

Blood and Manners: Rethinking Jewish Difference on the English Renaissance Stage

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Abstract

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English Renaissance plays take a great interest in foreign and exotic peoples, but they usually make it clear which characters are familiar and which are alien. Jewish characters trouble this distinction. “Blood and Manners” investigates how qualities that are traditionally labeled “Jewish” tend in early modern plays to spread beyond the characters meant to embody them. I term this process “assimilative Jewishness.” In order to remedy Jewish categorical vagueness and to re-erect strong boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, early modern stage Jews exemplify vengefulness, greed, literalism, atheism, Machiavellian cunning, and violence. In commercially-focused plays, these stereotypes grapple productively with England’s hopes and fears in the international arenas of commerce and colonization. The activities of international trade encourage its participants to recognize religiously, geographically, and culturally disparate people as linked by material needs and desires. This recognition makes it more difficult, and yet more pressing than ever, to draw clear distinctions between “us” and “them.” In plays by Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Daborne, Jews appear alien upon first glance; yet the traits the plays present as “Jewish” seem to be adaptations to an environment of cutthroat competition, and therefore emerge in those who participate in such environments, whether or not they are actual Jews.

Thus, I argue that Jewish difference often appears as such not because Jewish figures truly are a category apart, but because the plays reject or deny similarities between Jews and non-Jews. Plays containing Jewish characters anxiously reproduce Christianity’s conflicting needs to own and disavow its parent religion, unstable narratives about the sources and meanings of racial difference, and nascent ideas about how nationhood is tied (or not) to geography and religion, all without resolving such anxieties. In chapters on *The Jew of Malta*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and

A Christian Turned Turk, I show how drama's poly-vocality makes it the inevitable outlet for marginalized Jewish voices, and how its status as a performed genre made it possible to translate abstract and theoretical beliefs about Jewish otherness into lived behaviors and experiences that contest otherness as a viable framework for understanding the English relationship to Jews and Judaism.

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Introduction

This is a project about how to understand representations of Jewish difference in early modern English drama. In examining stage representations of Jewish difference, I wish to synthesize critical arguments that approach early modern stage Jews through the various lenses of race, religion, gender, biology, and nationality into one composite understanding of how the English thought about Jews. I also aim to develop a theory on the origins of the impulse to differentiate and categorize, one situated not in a reality of irreducible otherness, but in a rejection of identification or similarity. In a project that studies the intellectual and affective impact of a marginalized people upon the cultural production of a dominant group, ethical ramifications are, to my mind, an inevitable outgrowth. Thus, the intellectual lesson of this project is also a moral one: to reinforce the degree to which human difference (whether of Jews or others) is always a highly constructed, and not a natural, phenomenon. The decision to focus on the Jewish figures of the early modern theater – a group which has already received much critical attention, and therefore may not seem to require more, supports this dual critical and moral goal. To most Americans today, Jews as a group hardly register as different in the ways that they did to the early modern English. The experience of a disconnect between current expectations and those of playgoers in a distant time and place can be a useful reminder that 1) we ought to constantly re-evaluate our own assumptions about the groups of people who constitute our own culture's others, and that 2) though human differences may be cultural constructs, their impact is nevertheless real and often serious for those branded by the stigma of otherness, and therefore they merit our vocal questioning and contestation whenever possible.

Jewish Otherness and Jewish Assimlativeness

In his *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, Raphael Holinshed recounts an oft-repeated story about a Jew who fell into a privy one Saturday in the town of Tewkesbury. Holinshed reports that the Jew, “in reverence of his sabbath would not suffer any man to pluck him forth, whereof the Earl of Gloucester being advertised, thought the Christians should do as much reverence to their sabbath which is Sunday, and therefore would suffer no man to go about to take him forth that day” (2:453-454).¹ By Monday, unsurprisingly, the Jew was dead.

I begin with this tale despite it straying from the generic bounds of this project because it captures several of the tangled strands of English beliefs about Jewish difference in the late sixteenth century, and, being a medieval story, something of the intellectual history of those beliefs as well. To start with, the presence of the Jew in the privy reinforces the sense that Jewishness equals absolute and utter abasement. Jews form a separate and inferior class of people not because of their socioeconomic standing, but by virtue of being Jews, a point this story subtly emphasizes by surrounding the Jew with literal excrement. Though circumstantial in this case instead of intrinsic, the human waste references the belief in a special Jewish odor, attaching a proto-racialized sense of bodily difference to the already-prevalent assumption that Jews are fundamentally other.²

The story also associates Judaism with incorrect religious practice, in the form of excessively rigid adherence to the law. Yet we can also read the Jew in the privy as a surprisingly positive figure for his principled religious devotion. Philip Stubbes draws the lesson that, though the Jew may take religious observance to an extreme, he nevertheless offers a rebuke to

¹ I have modernized the spelling. This same story also appears in Philip Stubbes’ *Anatomie of Abuses* and John Stow’s *A Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles*.

