SHYLOCK AND ANTI-SEMITISM

by Morris U. Schappes

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SHYLOCK IN GEORGIA

AFTER the performance of *The Merchant of Venice* at the University of Georgia in Athens in Feb., "a Jewish school child here in Athens has been repeatedly taunted with the name of *Shylock*, and I would think that this was not the only harm done as a result of exposing many minds in the formative years to the distasteful stereotyping continued in this play," wrote Rabbi Nathaniel Zimskind, Hillel director, to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University.

An article by Adolph Rosenberg, editor of the *Southern Isralite* (Atlanta) June 1, publishes the correspondence and reveals that the University Department of Speech and Drama insisted on presenting the play despite advance protests of the Rabbi and several other Jewish leaders as far back as last July, when announcement of the intention to perform *The Merchant of Venice* was made.

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Shylock and Anti-Semitism

Evidence that the backbone of the play is anti-Semitic

By ***MORRIS U. SCHAPPES***

IN Central Park June 19 the N. Y. Shakespeare Festival, with Joseph Papp as director, will begin its performance of *The Merchant of Venice.* Admission will be free and it is expected that the new theater arena will be filled to its capacity of 2,300 seats. We wish Mr. Papp had been persuaded to follow the example of Orson Welles.

Welles abandoned what he said was a lifelong ambition to play Shylock when he announced in Jan., 1960 that he was cancelling his scheduled London production. Swastikas had appeared at Cologne, West Germany and were being spread by the Nazi international underground into England, the United States and other lands. Welles explained to the London *Express*: "No, until all the church walls are clean — and safely clean, too — I think Shylock, with his Jewish gaberdine, his golden ducats and his pound of flesh, should be kept on the bookshelves until a safer epoch."

Are we in that "safer epoch" now in our country, in New York, anywhere? (Israel is of course excluded and I am not concerned about performances of this play in Yiddish or Hebrew or before exclusively Jewish audiences. To such audiences you could read Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in any language without stirring them to anti-Semitism.) I know of no country in the world today (except Israel) in which performances of *The Merchant of Venice* could be given before general audiences with no risk of reinforcing, stirring or stimulating anti-Semitic attitudes or prejudices. For the anti-Semitism is built into the very structure and backbone of the play and cannot be eliminated if Shakespeare's text is fully or substantially followed.

For 350 years it has been staged with many "interpretations," including attempts to win sympathy for Shylock. Yet the word "Shylock" is, has been and continues to be a term of abuse. There is no record of anyone ever having come away from a reading of the play or the witnessing of even the most "sympathetic" Shylock portrayal who has thereafter used the term "Shylock" as a word of praise for any human being. Yet many who produce the play, including Jewish ac-

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tors performing as Shylock, disregarding the stage history of centuries, vainly assume that *they* will at last find that interpretation which will be both good Shakespeare and, so to speak, "good for Jews." Because we are convinced there has been and can be no such production, we wish as briefly as possible to outline why *the play as a whole* is unalterably anti-Semitic. The fact that the play is full of great poetry and prose and is a product of Shakespeare's mature genius for construction and stagecraft makes it therefore only the more dangerous to perform until we come to that "safer epoch" in which anti-Semitism will be a thing of the past.

The Central Conflict

IT IS necessary to view the play as a whole if one is both to understand it and to grasp its inherent anti-Semitism. Some people pick out *parts* of a couple of speeches by Shylock, ignore the entire dramatic context, treat the excerpts as if they were isolated arias in some lost opera — and come to the conclusion that the play really constitutes a defense of Jews against their persecutors and detractors! Thus in a sadly confused apology for the play published in the B'nai B'rith *National Jewish Monthly* March and April, 1962, Dr. David Klein, a former colleague of mine in the English department at the City College in New York, asserts: "Indeed, if these two passages were all that was extant, would we not conclude that the lost play must have been an arraignment of the world's inhumanity toward the Jews?"

Indeed, yes! But if the play had been lost, the Jews would not have been tagged for centuries with the vile epithet, "Shylock," nor taunted as people who always seek their "pound of flesh." Apart from the bigoted "Christ-killer" epithet, has any image of the Jews been more damaging than that of "Shylock"? (The image of Dickens' Fagin would be next in order.)

