Will rush into the state. It cannot be. (4.1.213-217)12

The Duke can delay the case if he wishes under colour of legal procedure, but he is a strong proponent of the new procedures for merchant justice, procedures designed to benefit merchants like Antonio, and to promote commercial interests in general. He is sorry for Antonio (4.1.3) precisely because he doesn't see how he can help him without impeaching a civil court system that has enabled Venice's success, without tarnishing the reputation that is the ground of its commercial preeminence. The third Babel's glory is at risk here.

22. There is, as it turns out, another more traditional brand of law lurking in the wings, but if the Duke knows of it, he doesn't know how to apply it in this case. No one, not the Duke, not even Antonio, can think of a way to inject equity into "this strict court of Venice" without putting Venice's reputation at risk. The play suggests that blindly promoting merchant law over equity and common law may make a city rich and beautiful, but it may also unintentionally give rein to the merciless and idolatrous lusts of unchristian beasts like Shylock. Merchant law and unbridled commercialism may build another Babel, another capitol of paganism and apostasy, another Rome.

23. Perhaps this is why Shakespeare's Duke, when he sends for a foreign judge to serve as auditor in this case, applies to the "learned Bellario" of Padua. Paduans were not Venetians, so Bellario is technically a foreigner, but according to legend, Venice was originally settled and founded by Paduans fleeing barbarian invasion. Padua, then, was Venice's father city and its link to a more traditional mainland past. Bellario qualifies as one of the "new Auditors," but he also represents the old country and its more traditional systems of law. The Duke, having spent so much energy trying to get Shylock to settle out of court, selects Bellario hoping that he may know how to inject an older sense of equity into "this strict court of Venice."

24. If this is so, Dr. Balthasar's first appearance in court must disappoint the Duke. Neither old, nor Paduan, Balthasar is astonishingly young and Roman. In his letter Bellario anticipates the Duke's disappointment by reassuring him that Balthasar is a puer senex: "I never knew so young a body with so old a head" (4.1.159-60). This could be code for "don't be disappointed; he's not the progressive young lawyer he appears." So the Duke accepts Balthasar and formally installs him as judge: "Take your place" (165). But no sooner is he in place than Balthasar fulfills all the Duke's worst fears about an innovative young judge in this case. Before he has heard a word of testimony, young Balthasar has his judgment ready:

Of a strange nature is the suit you follow, 
Yet in such rule that the Venetian law 
Cannot impugn you as you do proceed. (4.1.172-174)

This is summary enforcement of contract of the speediest sort! According to merchant law, apparently, this case is open-and-shut.

25. No doubt Portia's grand speech on the "quality of mercy" sounds very much like the sort of thing the Duke might have welcomed from the "old head" of Bellario. It seems the young Balthasar is familiar with the old notion that mercy should be above justice, but he doesn't let traditional notions interfere with his summary
I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea;
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there. (4.1.197-200)

There is a special irony in the ways the courtroom scene plays with the terms *old*, *new*, and *young* that is far more interesting and playful than the familiar critical allegoresis of "Old Testament law" and "New Testament grace" allows for. To Shakespeare's Venetians "old" law is law the way it was practised before the recent innovations that established merchant law as distinctively Venetian and republican. Old lawyers from Padua might remember how to practise "old" law. "New" law means support for international commerce, summary judgments for merchants, a presumption in favor of enforcing contracts regardless of the parties' "nations." Venice's old law is not blind to nationalities, social rank, and citizenship; it would force Shylock to "show mercy" or die. The new law that enables Venice's commercial success, however, favours strict literalist interpretation of contracts and does not allow arguments about equity and mercy to affect its judgments. To the English Protestant imagination, then, Venice's new merchant law looks suspiciously like the "old law" they associated with Jews. The Duke and Antonio are new law advocates, even though this time new law puts Antonio at Shylock's (nonexistent) mercy.

