

New Readings of *The Merchant of Venice*

Edited by

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HATH NOT A JEW A NOSE? OR, THE DANGER OF DEFORMITY IN COMEDY

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Identified and apprehended dialectically, as both individual and stereotype, “Shylock the Jew” is a complex blend of subject and object, of human particularity and cultural abstraction, of a *person* understood legally as an autonomous being who has rights and obligations and a *persona* understood etymologically as the lifeless wooden mask worn by an actor on stage. One stereotype, which happens to be a mask, has been routinely attached to Shylock: an obnoxiously large nose. This prosthetic comes not from the text of *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97), nor from a Shakespearean theatrical tradition, but from “the artificiall Iewe of Malts nose,” as William Rowley’s *A Search for Money* (1609) remembers the costume of Edward Alleyn’s Barabas in Christopher Marlowe’s play *The Jew of Malta* (12). Rowley even describes the “two casements” fastened on either side of the nose, “through which his eyes had a little ken of vs.” In other words, a pair of eyeglasses holds the nose on the actor’s face, just like that insufferable device meant to make you look like Groucho Marx, the Jewish-American comedian.

In *The Jew of Malta* (1589-90), Ithamore thrice salutes Barabas’s beak, roaring “I worship your nose for this” when Barabas schools him to “smile when the Christians moane” (2.3.173-74). Marlowe makes the nose the mark of a Jew who is exceedingly villainous: merciless, malevolent, and hell-bent against Christianity. Spying Barabas’s “villainy” (3.3.1), Ithamore laments how he has “the bravest, gravest, secret, subtle, bottle-nosed knave to [his] master” (3.3.9-10). The nose concludes this catalog of Barabas’s immoralities because Marlowe loads it up with moral significance, aligning a perceived pattern in the Jewish body with a perceived pattern of villainy in the Jewish nation. Thus, when two Christian clergy come for Barabas, he “smelt ‘em e’re they came,” and we might imagine Alleyn indicating his prosthetic, to raucous laughter, as Ithamore exclaims, “God-a-mercy, nose” (4.1.24-25).

If the play influencing Shakespeare's Shylock uses an artificial nose to signal a Jewish villainy, so do at least two plays influenced by Shylock. A character in George Chapman's *The Blinde Begger of Alexandria* (1598) disguises himself as "Leon the rich vsurer," presumably but not explicitly a Jew, as the others note "he hath a great nose." In *Jack Drum's Entertainment* (1601), John Marston's *dramatis personae* lists "Mamon the Vsurer, with a great nose," and news of the (again presumably) Jewish merchant's sunken ship causes Mamon to cry, "My nose will rot off with grief" (E3). Elizabethan dramatists like Marlowe, Chapman, and Marston associate the nose broadly with a Jewish antagonism to Christianity, and specifically with a stereotyped Jewish avarice, manifested in either mercantilism or usury.

Coming upon passages such as these, nineteenth-century scholars scampered to stamp the prosthetic on Shylock. In 1836, John Collier had "litttle doubt that the part of Shylock was originally played in a false nose" (38). An 1840 edition of Rowley's text agrees: "It was usual in the time of Shakespeare, to furnish Jews and usurers on the stage with artificial noses, and so Shylock was probably originally represented by Richard Burbage" (46n19). According to Moncure Conway's book *The Wandering Jew* (1881), "Shylock, as acted by Shakespeare's friend Burbage ... consisted of exceedingly red hair and beard, a false nose preternaturally long and hooked, and a tawny petticoat" (125). This astonishingly precise costume comes from two dubious sources, first a funeral elegy for Burbage that was actually forged in the nineteenth century by Collier, and second the "deformed Father" in the actor Thomas Jordan's seventeenth-century verse adaptation of *Merchant*:

His beard was red, his face was made
 Not much unlike a Witches.
 His habit was a Jewish gown,
 That would defend all weather;
 His chin turn'd up, his nose hung down,
 And both ends met together. (2-3)

In 1911 E. E. Stoll took Jordan's ballad as the best estimation of an Elizabethan Shylock, and in 1949 John Moore suggested the comparably cartoonish Italian clown Pantaloon (See Figure 1). Shylock's artificial nose survives in the more recent scholarship of, say, Jay Halio (10), Frank Felsentein (162), and Gary Taylor (11), but it survives in the absence of any direct evidence that Shakespeare's character actually wore the nose. More cautious criticism by Toby Lelyveld (8), James Smith (3), and John Cooper (117) has doubted and often denied Shylock the nose. As these

studies indicate, the evidence for an artificial nose is not contemporary with Shakespeare, and Elizabethan notices of *Merchant* do not evidence the nose. Charles Edelman puts it nicely when he writes that Alexander Pope's famous comment about "the Jew / That Shakespeare drew" (292) "shows a yearning, shared by all students of the play, to reconstruct somehow the first Shylock, about whom there is no reliable contemporary information whatsoever" (99). In sum, a historicist might reason an artificial nose onto Shylock on the basis of early English theatrical and cultural conventions, but the strict textualist will refuse to credit this unsubstantiated suggestion. In 2010 this very debate was staged in *The New York Review of Books* with Stephen Greenblatt playing the historicist and James Shapiro the textualist. The issue of Shylock's nose is so tricky, however, that Shapiro himself (*Shakespeare and the Jews*, 240n96), and such able analysts as Joan Holmer (136n11) and Peter Berek (56), have thrown up their hands in uncertainty.



Figure 1: Maurice Sand, *Pantolon* (1550), in vol. 2 of *Masques et Bouffons* (*Comedie Italienne*) (Paris: Michel Levy Freres, 1860), front matter.

Did Shylock wear a false nose on the Elizabethan stage? Shakespeare never mentions it, though he has ample opportunity to do so, as when Antonio spits on Shylock's gabardine and beard. Why not also spit on the most obvious target, his huge nose? Is it because the Elizabethan actor playing Shylock wore no nose? Nothing in *Merchant* precludes the nose, but nothing calls for it either, which, in the wake of Marlowe's eager symbolism, creates a present absence in Shakespeare's portrait of the Jew. The bard's disregard for this pungent theatrical device does not certify its absence, but it is cause for consideration. If Shylock wore no nose, why did Shakespeare abandon this theatrical tradition? If he did use the prosthetic, why did Shakespeare avoid making any moral significance of the nose, as Marlowe, Chapman, Marston, and Rowley clearly did?