But the play is indeed not lost; it is indeed too much with us. And even those isolated passages, when taken in context, as we shall see, take on a meaning quite different from that ascribed to them in isolation.

For what is the play about, what is its central conflict? Writing at the end of the 16th century, Shakespeare presented us with a play in which the tension is caused by a conflict between two ways of lending money: the way of lending money out of love and friendship for the borrower versus the way of lending money to make money by getting interest. In Shakespeare's day this contrast was still an issue. Under feudalism, the Christian Church had banned Christians from practising usury, which was the original term for lending money at *any* interest. As capitalism developed, money-lending at interest, or banking, became a pillar of that social system. The Church compliantly altered its definition of usury to taking money at *excessive* interest, with the definition of excessive depending upon many factors.

But in 1596, when Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice*, capitalism in England was in its infancy and the Church had not yet changed its definition. In fact it was not until 1638-40 that the first work establishing the capitalist theory of interest was produced in Holland (see my citation from W. E. H. Lecky in my *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States*, 1654-1875, N. Y.,

1950, p. 565.) The new money-lending technique of interest was coming to the fore, against the objection of both Church and feudal pre-capitalist or anti-capitalist classes and sentiments.

When Shakespeare, basing himself as usual on old sources, picked his theme and story-line, he decided to cast his weight *against* the new interest-breeding way of lending money and in favor of the old feudal, Christian way of lending it out of friendship. Seeking to add an additional emotional weight to this latter side, Shakespeare stacked the cards against the interest-breeding way of money-lending by making that money-lender a Jew. This was done deliberately by Shakespeare, since in his source the money-lender who exacted the "pound of flesh" was *not* a Jew! *Shakespeare* makes the conflict between two ways of money-lending a conflict between the Christian way and the Jewish way!

Now of course since Shakespeare's day capitalism and money-lending (banking) have become respectable. This social change, and the train of consequences that included humanitarian sentiments and even the beginning of the struggle for emancipating the Jews of England, caused some people to be uneasy about the obvious bias of a conflict between Christian money-lending and Jewish money-lending, since under capitalism money-lending has no religion. Beginning in 1814, therefore, actors (and some critics) tried to tone down the anti-Semitism because Shylock as mere money-lender was no longer so hateful as he was in Shakespeare's day. How ineffective these efforts have been is documented unintentionally in Dr. Toby Lelyveld's *Shylock on the Stage* (Western Reserve Univ. Press, Cleveland, 1961, 149 pages, $4.95 — see my comment, JEWISH CURRENTS, Oct., 1961). These well-intentioned efforts, despite all kinds of mutilations of the text, including often the omission of the entire last act, could not succeed exactly because the backbone of the play is anti-Semitic, that is, it shows with all Shakespeare's genius that the Christian way of money-lending is good and noble and the Jewish way is evil, malevolent and must be routed. This backbone is there no matter how any intepreter paints a feature, lops a limb, twists or stresses an isolated passage here or there to seek to change the overall effect.

In fact, moreover, from the humanist point of view, lending money out of friendship is superior to lending at interest, and no one who follows Shakespeare's guidance can help but rejoice in the besting of the malevolent Shylock and the triumph of the attractive characters Shakespeare has marshalled in opposition to Shylock. Shakespeare called his play a "comicall history" or a comedy, that is, a play with a happy ending. The happiness of that ending requires the besting of Shylock, his utter rout and discomfiture. When that is achieved, when Jewish money-lending has been downed and the virtues of Christian money-lending been exalted, the fifth act comes as a fitting gay and delightfully poetic climax.

Of course if you cannot swallow the anti-Semitism involved in the heart of the concept you may be in no mood fully to enjoy the last act. But it is better to face the anti-Semitic essence of the play than to attempt to distort it (in vain) into its opposite, or even to deny that the effect is anti-Semitic as if the disclaimer will show you to be broad-minded in the face of true art and therefore render you impervious to the evil effects.

Four Problems

THE situation at the beginning of the play may be described in terms of the problems of the four main characters.

The Merchant of Venice himself is Antonio (*not* Shylock, as so many people assume; Shylock is a moneylender, not a merchant). Antonio's problem is that he is wealthy but his capital is all at sea, invested in ships sailing many waters. He makes money as a merchant; he has lent much money to his good friend Bassanio, not for interest but for friendship. With his wealth tied up in sea-ventures, Antonio cannot, although he wants to do so, lend more money to Bassanio.