26. Shylock also likes this new law, nobody more than he. The new law offers some hope of ridding himself of the persecutorial Antonio. Antonio has been running a one-man crusade against Jewish usury (a.k.a. Shylock) for years, but under the new merchant law, if Shylock can once find a way to haul Antonio before a court, that court promises him a status Antonio and his friends have so far denied him. On the Rialto, Antonio calls him a dog and uses him like "a stranger cur" (1.3.107-124). He calls Shylock beast and devil with impunity. He does all he can to hinder Shylock's business, by fair means and foul (3.1.45-49). But in the "strict court of Venice," Shylock knows (or thinks he knows) that all that anti-Jewish blather will not count. Graziano can call him a dog, claim that his soul once belonged to a wolf hanged for murder, but "Till [he] can rail the seal from off my bond," says Shylock, he only hurts his lungs to shout so loud (4.1.132-137). Shylock believes that the Venetian court, famous for its practice of innovative merchant law, will allow him the status of a man, a *homo economicus* -- a juridical emancipation. So, "new law" in this "strict court of Venice" does not stand, as so many critics have thought, just for Christian grace and mercy. In the first instance it stands, like Shylock, for summary justice according to a literal reading of the contract.

27. Unlike the Duke, Shylock was probably glad to see a young judge in Bellario's place. The legal innovations that favour contracts over equity and strive for judicial blindness to nation and citizenship hold out the promise to Shylock of judicial liberation. Shylock hopes the new Venetian law will allow him to stand as Antonio's equal before the law. But what Shylock cannot see is how the play has already associated Venice with Babel, legal innovation with merciless machiavellian business practices, and how the play is on the verge of making Shylock, the stubborn Jew (and therefore the false Jew), into the mascot for this new Babel. In the remainder of the scene, Portia -- Daniel disguised as Balthasar -- will unmask Shylock as truly the Nebuchadnezzar of the piece.

Daniel in Babylon; Shylock in Venice; The Jew as Nebuchadnezzar
28. At first we might think that the play's allusion to Balthasar, Daniel in Babylon, draws attention to Shylock's position as a Jew in Venice. As we have seen, the English frequently thought of Venice as a latter-day Babel. Shylock makes his way, even prospers, in Venice much as Daniel did in Babylon (or Jacob in Laban's house, or Joseph in Egypt). Nebuchadnezzar's court rewarded sages and oneiromancers; Venice rewards merchants and financiers. Like Daniel, Shylock sets limits to his assimilation; he reminds the Venetians he is a Jew: "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" (1.3.29-32). This is a tempting interpretation, especially when Shylock invokes the story of Jacob and Laban, another instance of God's chosen man patiently prospering under oppression. But the play refuses to endorse this line of interpretation, preferring instead to play Shylock as the typically blinkered, self-serving hermeneut that Elizabethan Protestants believed all stubborn Jews were. This is especially evident when Shylock unwittingly casts himself as a self-righteous Pharisee when he calls Antonio a "fawning publican" (1.3.36). And we have seen how the play mocks his reading of the Jacob story as endorsing usury and miserliness. When Shylock reads the Bible all he hears is "thrift is blessing." The play explicitly rejects such a reading of scripture as blindly and stubbornly "Jewish." It endorses Antonio's Protestant reading that God's blessing is "a thing" not in one's own "power to bring to pass/ But swayed and fashioned by the hand of heaven" (1.3.88-89). The play rewards the prodigal Bassanio with Portia's blessings of wealth; the casket lesson recommends giving and hazardizing rather than careful thrift; Antonio first loses everything, and then gets most of it back as if by heavenly intervention (5.1.275-76). As Lewalski has argued, the play leans far more to the "take no thought for the morrow" end of the ethical spectrum and tends to indict Shylock's "fast bind, fast find" attitude as unchristian (Lewalski 328-330), and therefore, immoral.

29. I have already argued that the play undercuts and corrects Shylock's invocation of Daniel by presenting Portia disguised as Balthasar. Shylock tries to call to mind the clever young judge of Susanna, but the play insists that we pay attention instead to the prophet Daniel who preached Christ to stubborn Jews and mercy to oppressive Babylonians. When we do pay such attention, when we watch the play with the familiar stories of Daniel in Babylon fresh in our minds, some curious and fascinating readings emerge. I will conclude by sketching out just a few.