This chapter responds to these questions, not by scouring the historical record of Elizabethan performances, which yields no answer, but by extrapolating from Shakespeare's other thematic considerations and compositional decisions in *Merchant*. Such a critique cannot settle the historical question with absolute certainty, I know, but it does allow us to explore a series of possibilities and the likelihood and significance of each. From where I stand, this is the very best response to Shakespeare's drama, where so much – not just material details of Elizabethan performance, but more importantly key issues in the drama – is open to alternate readings of the text and renderings of it on stage. As I ask whether or not Shylock wears an artificial nose on the Elizabethan stage, therefore, I hope to use the indeterminacy of this historical question as an opportunity to discuss the composition and reception of Shakespeare's irony. By *irony* I mean the author's veiled attitude toward the characters and actions in his text, which is the compositional posture that creates such persistent debates over, for example, the origin of Shylock's anger, the terms of his bond, and the propriety of his forced conversion.¹ In the shape of a question mark, the artificial nose is the material, theatrical, and dramaturgical object that commemorates Shakespeare's irony in *The Merchant of Venice*.

¹ I mean Socratic irony, not what Puttenham calls the "drye mock" (157), but the manner of articulation described by Bacon: "It was not without cause, that so many excellent Philosophers became *Sceptiques* and *Academiques*, and denyed any certaintie of Knowledge, or Comprehension, and held opinion that the knowledge of man extended onely to Appearances, and Probabilities. It is true, that in *Socrates* it was supposed to be but a fourme of *Irony*, *Scientiam dissimulando simulauit*: For hee vsed to disable his knowledge, to the end to inhance his Knowledge" (51). See Knox.

The Figure of Stigma in Early English Drama: Abnormality, Villainy, Irony, Tragicomedy

Critics such as Lisa Freinkel and Julia Reinhard Lupton have recently updated the typological readings of the Christian treatment of Judaism in *Merchant* by considering the text in the terms of figural interpretation as it is mapped out by Erich Auerbach. Rather than rehearse the Christian attempt to cancel and supersede Judaism, Freinkel and Lupton remind us that our criticism of Shakespeare's text, like criticism of the Bible, is exegetical, especially when meaning is manifold or allegorical. I would like to continue this conversation by using Auerbach's analysis of the mimetic style in *Genesis* to articulate the coy compositional mode behind Shakespeare's description of Shylock's Jewishness, and the crazed interpretations consequently created by Shakespeare's Christian characters and his often-Christian audiences.

In the famous first chapter of *Mimesis*, "Odysseus' Scar," Auerbach juxtaposes the "realistic" style of Homer's poetry, particular facts here on earth strung together in an explicit series of causal connections and a "figural" style in *Genesis* that aims for truth rather than reality. To take nothing away from Auerbach, the mark of Cain might be a better point of contact with Odysseus's scar than the Akedah is, for it allows the marked body to serve as a touchstone, a shared feature that renders differences in mimetic styles apparent. On the one hand, Homer represents a natural reality by linking a bodily mark with its material cause, a hunting accident from Odysseus's boyhood. On the other hand, the *Genesis* writer fashions a supernatural world in which the mark of Cain is "mysterious, containing a second, concealed meaning," as Auerbach describes Hebraic figuralism (15).

Genesis announces and abandons the mark of Cain in one quick verse. Cain murders Abel, and God banishes Cain, but Cain fears retribution, so "the Lord set a marke vpon Káin, lest anie man finding him shulde kil him" (Gen. 4.15).² What is this mark? What does it look like? Who are these other men who would kill Cain? How will the mark stop them? Does the plan work? Unlike Odysseus's scar, which Auerbach calls "of the foreground" (13), leaving nothing in darkness, the mark of Cain is unclear, "fraught with background" (12), implying more than is said. As Auerbach puts it, the Hebrew text is "tyrannical" (14), announcing but not elucidating history, the kind of mysterious mimesis displayed for example

² All Biblical citations are to the Geneva Bible, i.e. *The Bible and Holy Scriptures*.

in the English Bohun Psalter that shows God marking Cain on an obscured cheek, leaving its exact nature unclear (See Figure 2).



Figure 2: Detail of Cain and Abel, in the Bohun Psalter (1370-80), at the Bodleian Library (Oxford, England), 40.

The withholding of information in the Hebrew text over-excites our interpretive faculty, which is why the mark of Cain surfaces variously in later cultures as a letter on his body, a trembling in his limbs, a set of horns, a cross, a tattoo, black skin, beardlessness, or leprosy (Mellinkoff). One particularly vigorous fourteenth-century English illumination displays a thoroughly marked Cain: the Lord's outstretched hand hunches the spine of the murderer, who also exhibits negro features and horns to announce his collusion with the dark and the demonic (See Figure 3). If the Bohun Psalter can stand for the coyness in the composition of the Hebrew figure, this anonymous English psalter suggests the consequent abundance in the interpretation of it.



Figure 3: God Punishing Cain, in an Anonymous English Psalter (ca. 1397-1400), at St. John's College Library (Cambridge, England), 6.

While Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously said Edmund Kean's acting was "like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning" (38), another nineteenth-century critic, Douglas Jerrold, thought something else about Kean's Shylock in particular: he impresses an audience "like a chapter of *Genesis*" (11). I would like to suggest that the mystery and the history of the mimesis in *Genesis* can illuminate the operation of Shakespearean irony, both its composition and its reception. With respect to Shylock's Judaism, Shakespeare writes *Merchant* in a way reminiscent of *Genesis*, where a shocking scarcity of facts is capily delivered in contradistinction to the moral absolutes at play in the text. Shakespeare's irony, always difficult to describe, can be viewed as a version of the Hebraic figuralism Auerbach adumbrates:

Certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, 'background' quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic. (23)

In *Genesis* and *Merchant* alike, an eerie absence of information in the text evokes an alarming presence of interpretation in the critical tradition, much of it trying to ascribe its exegetical claims to the text itself. The other characters in *Merchant*, as well as the play's audiences, often interpret Shylock's Judaism frantically, like the Christian treatment of Cain, which subordinates the sparse historical facts of the text to the relentlessly moralized meanings of Christian allegory.

For example, imagine you were the costume designer for the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1597, asked to gather materials for *Merchant*, specifically for the costume of "*Shylock the Jew*" (1.3.1sd). Your text tells you very little else: Shylock is "old" (2.5.2, 4.2.11), wears a "Jewish gaberdine" (1.3.112), and has a "beard" (1.3.117). You don't even have the *dramatis personae* first given in the 1637 quarto to tell you Shylock is "a rich Jew." The text of *Merchant* tells you Shylock is Jewish, but not what it means to be Jewish or to look Jewish. It's difficult to find Jews around you in Elizabethan England, so you have no unmediated experience with Judaism (Glassman). To stage Shylock, you must fill in the gaps of Shakespeare's text with reference to other representations: oral tradition, travel literature, previous plays, and the occasional printed image. Your Jew will be at least thrice removed from truth, an imitation of other imitations.