² David S. Katz discusses the *foetor judaicus* as one of many physical features thought to differentiate Jews (108). James Shapiro explains how the Jewish smell was part of a variety of efforts to articulate the racial otherness of Jews, but he also shows through the example of Thomas Browne, that some in the 16th century were skeptical of such a biological explanation (172).

insufficiently devout Christians, who should take their faith more seriously, if not quite as seriously as the Jew.³ As Jonathan Gil Harris explains, this Jew resonates ambiguously in both positive and negative directions. He is simultaneously a “scrupulous law-abider and lawless infiltrator” (*Foreign Bodies* 80). He follows laws to the letter, and yet somehow sneaks into England unnoticed.⁴ Adding to his bifurcation, the Jew is physically distinct and yet indistinguishable from non-Jews at the same time – distinct because his body is associated with the filth and stench of the privy, and indistinguishable because his presence apparently went unnoticed until his fateful fall into the privy.

Fear of Jewish infiltration and belief in Jewish innate inferiority resonate in the historical circumstances of the Jews’ residence in England, as well as in imaginative legends such as the Jew in the Tewkesbury privy. In the decades prior to the Jews’ expulsion in 1290, several English Jews converted to Christianity, facilitated by the *domus conversorum*, a house for converts in London established by King Henry III in 1232 (Stacey 267). One well-known convert, Henry of Winchester, was a particular favorite of King Henry’s; Henry knighted him and appointed him to prominent financial offices. Under the reign of King Edward, however, Henry of Winchester was denied a key role in adjudicating coin-clipping trials. Stacey reports that a member of the king’s council objected to Henry’s appointment, on the grounds that

‘he judged it unworthy and not pleasing to God for the faithful of Christ and those born to Christian parents to be subject to a man recently converted from Judaism to Christ and for their lives and limbs to be in the power of such a man, whose

³ If Jews “are but too scrupulous,” according to Stubbes, “we [Christians] are therein plaine contemptuous and negligent” (qtd. in Bartels 86).

⁴ In one tradition, the privy incident occurs after the Jews have been expelled from England in 1290, although Holinshed places the event in 1263. The post-1290 supports Harris’ point about infiltration more strongly, though I have been unable to verify this later date in any of the story’s sources.

conversion and fairness he perhaps held suspect, on account of Jewish perfidy and the ancient hatred of the Jewish people for Christians.’ (Stacey 278)

Henry of Winchester presents a political, socioeconomic, and religious threat to English identity. In his role as judge, he would have power over the lives and livelihoods of non-convert Christians; his elevation to the level of knight and prospective judge reverses the assumed superiority of English and Christian to Jew. His convert status also indicates the permeability of religious (and national, insofar as the English are by default Christians) identity. Though the details of Henry’s story differ greatly from those of the Jew in the privy, in both cases, the English read the Jew as fundamentally other, and do so despite the fact that in both instances, it is unclear exactly what the irreducible element may be. After all, the first Jew attracted notice only when he fell into the privy, and Henry’s conversion so sufficiently integrated him into the English upper classes as to have allowed for his knighthood.

These tales from medieval politics and popular legend open a window onto the forms of Jewish otherness from which the early modern theater draws to create its various stage Jews: bodily inferiority (represented by the stench of the privy); sneaky, infiltrating cunning; obdurate adherence to religious law and its associated incorrect religious interpretation; working in financial professions (often to gain power over Christians); and suspect or incomplete conversion. But, at the same time that the two stories enumerate Jewish differences, they also reveal what I think is an equally useful sense of vagueness about the origins and precise nature of Jewish difference, and especially, in Henry’s case, about what happens to this difference when a Jew converts. If conversion is legitimate, that is, if Jews truly can (and ought) to become Christians, then conversion opens up, in Sharon Kinoshita’s words, a “crisis of non-differentiation” (qtd. in Kaplan, “Jessica’s Mother” 14). A Christian identity that hinges on the

opposition between itself and a reprobate Jewish other risks collapsing into meaninglessness when conversion occurs. But the collapse of distinctions is not entire; King Edward's councilman's decision to exclude Henry of Winchester from the coin-clipping trials implies a belief in residual and irreducible Jewishness, a belief that does the crucial work of propping up the self/other binary.⁵ If conversion were fully efficacious, then there would be no sense of residual difference in the formerly Jewish individual, and Henry's appointment would have been unproblematic.