30. In the trial scene Dr. Balthasar is a kind of silenus figure. On the outside, he looks like a progressive young judge zealous for merchant law and summary judgments favouring contracts; inside he is Portia, heiress of Belmont, daughter of old money and imbued with ancient (even bigoted) notions of citizenship, nationalism and privilege. This resembles Daniel in Babylon. Outside, he is Balthasar, sage and trusted counselor at Nebuchadnezzar's court, but inside he remains a Jew who worships the one true God. Every so often, Nebuchadnezzar must be reminded that Daniel is a Jew and that his God is truly "God of gods and Lord of kings" (Daniel 2:47). This is the Daniel the play endorses, but with a Christian twist--we must read Jew here as "real" Jew, or Christian. The play's Daniel is a Christian; Shylock's Daniel is just a false Jew's stubborn misreading of the Bible.

31. Shylock appears completely ignorant of the biblical Daniel's various encounters with Babylonian law. In Daniel chapter 6, certain officials, jealous of Daniel's success at court, conspire to catch him up with a new law. They urge King Darius to declare a new law forbidding worship of any god besides Darius knowing that Daniel will transgress. Darius realizes too late what he has done; he loved Daniel and "was much distressed" and "set his mind to deliver Daniel" from this strict new
law, labouring "till the sun went down to rescue him," but the jealous satraps have the law on their side: "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and the Persians that no interdict or ordinance which the king establishes can be changed" (Daniel 6). Daniel is thrown to the lions. This story resembles Antonio's situation before the Duke. The Duke has been zealous for merchant law in Venice because it grows the economy and makes Venice famous and wealthy, but now Antonio has been caught on the wrong side of this new law, and the Duke, like Darius, wracks his brain for a way to save his merchant friend. But the law is the law; it cannot be changed even by the Duke's own voice. Just as Daniel must be saved from the lions by a miracle, so Antonio must be saved from the beastly Shylock's claws by a miracle--Portia.

32. This story, like the one in Daniel 3, is a cautionary tale about how strict application of novel laws can produce injustice. The Merchant of Venice is another such cautionary tale. When Shylock invokes the law, he unwittingly invokes the other side's champion, and ironically casts himself in the role of Daniel's Babylonian persecutors who would try to use the new laws to catch Daniel "on the hip." Dr. Balthasar looks at first like a young devotee of merchant law, but turns out to be an old-style prosecutor of the alien statutes. Shylock is called "the Jew" in this case, but winds up looking like the envious Babylonian satraps. And the real Daniel turns the law back on the satraps who go to the lions (6:24) without God's protection, much as Portia turns the old alien statutes on Shylock.

33. According to this reading, Shylock is cast as a kind of false Jew, the Jew who stubbornly misreads both Torah (the Genesis story of Jacob) and the prophets (Daniel), who is blind to the salvation story they everywhere imply. According to Paul, Jews who stubbornly crave the law and ceremonies, especially circumcision and kashrut, are like children who refuse to see the "true" meanings of both (Galatians 4). Calvin's comments on this are typical:

> It was not without cause that God distinguished between us and his ancient people, by training them like children by means of signs and figures, and training us more simply, without so much external show. . . . This was the state of the Jews under the law. But we are like adults who, being freed from tutory and curatory, have no need of puerile rudiments. (Institutes 4.10.14)

Christians, then, are Jews grown up, the full grown children of father Abraham (Galatians 4:1-7). Jews who stubbornly remain Jews are, in a sense, not really Jews at all any more, no longer the sons of Abraham, but sons of the "bondwoman" who was "cast out" (Galatians 4:30). Grownup Jews are Christians like Daniel; Jews like Shylock are willfully stunted, pertinaciously puerile, literal-minded, and selfish.16

34. The play embraces this familiar anti-Jewish trope, especially by way of Portia in disguise. Beneath the Babylonian disguise and name is the true Jew, a Daniel who preaches a Christian mercy that the law and its zealots cannot comprehend. Shylock is exposed as stubbornly deaf--he cannot hear the gospel even when it is preached by a prophet. His Daniel is a rulemonger, but the biblical Daniel is a champion of mercy over the law. He mistakes the Babylonian for the Jew, the disguise for the real thing. The "real" Daniel turns out to be the Christians' champion.