Since Shylock's gabardine is specifically "Jewish," you might put a badge on it, perhaps the yellow *rota* worn in Germany, or maybe the more English tradition of the two stone tablets bearing the Ten Commandments. Shylock's costume should be elegant enough to indicate the avarice early English plays attach to their Jews: you recall Barabas bragging of his "clean shirt" (*Jew*, 4.4.70). Speaking of Barabas, "The Hat he weares, *Judas* left vnder the Elder when he hang'd himselfe" (4.4.74-75), but should your Shylock wear one of the large pointed hats that identify Jews in medieval art? If so, a Venetian Jew's hat might be red, yellow, or orange, depending upon which travel literature you consult, or it might be a yarmulke. In any event, you must also determine the color of the hair underneath his hat. Shylock's beard might be the "little yellow beard, a Cain-color'd beard" that Shakespeare mentions in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1.4.23); or it might be "the dissembling color," as Shakespeare calls the red hair of Judas in *As You Like It* (3.4.7). Scuttling to supply

information Shakespeare leaves out, actors, directors, and critics have saddled Shylock with all these costumes and more. That is, Shakespeare's Shylock is the Cain of the Bohun Psalter (See Figure 2), but he has been made into the monster in the other psalter (See Figure 3). I would venture to say, however, that the anonymous sixteenth-century German print of *A Judge, a Jew, and a Woman* (See Figure 4) offers the best approximation of an Elizabethan Shylock drawn strictly from Shakespeare's text: aged, balding but with a long grey beard, and no hat, but richly dressed with identifying Jewish marks (a *rota* on the left shoulder and Hebrew gibberish on the gabardine), holding his bag of money, and – in this case – displaying a large nose (not however obnoxiously artificial).



Figure 4: HW, *A Judge, a Jew, and a Woman* (16th c.), 215 x 168 mm, in vol. 13 of *The Illustrated Bartsch* (New York: Abaris Books, 1978), 122.

The long, bridged, and hooked nose appears on two English Jews drawn in the late thirteenth century (See Figures 5 and 6), the last time the country housed any significant Jewish presence. The more famous of these caricatures includes the caption, *Aaron fil Diaboli*, “Aaron, Son of the Devil,” which is meant to evoke the the murderous pack of Jews insisting to Jesus, “Abraham is our father” (*John* 8:39). Allegorizing the parentage of the Jews, Jesus responds, “Ye are of your father the deuill,” who “hath bene a murtherer from the beginning” (*John* 8:44), lumping the Jews and the devil in with Cain, the world’s first murderer. Some early Christians said that Satan, not Adam, had fathered “Cain whiche was of the wicked” (*I John*, 3:12). When Cain is made into an agent of evil, his mark gains additional significance. In *Genesis*, it is the Lord’s blessing of protection for an exile, but the Christians who demonize Cain make this mark into the original instance of the mark of the Jews, a mark elsewhere iterated as circumcision, horns, a big nose, badges, hats, or distinctive clothes (nevermind the transparent contradiction of needing to distinguish in their dress Jews supposedly identified by their bodies).



Figure 5: Caricature of an English Jew, in an anonymous English liturgical manuscript (late 13th c.), at St. John’s College (Cambridge, England), 50v.



Figure 6: *Aaron fil Diaboli*, in the Forest Roll of Essex (1277), at the National Archives (London, England), “5 Edward I.”

Rather than clarify how to costume a Jew, *Merchant* sends a series of insults toward Shylock that makes the Jew sound a lot like the devil. Antonio says Shylock has an “evil soul” (1.3.99), and the Jew is called “devil” on five occasions by four different characters. Most memorably, Launcelot Gobbo thinks “the Jew is the very devil incarnation” (2.2.27-28), and when Salanio sees Shylock, “the devil ... comes in the likeness of a Jew” (3.1.19-21). Here, Gobbo’s “incarnation” parodically inverts the

incarnation of God in Jesus, and Salanio also displays what social anthropologists like Stuart Clark call magical or oppositional thinking when he reasons a “likeness” between the Jew and the devil. Visually, because spiritually, the Jew and the devil are a “match,” as Salanio says when he sees Shylock’s friend, Tybalt: “Here comes another of the tribe: a third cannot be matched, unless the devil himself turn Jew” (3.1.77-78). Their bodies “match” each other, devil and Jew, and their bodies also “match” their morals. Same morals, same bodies, and both are wicked, so both should be ugly, because that is what evil is said to look like.³

With no evidence to demonstrate he does, one reason to think Shylock wore the false nose on the Elizabethan stage is that this device thoroughly demonizes the Jew. This is because the other character to wear an artificial nose on the sixteenth-century stage is the devil of the Tudor interludes. In Thomas Lupton’s *All for Money* (1578), Sin calls Satan a “bottell nosed knaue,” a phrase Nichol Newfangle also uses to describe Lucifer in Ulpian Fulwell’s *Like Wil to Like* (1587). If Shylock perhaps borrows Barabas’s “bottle-nose,” Marlowe’s Jew himself inherits this prop from one of the previous generation’s devils, a legacy that configures at least three layers to the character of Shylock – man, Jew, and devil – each identity offering a different valence of villainy.

It is a complicated bit of costuming, the false nose, meant to represent a natural physical feature of the Jew’s body yet so obviously artificial when affixed to the Gentile actor. The Jew’s nose is a part of the character’s body, but not the actor’s, just like the hump propped up on the shoulder of Shakespeare’s Richard III. The fact that Barabas and Richard wear similar dramaturgical devices suggests that some issue prior to “race” or “deformity” is at play. When a character is socially disqualified on the basis of an innate difference from some cultural norm, the phenomenon Erving Goffman identifies as “stigma” reveals its representational force. Goffman lists three kinds of stigmata: physical, mental, and racial, the first being Richard’s, the last Barabas’s. The collapse of these three discrete categories in a single concept shows that stigma is not an attribute of the human body but a social relationship that only arises after birth. In other words, stigma is not nature but second-

³ Certainly this comparison of Shylock and Satan benefits from the memory of Marlowe’s Barabas sinking into a cauldron at the end of *The Jew of Malta*, just like the devil diving into a hell-mouth at the end of earlier mystery and morality plays. See Lupton on the “Pauline architecture of typology” in Marlowe’s stagecraft (*Citizen-Saints* 67). In *Merchant*, the Jew’s “house is hell,” over which he lords like Satan, complete with a “merry devil,” Gobbo, whose comic villainy frustrates while foregrounding the tragic villainy of his master (2.3.2).