In tracing the medieval pre-history of early modern stage Jewishness, I follow in the footsteps of M. Lindsay Kaplan, who argues that representations of Jews in early modern England originate in medieval ones. Kaplan draws upon stories such as Henry of Winchester's, images from psalters depicting Jews as black, and laws enforcing Jewish subordination to Christians in order to show that these medieval beliefs contain elements of what we think of as modern racist thought (4-5, 10-15). The fact that medieval Jews could convert to Christianity and yet never quite give up their Jewishness in the eyes of the English reflects a racist ideology of somatic, inheritable, and immutable difference, difference that renders Jews inferior.⁶ With Kaplan, I believe that early modern representations of Jews are not novel; they merit critical attention for their new inflections and purposes in the context of the commercial theater. I branch off from Kaplan by reading early modern plays as cultural products that not only reproduce medieval beliefs, but also recast them for new purposes, especially purposes that employ Jewish

⁵ Of this decision, Stacey concludes, "Through baptism, converts from Judaism became Christians, but this did not mean they had entirely ceased to be Jews in the eyes of their brothers and sisters in Christ" (278).

⁶ Kaplan compares the medieval sense of bodily, inheritable Jewish difference to Kwame Anthony Appiah's definition of modern racism as "biologically" based in order to show the congruencies between them (3).

stereotypes in their own paradoxical undoing.⁷ Through medieval racial logic, religion, and ethnic stereotypes, early modern plays departricularize Jewish traits, making them common in certain environments.

This argument – that historically “Jewish” qualities become common ones in early modern drama, especially in plays that portray international commercial settings – links all three chapters of this project together. From approximately the 1580s through the 1610s, Jewish characters work as tools for thinking about the implications and experiences of participating in international commerce and colonization, at a time when England’s involvement in such spheres was primarily aspirational instead of realized.⁸ In Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* (1589), William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-98), and Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turned Turk* (1612), Jews are most often, though not always, coded as alien. And yet, the traits these plays present as Jewish seem to be adaptations to environments of cutthroat competition, and therefore emerge in those who participate in such environments, whether or not the characters are actual Jews. I call this tendency for “Jewish” traits to spread beyond the characters meant to embody them “assimilative Jewishness.”

Marlowe’s Barabas, the eponymous Jew, provides the clearest example of assimilative Jewishness. The accusations the Maltese governor, Ferneze, lobs at Barabas – inordinate greed,

⁷ In this respect, I also depart from Jonathan Burton, who argues that Jewish stereotypes grow more entrenched and rigid in plays about English interaction with Muslims in the Mediterranean. Burton asserts that “the scoundrel Jew is instrumental to the defense of the Christian position” (198) – in other words, the English need a Jewish scapegoat in order to justify commercial interactions with Muslims which would otherwise render them uneasy. While I actually agree with Burton about the rigidity of Jewish stereotypes in certain cases, I think he is more perceptive when he pursues the consequences of this formula to its logical extent: that such stereotypes often “[reveal] anti-Semitism as a hollow strategy of self-affirmation” (221). When this revelation occurs, I think it also exposes the hidden convergences between Jews and non-Jews, since the stereotypes are clearly nothing more than inventions for and staged by Christians.

⁸ Daniel Vitkus argues that “English authors writing before 1600 express imperial envy, ambition, desire, and fantasy. There was much rhetorical bluster and much interest in the New World, but there was no way of knowing if, when, or where the English (or British) would build an enduring empire” (3).

spiritually unsound interpretation of the world and God's word, and devious back-stabbing – describe no figure in the play better than they do Ferneze himself. What is true of Barabas (for instance, that he secretly plots against those he would seem to work with), is doubly true of the governor (Ferneze ultimately triumphs over Barabas by doing just that – double-crossing him). Similar instances of convergence between Jews and non-Jews occur in *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Christian Turned Turk*. *Merchant* takes great pains to maintain the difference between Jew and Christian in the face of linguistic slippage that threatens to designate Shylock and Antonio as of the same kind, such as when Shylock says he would be friends with Antonio, and when Antonio teases that “the Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind” (1.3.174).⁹ *Merchant* swiftly shuts down these moments of convergence in the trial scene, which reasserts Christian superiority and dominance against Venice's commercially-necessitated tolerance. *A Christian Turned Turk* links Jews to English renegades (individuals who reject religious and national ties for the sake of personal profit) by giving them a shared tendency for self-destruction. Through the elaborately performed suicides of Ward, the English pirate, and Benwash, the cuckolded Jew-turned-Muslim, the play tries to contain the wayward, hybridized energies of renegade and Jew. Whatever its particular manifestation – as vengefulness, greed, renegadism, atheism, or xenophobic endogamy, among others – Jewish difference often appears as such not because Jewish figures truly are a category apart, but because the plays reject or deny fundamental similarities between Jews and non-Jews.