Bassanio's problem is that he has squandered Antonio's loan and needs another loan so he can solve his financial worries by trying to win the rich and beautiful Portia.

Portia's problem is in how to abide by her father's strange will — according to which her inheritance depends upon her accepting the man who chooses the right casket — and still get the husband she wants apart from the casket choice.

Shylock's problem is that he could make much more money as a moneylender were not Antonio constantly denouncing his taking interest in the money-marts and thus forcing down the rate of interest.

The problems of the first three are solved by the end of the play: Antonio gets his ships back safely; Bassanio gets Portia and her money; Portia gets her Bassanio. And Shylock gets it in the neck after almost spoiling everything for everybody else. Shakespeare was not aiming at any Jews in England in his day because there were none — and had not been for three centuries. He *was* aiming at interest-breeding capitalist moneylending and making it more hateful by making it seem Jewish rather than merely a matter of another economic method. He transformed an economic difference into a difference of morality, religion and race. Whether *Shakespeare* was "anti-Semitic" is of no importance. His *play* is.

Shylock Introduced

SHYLOCK does not appear until the third scene of Act One. We are not concerned *here* with whether Shylock is played in a broad comic, or even farcical, style *as he was for more than a century*, or as a serious dramatic figure — although it is important to keep the first type of portrayal in mind, because even some of his "best" speeches, if presented in a comic "Jewish accent," get entirely different meanings. We want to examine how Shakespeare introduces his Shylock.

Shylock's first words are, "three thousand ducats, well," as he walks on stage, talking to Bassanio, who has been telling him what Antonio wants to borrow. When Antonio comes on stage, Shylock gives us his two reasons for hating him — and note the order in which he names them:

How like a fawning publican he looks!
I hate him for he is a Christian;
But more *for that in low simplicity*
He lends out money gratis and brings down
The rate of usance [*interest*] *here with us in Venice.*

Apart from the effect on Shakespeare's or any other audience of Shylock's hating Antonio because he is a Christian, is there any question that the more important reason is that Antonio is hurting Shylock's business by lending out money for nothing?

Edmund Kean as Shylock
Hiram Stead Coll., N. Y. P. L.

Then Shylock tells the audience he is out to "get" Antonio:

If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.

This is noteworthy at the very beginning because there are those who try to excuse or explain Shylock's insisting on his pound of flesh as a consequence of his rage over the fact that his daughter has eloped with a Christian and robbed him. That this excuse is hollow is evident when you consider that Jessica herself says in Act 3, Sc. 3 that, when she was still in her father's house:

I have heard him swear . . .
That he would rather have Antonio's flesh
Than twenty times the value of the sum
That he did owe him . . .

In the same speech, Shylock continues to explain why he hates Antonio — and again note the stress on "interest" as the basic reason for Antonio's attack on Shylock:

He hates our sacred nation; and he rails,
Even there where merchants most do congregate,
On me, my bargains, and my well-worn thrift,
Which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe,
If I forgive him!

Is there any doubt that the main conflict is between lending "money gratis" and lending at "interest," and that Antonio is spoiling Shylock's business with other merchants than Antonio? And when Shylock tries to justify his methods by telling the story from Genesis of Laban and Jacob and the sheep, Antonio's comment is: "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose." (How many who quote that line remember that it was originally a thrust at Shylock the Jew defending his money-lending at interest?)

As the scene unfolds we come to one of the two passages most frequently taken out of context to present a "sympathetic" Shylock. Pressed by Antonio for an answer as to whether he can borrow from him, Shylock answers at length:

Signior Antonio, many a time and oft
In the Rialto you have [be]rated me
About my money and my usances [interest]:
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug:
For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,
And all for use of that which is mine own. . . .

Again Shakespeare underscores that Antonio's hostility is not based on

Shylock's religion but on his lending money at interest.

Before the scene ends, the "merry bond" is signed by which Antonio gets the loan and Shylock the possibility of the "pound of flesh" if the loan is not repaid on time, but without interest. However, the audience, having heard Shylock's soliloquy about catching Antonio "upon the hip" to "feed fat the ancient grudge" he bears him, now hears Shylock disclaim to Antonio that he would actually take the forfeiture because

A pound of man's flesh taken from a man
Is not so estimable, profitable neither,
As flesh of mutton, beefs or goats.