nature, which is what makes it such a compelling rhetorical device for poets. Like culture, poetry presents “another nature” (in Phillip Sidney’s words [14]), not the world as it is but the world as it seems or ought to be, and the visibility of stigma is what makes it so available to the dramatist, the one poet possessed of the power of spectacle. Other characters can submit their words and deeds to an audience for interpretation, but stigma on stage consumes our attention, prejudicing us against he who has it. A stigmatic’s actions are not to be judged good or bad: the interpretive task is to determine how his actions are bad, since he has been stigmatized. At the same time, the overt artifice of a nose or a hump draws attention to the theatrical event. It insists we acknowledge the act of representation. During the Elizabethan age, it is in the ironic drama of Shakespeare, where the artifice of both mental and cultural assumptions is habitually exposed, that the interrogation of stigma is most evident. Thus, our currently unanswerable question, *Did an Elizabethan Shylock wear the artificial Jew’s nose?*, can stand for an unstable moment in the intellectual history of England, when the reading of stigma was under revision.

Seeing Barabas and Richard III together illuminates what I would call – combining the vocabularies of Auerbach and Goffman – the figure of stigma on the Elizabethan stage. The stigma, be it a crooked nose or a crooked back, incorporates and envisions a particular crime, such as avarice or murder. At the same time the stigma also embodies a cultural enmity to the beautiful and good state suggested in contrast, either Christendom or England. The stigmatic spectacle at the start of an early English play points into the soul of a villain, but also forward to his evil actions, and even up to a divinity that defeats and erases all manner of abnormality (physical, mental, spiritual, and moral) through an attractive and heroic earthly agent like Ferneze or Henry Tudor. In the interim, the stigmatized villain speaks directly to the audience, as in the opening addresses of both Barabas and Richard, trying to avert tragedy with farce, usually by way of some hilarious double-dealing. His invigorating wit endears the stigmatic to the audience, who goes along for the ride, until the playwright slaps us back to our senses with a tragic catastrophe in Act 5. In sum, Barabas and Richard evidence a dramatic strategy early English playwrights use to organize physical abnormality as dramatic spectacle, moral villainy as dramatic character, verbal irony as dramatic speech, and tragicomedy as dramatic plot.

In the comparison of Barabas’s nose and Richard’s hump, the stigmatic is, among other things, the protagonist of a revenge tragedy, returning woe unto a world that has dealt with him unfairly. In Marlowe’s play, when the Maltese coffers are empty, and they owe the Turks ten years’ tribute, the

governor callously confiscates the wealth of the Jews. Barabas vows revenge, for which the stage is set in Act 5, but he dies in a plot of his own design. In Shakespeare's first tetralogy, the Lancastrians kill Richard's father, and he laments the innate disadvantages of his deformity. Richard vows revenge against his enemies and in fact the entire world, though he cannot kill enough to quiet his anger, which persists until he himself dies in battle during Act 5 of *Richard III*.

Physically and generically, Barabas and Richard are twins, in a manner of speaking, but what about the physical and generic form of their other brother, Shylock? If stigma ends in tragedy on the early English stage, is it possible to think of *The Merchant of Venice*, like *The Jew of Malta* and *Richard III*, as a tragedy? No, frankly, it is not, though it is important to recognize revenge tragedy as the genre against which *Merchant* works. Shylock wants the play to be a revenge tragedy, fuming he will have "no satisfaction" if he has "no revenge" against Antonio (3.1.94). The Christian merchant freely lends out money in Venice, lowering the rate of interest Shylock can charge on his loans, and Antonio does so in a particularly public and racially charged fashion. Shylock vows revenge and plans to exact it through the elaborate contract for a pound of Antonio's flesh if the Christian defaults on his loan from Shylock: "If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge" (3.1.53-54). Here Shylock plays a Janus-faced revenger, like Barabas and Richard III, "a villain with a smiling cheek," as Antonio puts it (1.3.100). In the wake of *The Jew of Malta* and *Richard III*, though, the revenger ought to die in Act 5. The too theatrical public event at the play's climax ought to end in bloody catastrophe, littering the stage with bodies. In *Merchant*, however, Shakespeare locates his public gathering in Act 4, and he emphatically allows "no jot of blood" (4.1.306). *Merchant* is not the revenge tragedy sought by Shylock and written by Marlowe. It is not another play about some Jewish villainy. It is a play about Christian virtue. That virtue is mercy, which is what Shakespeare exercises in Act 4 with a dramatic antinomianism that dispels the laws of revenge tragedy in the same moment that Shylock begrudgingly suspends civic law by renegeing his right to Antonio's flesh.

The mixed mode of tragicomedy brings the play's first printer to classify it as "*the most excellent history of the Merchant of Venice*," though the running title in the Quarto calls the play a "*comicall History*," and it is easy to see why both Francis Meres (282) and the First Folio group *Merchant* with Shakespeare's comedies. The marriages of Bassanio and Portia, Gratiano and Nerissa, and Lorenzo and Jessica are only the most obvious reason *Merchant* is a comedy, with a fifth act offering not

catastrophe but – nearly a *deus ex machina* – the safe harbor of Antonio's ships. If Shakespeare clearly alters the generic distinction of Marlowe's revenge tragedy, then what does Shakespeare do with the stigma in Marlowe's play, the artificial nose, which is the seal of both villainy and tragedy according to the figure of stigma in early English drama? The question of Shylock's nose can be considered by reasoning inversely: the changes Shakespeare made to the genre of Marlowe's play suggest to me that Shakespeare would have directed the actor playing Shylock to avoid the artificial nose and its tragic implications.

Hath not a Jew a Nose? The Trouble with Stigma in *The Merchant of Venice*

If *Merchant* is clearly no tragedy, it is the enigmatic moral character of Shylock that opens the play up to two possible species, as it were, within the genre of comedy. As I specify the genre of *Merchant* in the following pages, I want to think about the consequent strategies available to Shakespeare for characterizing Shylock. I hope to show a new resonance for the old distinction between a character that is drawn from either art or nature, since this familiar conceit fits so nicely into a discussion of Shylock's nose as also either artificial or natural. Here Stevie Simkin has perceptively unpacked “the artificiall Iewe of Maltas nose”: “The description is a transferred epithet – that is to say, a phrase where the adjective ('artificial') is transferred from the appropriate noun ('nose') to another noun ('Jew').... It is not only the false nose (worn presumably by Edward Alleyn when playing the role) that is artificial, but Barabas himself” (149). In this section, I weigh the implications of visually figuring Judaism in either the Jew's clothes or the Jew's nose, coordinating these options with the two kinds of characters I have named, natural and artificial. If Shylock wears an artificial nose, I argue, then his moral character is absolute, coded in his race: he could never not be Jewish. Thus *Merchant* is a moral comedy replacing a Jewish vice with a Christian virtue. If, however, Shylock wears no artificial nose, only Jewish clothes, then his character is variable, open to alteration: he can convert religions (which means moral regeneration) as he can change clothes. Now *Merchant* is a comedy of errors correcting the religious foolishness of the Jew with a Christian education.