35. Another episode from the book of Daniel reinforces this trope. In Daniel 4, King Nebuchadnezzar calls upon young Balthasar (Daniel) to interpret a dream that baffles his other sages. The interpretation Daniel offers is a prophecy: as
punishment for his overweening pride and his failure to show mercy to the oppressed (particularly the Jews in exile) Nebuchadnezzar "shall be driven from among men" and shall dwell with "the beasts of the field," eating grass and becoming "wet with the dew of heaven." He will continue this bestial existence, says Daniel to the King, until "[you] break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed" (Daniel 4:27). According to the story, all this comes to pass; a "voice from heaven" condemns the great king to be "driven out from among men" and live like a beast until his "reason" returns, until he acknowledges the God of Israel and shows mercy on the oppressed (Daniel 4:32-37). This Daniel story directly challenges Shylock's caricature of Judaism as a legalistic religion--"I stand here for law." In this story, Daniel is the champion of mercy over law, and the villain is the self-righteous Nebuchadnezzar who has forgotten God, and has forgotten to be merciful to the oppressed. He is condemned to live like a beast until his reason returns.

If we apply this Daniel story to the play, once again we find Shylock in the role of the pagan anti-Jewish oppressor steeped in his own self-righteous pride. Portia is cast as the prophetic Daniel disguised as Balthasar. The Duke and everyone else think the self-righteous Shylock is truly a beast -- a dog, and an "inhuman wretch," a "currish Jew" -- but the merchant law under which he brings his strange suit allows him the status of a human plaintiff. No one but Portia (like Daniel) knows how to interpret the situation, how to strip Shylock (like Nebuchadnezzar) of his ersatz humanness and return him to his underlying bestial status. She manages this by encouraging him at every turn to overplay his role as a stereotypically stubborn Jew -- literal-minded, self-righteous, legalistic, envious, and even bloodthirsty. Of course, he plays it perfectly, thus exposing himself as the opposite of the "true" Jew represented by the Christian Daniel. He is instead the false Jew, a beast. Once he is exposed as such a beast, he can simply be prosecuted as such.

The play, then, is anti-Jewish in ways more sophisticated than we have recognized. Shakespeare may very well eschew, even scorn, more pedestrian forms of anti-Jewish humour, but he lends his astonishing imaginative powers to support some very sophisticated and elaborate versions of Protestant anti-Jewish polemic. It exploits and even endorses anti-Jewish discourses woven ever so tightly into the fabric of Protestant Christianity and reformation readings of the Bible. The play also mocks the Venetians and betrays what appear to be typically English ambivalences about the growth of internationalism in commerce and law, anxieties that live on, perhaps, in the europhobias we read about today. Antonio, Bassanio, and the Duke, however, learn their lessons; they will not so blindly endorse the innovations of merchant law again. The play makes Shylock the mascot of stubborn misbelief, hermeneutic myopia, and a mercilessly machiavellian approach to business. He is cast as more Venetian than the Venetians, more Babylonian than even Nebuchadnezzar (who repented), and therefore not truly a Jew at all, for the true Jews, the verus Israel, says the play, are the Christians.

Notes

1. I prefer the term anti-Jewish to anti-semitic as a description of the attitudes that are the focus of this essay because the latter implies attitudes based on late modern notions of race. The anti-Jewish attitudes depicted and endorsed by this play are more about theology, religion, and nation than about race as we conceive of it, but see Shapiro, 170. I am aware that scholars of early Christianity use these terms differently and more precisely than I think appropriate here; see John G. Gager, The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes

2. Yaffe even scorns historical evidence of the kind Shapiro assembles, claiming that "evidence from outside Shakespeare's play" can bring nothing useful to the issue (19). Yaffe also incorrectly claims that Shapiro "has no hesitation about calling the play 'anti-Jewish' (218)" (18). In the place Yaffe refers to, Shapiro attributes the characterization "anti-Jewish play" to someone else. Indeed, for reasons I respect but cannot share, Shapiro is very hesitant to call the play anti-Jewish. [Back]