Yet when the trial scene comes and he demands the pound of flesh, Shylock answers the question what use will the flesh be for him with the spiteful cry, "To bait fish withal."

Stacking the Cards

TO sharpen the contrast between Antonio, whose money-lending is governed by Christian ethics and friendship, and Shylock, the Jew who lends money at interest (usury), Shakespeare skilfully uses many resources. One is to show that Shylock is despised by all those close to him except other Jewish money-lenders like Tubal.

The first is Shylock's servant, the clown Launcelot Gobbo, brought on in Act 2, Sc. 1. To him, "the Jew my master" is "a kind of devil," indeed, "the very devil incarnal." So much so that Launcelot has decided to quit Shylock's service and try to get a place with a good man—Bassanio. When Launcelot's father comes along with a present for Shylock, Launcelot cries out: "My master's a very Jew: give him a present! give him a halter: I am famished in his service . . ." So — Shylock starves his worker. And characteristically, Shylock later (Act 2, Sc. 5) complains of Launcelot that he is "a huge feeder."

But Launcelot is not the only member of Shylock's household who wants to leave it. His own daughter, the lovely, modest and tender Jessica, cannot stand her father. In her very first appearance on the stage (Act 2, Sc. 3) she immediately tells us, "Our house is hell." She is "ashamed to be my father's child" but explains that "I am a daughter to his blood" but "not to his manners." And we learn she plans to elope with and marry a Christian. Thus long before Shylock's full villainy is presented to the audience, it sees him as one that no one but Jewish money-lenders can stand.

When we next see Shylock, Shakespeare underlines another characteristic to make him repulsive to the audience. He has been invited out to supper, and does not really want to go because

I am not bid for love; they flatter me:
But yet I'll go in hate, to feed upon
The prodigal Christian."

Thus we are reminded of Shylock's early words about Antonio: "I hate him for he is a Christian." For contrast, Shakespeare asks us to enjoy the following scene when Jessica elopes with Lorenzo, taking her father's ducats and jewels — to serve the old villain right.

Shakespeare returns to his task of making Shylock as hateful and contemptible as possible in Act 2, Sc. 8, in which Antonio's friends mock Shylock's reaction to Jessica's elopement. Shylock is described sportively as crying:

My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!

We learn later, when we hear Shylock himself carrying on, that this account is by no means exaggerated.

Shylock is seen next in Act 3, Sc. 1, crucial in several respects both to the understanding and the attempts to reinterpret the entire play. First we learn that our hero, The Merchant of Venice, Antonio, is suffering reverses, his ships being reported lost at sea. He is in danger if Shylock insists on his "merry bond." Antonio's friends taunt Shylock on Jessica's elopement — and then ask whether he has heard of Antonio's ships. At this point Shakespeare reasserts the central issue of the play: lending "money gratis" or at interest. Shylock rages at Antonio: "a beggar, that was used to come so smug upon the mart; let him look to his bond: he was wont to call me usurer; let him look to his bond: he was wont to lend money for a Christian courtesy; let him look to his bond." Christian courtesy versus Jewish usury is the issue — how can one escape that essence of the play?

Immediately after this we get the speech *part of which* is the famous "aria," "hath not a Jew eyes . . ." Examined in its dramatic context, both in relation to what has just preceded it and what follows it directly, what does this speech say?

Antonio's friend Salarino, alarmed by Shylock's cries, "let him look to his bond," asks, "Why, I am sure, if he forfeit, thou wilt not take his flesh: what's that good for?"

"To bait fish withal," Shylock viciously retorts; "if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge." We have not forgotten Shylock's early threat that if he catches Antonio upon the hip, he "will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him." Now we get the note of revenge, which Shakespeare will contrast with Christian mercy ("the quality of mercy" speech) in order to place on a new emotional level the basic issue of Christian versus Jewish types of money-lending. This issue will now be surcharged with the contrast between Jewish vengeance and Christian mercy.

Shylock proceeds at once to summarize what evil Antonio has done him; and it is well to note again the order in which Shakespeare writes the sequence, stressing the economic harm Antonio has done Shylock: "He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains [by taking interest], scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains [by lending money gratis], cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? . . ."