Here I am referring to a *comedy of errors* and a *moral comedy*, two different kinds of comedy that come from two different traditions, the one classical and the other medieval. The first kind comes from Aristotle, who gives this surprisingly corporeal definition of comedy in the *Poetics*:

Comedy is, as we have said, a representation of people who are rather inferior – not, however, with respect to every kind of vice, but the laughable is only a part of what is ugly. For the laughable is a sort of error and ugliness that is not painful and destructive, just as, evidently, a laughable mask is something ugly and distorted without pain. (1449a)

Laughing at what is “ugly” and “distorted”: Is this our response to the stage-Jew and his artificial nose? It might be “a laughable mask” that makes him “ugly,” but I have suggested that stage-stigma signals an essentially villainous character that is “painful and destructive,” like Richard or Barabas. Whether physical or moral, “inferiority” in Aristotelian comedy is not something absolute. Aristotle calls it “error.” In ancient Greece and Elizabethan England, there are no corrective measures for the physical differences that are loaded with stigma; they signal something more serious than “error.”

The second kind of comedy comes from Dante, who explains the title of his epic, *Commedia*:

Comedy, then, is a certain genre of poetic narrative differing from all others. For it differs from tragedy in its matter, in that tragedy is tranquil and conducive to wonder at the beginning, but foul and conducive to horror at the end, or catastrophe.... Comedy, on the other hand, introduces a situation of adversity, but ends its matter in prosperity. (100)

Contrary to the laughably ugly *characters* in Aristotelian comedy, Dante understands comedy as a simple trajectory in the *narrative*, from “adversity” to “prosperity.” If the genre of comedy is about finding felicity, the comedy of errors does so in spite of the inferiority in its characters, while moral comedy does so on account of the good fortune found at the end of its plot.

It is the comedy of errors that Shakespeare initially establishes in *Merchant* by using the Roman stock characters he had explored a few years earlier in *The Comedy of Errors* (1592-94). Bassanio plays both the *adulescens amator* and the *parasitus*, a “willful youth” (1.1.146) but with a “disabled ... estate” (1.1.123). From this perspective, he is little better than the six other “sponge[s]” Portia enumerates during her introduction (1.2.39-94). With a carefully crafted garrulity the *servus callidus* Gratiano “play[s] the fool” (1.1.79), in contrast to the “clown” Launcelot Gobbo (2.2.1sd), who actually is a fool, or *servus stultus*.⁴ In Belmont, the “lady richly left” (1.1.161) is the *virgo* Portia. “*Her waiting woman*” (1.2.1sd),

⁴ In Italian, *gobbo* means “hunchbacked,” and some scholars have sought to deform Launcelot, but this allusion is tendentious.

Nerissa, plays the maid, or *ancilla*. Together they provide suitable sexual pairings for the lusty youth and his clever slave. Antonio, so dearly “lov[ing]” Bassiano (1.1.131, 132, and 154), is a *senex amator* of a sort, while the *senex iratus* is “old Shylock” (2.5.2), whose body Shakespeare characterizes as aged, not Jewish. As Shakespeare starts *Merchant* in the manner of Roman comedy, the character types from that tradition fill the stage with what Shylock calls “shallow fopp’ry” (2.5.35). Revenge tragedy destines such a society for destruction, but not Shakespeare’s Venice, here in this comedy of errors.

If Shylock can be seen as a Roman stock character, the more English tradition of moral comedy offers another, equally evident, aspect. Shylock cannot be a revenger like Barabas – the genre of *Merchant* does not allow it – but Shakespeare’s comedy can handle the aspect of Barabas that resembles the Tudor Vice. Like the Vice, Shylock enjoys “merry sport” (1.3.145), through which he produces his “merry bond” (1.3.173), although it is formulated with “a villain’s mind” (1.3.179). In the comedy of errors the *senex iratus* is a morally inferior curmudgeon, but in a moral comedy Shylock is the “enemy,” as Antonio puts it (1.3.135). With virtue and vice clearly cut, Portia can say, “I stand for sacrifice” (3.2.57), and Shylock can insist, “I stand for judgment” (4.1.103) or “I stand here for law” (4.1.142). Informing the audience exactly which ethical principle they designate, these two sound just like the allegorical abstractions of sixteenth-century moral comedy. If *Merchant* is a moral allegory, then Portia is the Christian virtue Mercy and Shylock the Jewish vice Law, and the two personifications battle for control of Everyman’s soul, as depicted during Antonio’s hearing, until Mercy finally conquers Law. As Law, Shylock carries the appropriate allegorical accouterment, the scales of justice (4.1.255). As Vice, Shylock also wields a knife (4.1.124), one certainly sharper than the Vice’s dagger of lathe.

Like Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-99), the early English stage does not distinguish between “villain” and “Jew.”⁵ To see Shylock alternately as the *senex iratus* and as the Vice, however, is to see that Shakespeare’s character can accommodate different versions of villainy, ranging from error to enmity. It is important to remember the semantic range of the word *villain*, from the Latin *villa*, “country house.” Etymologically *villain* signals a low-born and base-minded social inferior, but in literary usage the word comes to signify a more sinister antagonist.

⁵ Benedick does not distinguish “villain” from “Jew” thematically, nor does Shakespeare grammatically: “If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain; if I do not love her, I am a Jew” (2.3.262-63). On this proverbial phrase, see Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 8.

It is these various villainies possibly present in Shakespeare's characterization of Shylock that lend *Merchant* alternately to a classical comedy of errors or the medieval moral comedy.

The comedy of errors is about the confusion that ensues when characters forget to balance their personal desires with their social responsibilities, so the character types of Roman comedy each represent a mixture of virtue and vice. This kind of comedy creates a world in which the confused stand around, or more often scuttle about, awaiting reformation. The comedy of errors finds felicity because each character can be educated up out of his or her mistakes and brought back to social propriety. If *Merchant* is played as a comedy of errors, then Shylock's anger toward Antonio, boorishly performed, leads him down a steepening path of moral mistakes, which are compounded until finally corrected into the socially responsible morality of mercy inaugurated with his conversion to Christianity.