3. Yaffe's claim that "Shakespeare measures his Shylock by the standards of Jewish orthodoxy" is based on his unproved assumption that Shakespeare recognized a "common reverence for biblical morality" among Christians and Jews (125) and shared a common sense of biblical ethics, the so-called Judaico-Christian ethics featured in modern right-wing rhetoric. In light of Shapiro's historical evidence, this is simply incredible. [Back]

4. The Geneva annotations to the book of Daniel refer repeatedly to the non-apostate Jews of Daniel's time as "the Church." In Institutes of the Christian Religion, Calvin frequently refers to the pre-advent "Church" of the prophets and patriarchs (4.1.18, 24). Throughout his Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel, Calvin refers to Daniel as the leader of God's Church in captivity. On Luther's sense of promissio and the pre-advent Church, see J. S. Preus, From Shadow to Promise, 268-269. See also Luxon, Literal Figures, ]65-67. [Back]

5. Jerome's Latin Vulgate spells the name as "Baltassar." [Back]

6. The implied judgment against Roman Catholic "Ceremonies, and legal Sacrifices" along with condemnation of the Jews is familiar to anyone who reads these commentaries. [Back]

7. The Geneva annotations identify "the sonne of man" (7:13) as "Christ, who had not yet taken vpon him mans nature, neither was the sonne of David according to the flesh, as he was afterward: but appeared then in a figure, and that in the cloudes, that is, being separate from the common sort of men by manifest signes of his divinitie." [Back]

8. The Geneva annotations identify all these visions and voices, including the appearance and voice of Michael, as Christ. [Back]

9. Lewalski highlights this (340-41). [Back]

10. A more detailed explanation of merchant law, the Venetian courts, and Shakespeare's sense of both follows below. [Back]

11. Spenser's sonnet appears on an unnumbered page immediately following the title page, as do the others mentioned below. Spenser's name appears as "Edw. Spencer." The poem also appears in Ernest de Sélincourt, ed., Spenser's Minor Poems 482. [Back]

12. Contarini writes, "So great is the princes authoritie, that he may in whatsoever court adioine himselfe to the Magistrate therein, being president as his colleague or companion, and have equal power with the other
Presidents, that he might so this means be able to looke into all things" (41), but he also says, "Yet nevertheles so is this authoritie of his by lawes retracted, that alone hee may not doe any thing, neyther being ionyed to the other magistrates hath he any farther power then every other president in his office" (42). [Back].

13. Stephen Greenblatt advanced the interesting suggestion that Antonio's persecution of Shylock resembles the activities of the Monte di Carita in "Marlowe, Marx, and Anti-Semitism" 294. [Back].


15. See her bigoted remarks about Morocco earlier in the play (2.8.79). [Back].

16. For especially good discussions of Paul and the anti-Jewish attitudes of the early Christian church, see Gager 113-269. [Back].

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http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/04-3/luxoshak.html
The merchant of venice. By william shakespeare. Originally written between 1596 and 1598. THE DUKE OF VENICE THE PRINCE OF MOROCCO, suitor to Portia THE PRINCE OF ARRAGON, suitor to Portia ANTONIO, a merchant of Venice BASSANIO, his friend SALANIO, friend to Antonio and Bassanio SALARINO, friend to Antonio and Bassanio GRATIANO, friend to Antonio and Bassanio LORENZO, in love with Jessica SHYLOCK, a rich Jew TUBAL, a Jew, his friend LAUNCELOT GOBBO, a clown, servant. That he hath a neighbourly charity in him, for he borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman and swore he would pay him again when he was able: I think the Frenchman became his surety and sealed under for another. NERISSA. Reading The Merchant of Venice as an English Jew is a study in disjuncture. I grew up with a Rabbinic tradition which teaches that two seemingly oppositional truths can co-exist: “these and these are the living words of God” argues the Talmud, and one of the most frequent phrases in Jewish textual commentaries is “And another opinion…” The unsettling complexity of holding opposing views in tension is never more evident for a Jewish literary scholar than when thinking about this particular play. Perhaps it’s due wholly to my readerly identity, but I would argue that a nuanced exploration of The