And the climax of Shylock's insistence on the *physical* humanity of the Jew is that he will take revenge against Antonio, the kind and generous Christian, who lends money out of friendship and drives down the rate of interest that Shylock can charge on the Rialto.

That Shakespeare is *not* holding Shylock up for admiration as the long-suffering and persecuted Jew who finally asserts his humanity and dignity can be seen from what follows immediately after Shylock has ended his speech. Tubal comes in, returning from trying to find Jessica. What does Shylock say when he is told Tubal could not find her, this Shylock, who has just protested he is like every other human being, "fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same dis-

eases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is."

Shylock's words are: "Why, there, there, there, there! a diamond gone, cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfort! The curse never fell upon our nation till now; I never felt it till now."

There is a monstrously cunning demonstration by Shakespeare of Shylock's character: "sufferance is the badge of all our tribe" indeed, when it is not persecution for religious belief that Shylock really feels is the curse upon his "nation" but the loss of a 2,000 ducat diamond. "I never felt it [the curse] till now . . ."! Is this the man we are supposed to identify with, in or out of context?

But this "Jew who hath eyes" proceeds to an even more horrible self-indictment, underlying the way we have already heard from Antonio's friends that Shylock commingles the loss of daughter and ducats in a contemptible and comic way. Says Shylock: "I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!" There's an admirable and "sympathetic" statement to make of Shylock a "positive" symbol of suffering Jewry . . .

But it is as the scene ends that Shakespeare really turns the anti-Semitic knife. Shylock is now bent on vengeance and his pound of flesh. He asks Tubal to prepare an officer who will arrest Antonio. Lest we have any doubt as to Shylock's motive, he states it again clearly: "I will have the heart of him, if he forfeit; for, were he out of Venice, I can make what merchandise I will." That is, he will be able to do business without Antonio's interference.

But where does Shylock arrange to meet Tubal in order to continue the plan to "get" Antonio — at the Rialto, the business exchange, or at his own or Tubal's home? Not at all. The scene ends with Shylock crying out, immediately after the sentence just quoted, "Go go, Tubal, and meet me at our synagogue; go, good Tubal; at our synagogue, Tubal." Is further comment necessary on how Shakespeare stacks the cards not only against Shylock as *a* Jew but against Jews?

It is with relief, if we follow Shakespeare's bent, that we get the contrast in the next scene, with the lovable and lovely Portia and the good Bassanio picking the right casket to win fair Portia. To mar the pleasure, this charming company learns that Antonio's life is in danger; Jessica here stresses the acuteness of the danger by revealing that her father had told Tubal he wanted Antonio's pound of flesh rather than 20 times the sum he had lent Antonio. Two minutes later (Act 3, Sc. 3) we see Shylock again, making the theater ring with his insistent cry, "I will have my bond." When Antonio, under arrest, pleads with Shylock, the latter cries:

Jailor, look to him: tell me not of mercy;
This is the fool that lent out money gratis;
Jailor, look to him.

Should you have forgotten the essential conflict in the play, Shakespeare makes sure you remember it as the climax approaches. Antonio adds his own emphasis to what Shylock has just said:

He seeks my life: his reason well I know:
I oft deliver'd from his forfeitures

Many that have at times made moan to me;
Therefore he hates me.

The Anti-Semitic Climax

IT IS in the great court-room scene in Act 4 that Shakespeare makes his final confrontation between what is presented as Christian mercy versus the Jew's insistence on "judgment," the "law" and his bond for a pound of Antonio's flesh nearest his heart. The Duke presiding over the Court defines the situation when he opens by saying to Antonio:

I am sorry for thee: thou art come to answer
A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch
Uncapable of pity, void and empty
From any dram of mercy.

Shylock, urged by the Duke to relent, refuses because "by our holy Sabbath have I sworn/ To have the due and forfeit of my bond . . ." He disdains to give a reason:

So can I give no reason, nor I will not,
More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing
I bear Antonio . . .

Antonio concedes it is impossible to soften Shylock's "Jewish heart." Shylock begins to sharpen on the sole of his shoe the knife with which he will cut Antonio's pound of flesh. Portia appears, delivers her "quality of mercy" speech, agreeing that since Shylock has law and justice on his side he may have his pound of flesh. Bassanio offers Shylock "twice the sum" of his loan to Antonio. Shylock retorts, "An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven."