This comedy of errors cannot possibly handle an artificial nose, insofar as the figure of stigma establishes an innate and absolute villainy, as well as certain tragedy. For this reason, there are (to my knowledge) no physical deformities in the Elizabethan comedies of error that are modeled on Roman new comedy. Like the artificial nose, the Vice has no place in the comedy of errors. As an allegorical aspect of the greater human or social whole, the Vice is uneducable. Without other allegories to oppose it, the Vice would wear down and annihilate the naturalized characters of Roman comedy, who could not endure an incessant evil that constitutionally resists all attempts to reform it. Conflict in the comedy of errors comes from misperception, right and wrong, but the Vice creates a conflict in moral comedy between good and evil. If *Merchant* is played as a moral comedy, then Shylock's enmity toward Antonio, soberly performed, leads to a confrontation between a Christian good and a Jewish evil, until Shylock is bested by his moral superiors and vanquished from the stage.

In Shakespeare's play, is the villainous Jew morally mistaken, an inferior in need of education, or actually an enemy, a Vice at war with a virtue to which it can never acquiesce? Shakespeare allows both species of comedy into the middle acts of *Merchant*: in Act 2 Jessica's conversion shows a comedy of errors where villainy can be corrected, and in Act 3 Shylock's inconsolable rage shows moral comedy pitting virtue against an irreconcilable vice. First, Jessica's conversion reveals that the Jew in *Merchant* is not necessarily the enemy of the Christian. In this iteration, the Jew is ignorant but educable, not evil nor innocent, so still a villain, but open to reformation. No morality is necessarily written into the Jewish

nation, nor the Jewish body, as Jessica says, contrasting herself with her father: “Though I am daughter to his blood, / I am not to his manners” (2.3.18-19). For Jessica to “become a Christian” (2.3.31) is for religious identity – which in *Merchant* means moral character – to be contingent on conscious decision rather than attached absolutely to the conditions of one’s birth.⁶ Thus when Jessica becomes “a gentle, and no Jew” (2.6.51), Shakespeare envisions her conversion in her clothes: she disrobes her Jewish fashions to appear “*above in boy’s clothes*” (2.6.25sd). An artificial nose on Shylock is possible, but it seems highly unlikely on Jessica, whose religious identity exists not absolutely in her Jewish body but contingently in the clothes she chooses to wear, Jewish or Christian. She is not regulated by the figure of stigma, because her body is not marked off. As Salerio says to Shylock when the Jew laments his lost daughter, “There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory” (3.1.39-40). The line suggests another stigma to identify and discredit Shylock, tawny skin, and in his Arden edition of *Merchant* John Drakakis speculates that the roles of Shylock and Morocco were doubled (404). If, like the Prince of Morocco, Shylock has “the complexion of a devil” (1.2.130), Jessica shares the “fair flesh” of the Christian Antonio (1.3.130), or the “fair” skin of the Christian Portia (1.1.162), with color moralized here into a virtuous light skin and a vicious dark skin. Shakespeare repeatedly figures religious conversion in the skin color of “fair Jessica” (2.4.28, 39), who writes to her Christian fiancée with “a fair

⁶ Much of *Merchant* interrogates, as Portia puts it, “the word *choose*” (1.2.22-23), especially the tension between the human desire to choose one’s own destiny and the angst of a situation where one has no choice. Early in *Merchant*, Shakespeare poses the problem of religious choice, or conversion, when Antonio calls Shylock a “gentle Jew” after they seal their bond: “The Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind” (1.3.177-78). Here “kind” means “nice,” but it also sounds its etymology, *kin*, or family, even race, the people to whom you are naturally nice. In Antonio’s statement, Shakespeare suggests the possibility of “growing kind,” or becoming familiar with those who are foreign, asking whether kinship is determined by blood or by manners, whether it is something one can “grow” into through, say, religious conversion. Is *kindness* written into our birth, or is it predicated on our action? These two perspectives produce two readings of the statement that there is “much kindness in the Jew” (1.3.153). In one interpretation, there is “much [hospitality] in the Jew,” suggesting a cross-cultural kindness; but in another interpretation, there is only, tautologically, “much [Jewishness] in the Jew.” This latter kind of *kindness* references a Jewish identity that can be nothing other than Jewish (including hospitable, the former kind of *kindness*). This tautological kind of “Jew” is synonymous with “villain,” as in Gobbo’s polyptoton: “I am a Jew if I serve the Jew any longer” (2.2.112-13).

hand, / And whiter than the paper it writ on / Is the fair hand that writ” (2.4.12-14). Jessica’s conversion to Christianity even signals a moral education that might emanate to Shylock: “If e’er the Jew her father come to heaven, / It will be for his gentle daughter’s sake” (2.4.33-34). As Lorenzo continues, however, he says the Jewish nation might have a necessarily tragic fate operating independent of any conscious moral choice: “And never dare misfortune cross her foot, / Unless she do it under this excuse, / That she is issue to a faithless Jew” (2.4.35-37). For this reason, Gobbo later playfully pontificates to Jessica, “I think you are damned” (3.5.5-6). There will be, Jessica mocks, “no mercy for me in heaven because I am a Jew’s daughter” (3.5.32-33), to which she responds with a summary of her comedy of errors: “I shall be sav’d by my husband, he hath made me a Christian” (3.5.19-20).

In the idiom of Elizabethan comedy, the error of Jessica’s Judaism in Act 2 is open to education, but the enmity of Shylock’s Judaism in Act 3 is unalterable and must be attacked. Seeing Jewishness as a villainy alternately to be corrected or to be conquered drives us to the core question of what exactly Shakespeare’s Jew is: how does Shakespeare want us to see this character, as a human being or as a cultural stereotype? Here we can separate the two identities Shakespeare collapses in his stage directions for “Shylock the Jew.” I shall speak of one possibility called “Shylock” and one called “the Jew.”⁷ The first is a “he,” the second an “it,” so “Shylock” refers to an un-nosed character, while “the Jew” invokes the artificial device. “The Jew” is the Vice, so it is a dramatic convention, an artificial construction of evil, but when he is only morally inferior, not evil, “Shylock” is a human being, fully naturalized. In my reading, *Merchant* is about Shakespeare’s attempt to make a character (“the Jew”) into a human (“Shylock”), which I say thinking about Charles Lamb’s juxtaposition of a Barabas that is stigmatized and a Shylock that is not:

Shylock in the midst of his savage purpose is a man. His motives, feelings, resentments, have something human in them.... Barabas is a mere monster brought in with a large painted nose to please the rabble.... It is curious to see a superstition wearing out. The idea of a Jew (which our pious ancestors contemplated with such horror) has nothing in it now revolting. We have tamed the claws of the beast, and pared its nails, and now we take it to our arms, fondle it, write plays to flatter it: it is visited by

⁷ Although I have not seen this formulation elaborated, it is suggested by Brooke: “He is not only Shylock, he is a Jew” (140); and Cohen: “Shylock is addressed as ‘Shylock’ only seventeen times in the play. On all other occasions he is called ‘Jew’ and is referred to as ‘the Jew’ ” (54).

Princes, affects a taste, patronizes the arts, and is the only liberal and gentlemanlike thing in Christendom. (31)

Amidst this notionally refined but really inhumane conceptualization of “the idea of a Jew,” Lamb articulates two possible ways to play “it.” On the one hand, “the Jew” in *Merchant* could have been a monstrous bogey like Barabas, where “it” is an artificial construction, either the revenger or the Vice. On the other hand, Shakespeare’s “Shylock,” though still a villain, seems more human than Barabas, for “he” is a naturalized character, not a monster.

Shakespeare shows these two strategies for characterizing “Shylock the Jew” in the altered basis of the character’s identity, which comes from “its” religion in 1.3 but from “his” bare human being in 3.1. First, when the Christians invite it to dinner, the Jew identifies itself through a religious difference allowing no communion: “I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you” (1.3.33-38). Later, however, Shylock famously subordinates his Jewish identity to a universal human community based not on religious difference but on biological similarity: “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?” (3.1.61-64). It is significant that Shakespeare’s blazon passes over the nose, the one body part that might determine whether we should see a naturalistic “Shylock” or an artificial “Jew.” Moments like this illustrate what I mean by Shakespeare’s irony. In his assertion of bare human being, Shylock could have said, “Christians and Jews smell with the same noses,” which would have confirmed Shakespeare’s rejection of the artificial nose; but Shakespeare goes out of his way to avoid the most obvious physical feature of the Jew’s body, leaving open the possibility that Shylock dons the nose. This dramaturgical indeterminacy actually fits the thematic irony of this scene perfectly, for Shylock only appeals to a universal human community in the service of his quest for revenge: “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” (3.1.68-71). In other words, Shylock’s most human and usually sympathetic moment is tethered to his intensely artificial heritage as a Vice and a revenger who cannot act otherwise.

The possibility that an Elizabethan Shylock wore the nose refocuses the famously problematic question Portia asks upon arriving in Venice: “Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?” (4.1.174). Portia seems to say neither Antonio nor Shylock appears in such a way that makes his

identity self-evident. Shylock wears no Jewish nose, it would seem, nor even Jewish clothes. Insofar as Shakespeare usually minds the relationship between spectacle and character closely, an identical appearance could suggest a moral equivalence between Antonio and Shylock, each partly responsible for letting their bond get so out of hand. Shakespeare might be making this point, but completely indistinct appearances seem highly unlikely to me, and Portia's line does not land if Shylock has even the most moderate Jewish attire. I can easily imagine, however, Portia uttering the line sarcastically, to roaring laughter, as she recovers from the shock of seeing a hyperbolically Jewish Shylock, clothed head-to-toe in Jewish regalia and wearing an obnoxiously bulbous nose: "Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?" In the void of evidence that the Elizabethan Shylock wore an artificial nose, Portia's disarming question is a rare reason to think he did.

Even though Portia starts by insulting "the Jew," she proceeds, like the Duke, with an appeal to an individual. "Is your name Shylock," she asks, and he answers, proudly, surprised to be addressed as a man rather than a monster, "Shylock is my name" (4.1.176). When Portia insists, however, "must *the Jew* be merciful" (4.2.182), she undercuts herself, since "the Jew" that is abstractly constructed to signify Law is not capable of mercy. "Shylock" is, but not "the Jew." Thus Portia pleads once more with "Shylock" (4.1.227), but her appeals do not resonate with "the Jew," as the character is called for the rest of the scene (4.1.231, 280, 292, 321, 346, 393).

The shifting appellations used by Shakespeare's Venetians express the nebulous identity of their opponent, as well as the alternate possibilities for the scene's comic resolution. When Antonio's bond is eventually forgiven, and felicity finally found in Venice, it is punctuated with the demand that "Shylock the Jew" convert to Christianity. Since Charles Macklin's sympathetic performance of the character in 1741, and acutely since World War II, it has been popular to view Shylock as a man wronged by Antonio before the play begins, then wronged again by Portia during the scene at court. I doubt many Elizabethans saw Shylock's conversion in this way. They would not have asked if it was a good thing done fairly. They would have assumed it was, then spent their interpretive energy asking what kind of comedy they had seen come to completion, asking how the comic promise of felicity had been fulfilled: had the villainy of "the Jew" been conquered in a moral comedy, or had the villainy of "Shylock" been corrected in a comedy of errors?

To summarize: on the one hand, *Merchant* can be a moral comedy, featuring "the Jew" and its artificial nose. To stigmatize Shylock with this

dramaturgical device is to suggest that the character is equally artificial, an allegorical abstraction of a certain kind of immorality, like the Vices that annoy the Tudor interludes. With its character predetermined by its conceptual significance, thus absolute and impervious to change, this villain is an enemy whose actions can be altered no more than the stage-Jew can hide its humongous nose. From this perspective, *Merchant* is a morality play depicting the conquest of a Christian virtue, Mercy, over one of its most persistent challenges, Law. Thus the Jew and its legal absolutism are expelled from the play in Act 4, left to wander the earth like Cain, while the Christian characters find felicity in Act 5. Even Antonio gets his ships. On the other hand, *Merchant* could be seen as a comedy of errors featuring “Shylock,” who wears no artificial nose. To abandon this dramaturgical device is to humanize the character according to the naturalized stock characters of Roman comedy. As *senex iratus*, Shylock is still a villain, but his villainy can be corrected with religious conversion. Rather than an enemy, this version of Shylock is an inferior whose errors can be amended, just as he can change into Christian clothes. While the character of the Vice is absolute, the *senex iratus* is open to education. It is this willingness to change his behavior, howsoever begrudgingly, that allows Shylock to remain in the state of Venice after his hearing. Barabas isn’t so lucky.