Shylock is ready not only with his knife but with the scales in which to weigh Antonio's pound of flesh. When Portia asks whether he has a doctor ready "To stop his wounds, lest he do bleed to death," Shylock asks, "Is it so nominated in the bond?"

Por. *It is not so express'd: but what of that?*
'Twere good you do so much for charity.
Shy. *I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond.*

Thus Shakespeare points up the contrast between the Christian concept of "charity" and the Jew's vengeful insistence on the law.

By this time there can be no one in the audience who has followed Shakespeare's presentation who is not against the malevolent Shylock and who would not rejoice in his defeat. Certainly he *deserves* no sympathy. Therefore the audience shares the relief felt by everyone on the stage when Portia, with consummate cleverness, turns the law itself against Shylock and assures him "Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest."

According to Venetian law, Shylock's estate is confiscated, half going to Antonio, half to the state, and Shylock's life depends upon the mercy of the Duke. The magnanimous Duke grants Shylock his life "that thou shalt see the difference of our spirits," i.e., the difference between Christian mercy and the Jew's vengefulness. Antonio, noble and forgiving, shows his mercy to Shylock by refusing to accept the half of Shylock's estate due him, except as a loan that, on Shylock's death, he will repay to Jessica's husband.

Antonio asks the court for two more favors: that Shylock will his fortune to Jessica and her husband, and that Shylock immediately become a Christian. (In the code of his time and in Christian thinking this is real generosity, since Shylock will thus be enabled to attain salvation.) The

Duke of course agrees to these generous terms — and Shylock, sick, exits. The triumph of virtue over evil in the terms Shakespeare has used — the wicked Jewish lender of money at interest versus the noble Christian merchant who lends money gratis — is complete.

Those actors who, beginning with Edmund Kean in 1814, have tried to twist the play out of shape by presenting a "sympathetic" Shylock have been able *at best* to do *no more* than win the kind of reaction one critic noted in regard to Edwin Booth's Shylock: "we are moved by a sense of pity for Shylock only because it is we who are compassionate and not because of any virtue in Shylock's disposition." The more common result of the so-called "sympathetic" Shylocks is simply to reinforce the stereotype of Shylock as an evil epithet.

The audience, triumphant in the defeat of Shylock, who disappears from the play, is now ready for the happy ending that Shakespeare has provided this comedy. The fifth act, which Kean and others, to be consistent, had to discard for their interpretations, provides a light and lovely conclusion, playful and poetic as only Shakespeare can be.

We have outlined why *The Merchant of Venice* is inherently anti-Semitic in its structure and backbone. There are some who seek lamely to apologize for Shakespeare's play by comparing it favorably with Marlowe's earlier *The Jew of Malta*, a very crude anti-Semitic concoction about a Jew named Barabbas. True, Shakespeare is not as clumsy as Marlowe. Yet his own attitude to this Barabbas is stated in the court-room scene, lines 304-306. The moment is just after Antonio has bid what he regards as his last farewell to Bassanio, as Shylock stands by with knife and scales ready. Bassanio and Gratiano, distraught, tell Antonio they wish their wives were in heaven (dead) to intercede to change "the currish Jew." Shylock's comment is:

These be the Christian husbands. I
have a daughter;
Would any of the stock of Barabbas
Had been her husband rather than a
Christian!

Indeed, Shakespeare is infinitely more skillful than Marlowe — but the backbone of the play is anti-Semitic. Orson Welles recognized this and decided to cancel his production. An even more renowned Shakespearean interpreter, director and actor, Solomon Mikhoels, director of the former Moscow Yiddish Art Theater, told me, in a long interview on this matter when he was in New York in 1943, that *The Merchant of Venice* was not produced in the Soviet Union in any language, not even in Yiddish. Yet Shakespeare is the single most popular dramatist on the Soviet stage. Shelving Shylock has not diminished him.

In our country, anti-Semitism takes many forms, from "polite" exclusion from top-level "social" clubs (at which key economic plans and decisions are frequently made) to the blatant genocidal cry of a Rockwell, "Jews to the gas-ovens!" This is hardly the time and the atmosphere in which *The Merchant of Venice* can be safely performed for a general public.