We cannot know with any certainty which way an Elizabethan experienced *The Merchant of Venice*, for two reasons. First, Shakespeare’s irony is often canceled in performance when a company must make dramaturgical decisions that privilege one interpretation over another, like whether or not Shylock should wear the artificial nose. In the dramatic illusion Shakespeare envisioned and we recreate for ourselves when we read his text, Shylock may or may not wear the artificial nose. In a theatrical performance, with all the finality of the material world, Shylock either is or is not stigmatized. Until we know whether or not the Elizabethan actor playing Shylock wore the artificial nose, we cannot know how Lord Chamberlain’s Men encouraged their audience to interpret the character.

Second, in the Christian ethics an Elizabethan draws from the Bible, there are inconsistent instructions about how to respond to inferiority, as evident in the plight of the stigmatic. Throughout the Bible, stigma always signals inferiority, but the stigmatized are excluded from God’s sacred society in some books of the Bible and included in others. In *Leviticus* the Lord tells Moses to deny priesthood to anyone with a “blemish ... lest he pollute my Sanctuaries” (21.18-23). Here, with impure souls somehow expressed in their defective bodies, the stigmatized are encountered and

exiled by God's lieutenant on earth, as occurs in the figure of stigma in early English drama. In the terms of my discussion on dramatic genre, *Leviticus* and its ethics of exclusion align with the concerns of moral comedy, where vice is vanquished by a superior virtue. It is when *Merchant* is seen from this perspective that "the Jew," a sinister evil stigmatized by its artificial nose, must be attacked and vanquished from the blessed community of Christians Shakespeare creates in Act 5.

In contrast, other books of the Bible welcome the stigmatic into God's fold, although this inclusion takes two different forms. First, the stigmatics are sometimes accepted, inferiority and all. When David wants to "shewe the mercy of God" to his friend Jonathan, he hosts a dinner for Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, who was "lame of his feete" (2 *Sam.* 9.3). Jesus moralizes this gesture: "When thou makest a feast, call the poore, the maimed, the lame, and the blind" (*Luke* 14.13). These are the ethics of acceptance at play in *Merchant* when Bassanio invites Shylock to dinner. It is heartening to imagine a stigmatized Shylock sharing table fellowship with Venetian Christians in a moment of mutual recognition, but Shylock throws the invitation back in Bassanio's face. Racial tensions are so strained in Shakespeare's Venice that there can be no communion between Christian and Jew. In the play Shakespeare wrote, Shylock cannot be accepted for who he is. His inferiority must be either conquered or corrected.

Thus, if Shylock is to join the sacred society, this inclusion is predicated on the correction of his inferiorities, moral and possibly physical as well. Rather than exclusion or acceptance, some Biblical stigmatics experience what might be thought of as a "messianic orthopedics." From the promises of the prophets, to the miracles of Jesus, to the healings of his apostles, these stigmatics have their inferiorities magically amended by the awesome power of God. While discussing correction in the comedy of errors, I sought to associate it with a "Shylock" who shows no stigma, since the deformities, disabilities, and differences that are stigmatized in the pre-modern world have no corrective measures available to them. The notion that God can miraculously correct organic inferiorities, however, opens up a new possibility for *The Merchant of Venice*.

At Shylock's hearing, and at other times in *Merchant*, Portia speaks – more than mercy, equity, or justice – a rationality that borders on the divine *logos* of Christianity. Her dad set up the ridiculous business with the caskets to select Portia's husband, but when her suitors come to Belmont, she quickly sees how stupid it would be to leave love to chance. When she directs Bassanio to the lead casket, she does not capriciously

suspend the laws of the land so much as she amends an outdated edict based on circumstance. She must massage her father's law into the actual affairs on the ground, just like Jesus in the Gospels. Thus she is a "demigod" (3.2.115) bringing "the joys of heaven here on earth" (3.5.76) and "drop[ping] manna in the way / Of starved people" (5.1.294-95). Shakespeare makes Portia the mediation of deity and humanity, romance and realism, Belmont and Venice. I think it would be too much to associate her transformation into Balthazar with the incarnation of God in the Christian gospels, but her trip to Venice does carry a certain sense of grace. It allows Shakespeare to cancel his bond to the dramatic laws of revenge tragedy in the same moment that Portia cancels Antonio's bond to the civic laws of Venice. In this reading, Portia's appearance in Venice figures the appearance of the messiah awaited by the Jews – she is one of Shylock's "godfathers" after all (4.1.398) – and the conversion of Shylock recalls the conversion of Paul. *Acts* commemorates Paul's conversion to Christianity with a memorable metaphor, the scales falling from his eyes (9.18), which might prompt us to consider a corporeal correlative for Shylock's conversion, like the artificial nose falling from his face.

In 1894, Henry Vibart described an amateur Shakespearean travesty held by some boys at a military academy in south London:

When they essayed to play a piece called 'Shylock Travestied,' Shylock had become possessed by lawful purchase, of a magnificent Jewish nose made of gutta-percha. This nose, a most artistic one, stuck on beautifully in a cold climate; but in the air-excluded room, with the temperature at about 100° Fahrenheit, the case was altered. In the midst of one of Shylock's most telling speeches, the nose became detached, and had to be held on with one hand, whilst the requisite declamation was conducted with the other. (260)

With Jewish-Christian friction heating up in Europe during the 1930s, an Oxford dramaturge described another small and otherwise unremarkable production of *The Merchant of Venice* where "Shylock started so energetically when told he must become a Christian that his Jewish nose came off and fell with a resounding flop on the stage" (Foss 36). For Shylock's nose to fall off in the middle of a performance is one thing, literally revealing the Christian authority behind this representation of a Jew, as well as the unstable artifice of one race stigmatizing the physical differences of another. For Shylock's nose to fall off upon his Christening is another thing, configuring the elimination of this stigma with Shylock's forced conversion. We might imagine an Elizabethan production of *Merchant* planting the artificial nose on Shylock, announcing absolute villainy and unavoidable tragedy according to the figure of stigma; but

then Portia converts the Jew, or *corrects* in the idiom of the comedy of errors, demonstrating the miraculous power of Christianity to alter the laws demanded by stigma on the early English stage. The notion that every Jew has inside a Christian trying to break out is utterly repulsive, though tonally this reading of *Merchant* rings more pro-Christian than anti-Semitic, for which it is hard to fault Shakespeare. If an Elizabethan *Merchant* did use the nose, and play Shylock's conversion as a correction (rather than a conquest), this play would be the only comedy of errors I have seen that can handle stigma, doing so by recruiting some supernatural element that can correct the uncorrectable, Portia, what the Romans called a *deus ex machina*.

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