Despite emphasizing the assimilative properties of stage Jewishness, this project does not discard difference as a meaningful concept. Whether real or imagined, human differences come

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, I cite the Norton Shakespeare edition of *The Merchant of Venice* here and throughout the dissertation.

with consequences. Differences are real to the cultures that encounter and deploy them even when they are not factually true, and therefore they merit our attention for the ways in which they can make ideas thinkable or unthinkable and actions performable or impossible. Emily Bartels' study of aliens and otherness in Marlowe's works demonstrates the significance of Jewish difference even (or especially) when it is constructed rather than factual. Barabas embodies Jewish difference, but, "instead of *being* the Jew, [he] strategically *plays* the Jew – or rather, the various Jews – which others fabricate" (100). With Ithamore, Barabas goes through the laundry list of Machiavellian stereotypes; with Ferneze, Barabas plays the role of the greedy Jewish merchant; for the friars, Barabas highlights his religious reprobation. Barabas is different because he *performs* his difference; his performances are so layered and virtuosic as to make it essentially impossible to pinpoint his "essence," if he has one at all. His otherness reflects not fundamental truths about Jews, but his interlocutors' own preoccupations (Bartels 100-106).

Difference and otherness, then, constitute two of my primary arenas of inquiry just as they do for Bartels. I differ from her and other critics interested in race, religion, ethnicity, and colonialism in early modern drama by asserting that Jewish assimilateness surfaces despite the obsession with difference, and by asking why beliefs in Jewish difference persist in the face of empirical evidence of sameness.¹⁰ Each play is a case study that works toward answering the

¹⁰ This is not to say that other critics fail to notice the blurring of distinctions between Jews and non-Jews in English drama. Many of them do notice it, but they address it in ways that differ from my approach. For instance, Mary Janell Metzger, like Kaplan, describes how Jessica can be read as an alternative to Shylock – she is a Jew who can be integrated into Christianity because she is fair-skinned and female, whereas Shylock is a perpetual reprobate who must be expelled. But, in pursuit of those blurry boundaries that allow Jessica to convert, Metzger shows that the characteristics that make her able to be integrated from a racial standpoint in fact cannot be fully overcome: "the logical incompatibility of the play's representations of Jews is impossible to sustain and requires endless permutations. Consequently, the Jessica of Act Five may be read not as an alternative and fully integrated Jew but as a homeless figure that suggest the dangers of consummating a relationship across such differences" (59). In a way, Metzger and I reach diametrically opposed conclusions. I argue that Jewish assimilateness arises in and through apparent differences, and she argues that difference persists despite attempts to assimilate.

above questions. Taken together, the three chapters allow me to theorize that difference originates in rejected similarity or shared identity. In early modern English plays, the fear of identification with Jews and Jewishness produces Jewish difference. It also, I argue, leads to a heightened insistence on these differences. Jews attract English attention and anxiety because Jews are, as a matter of historical, geographical, and theological circumstances, always unstable and flexible in their appearance and connotations. Against all the scholarly and popular “knowledge” of Jews – everything from their religious reprobation to their greed and usury to their strange dietary customs and other unusual rituals – they remain in a sense always unknown, because their adaptability and itinerancy render them difficult to distinguish from the native occupants of whatever land they inhabit. This indeterminacy is certainly true of Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* – we never learn where he is from originally, and he inhabits an island totally devoid (in Marlowe’s representation) of natives. This elision of Jewish and English identities also gets encoded in early modern visual culture and popular printed stories.

In the three plays this project considers, moments that offer the possibility of similarity are precisely those that produce the most violent rejection of common ground and a retreat to difference. Shylock’s offer to be “friends” with Antonio and provide him an interest-free loan provokes Antonio’s insistence that Shylock “lend it rather to thine enemy” (1.3.130). And it is not only non-Jewish characters that reassert boundaries – Shylock is horrified at and refuses Bassanio’s dinner invitation (1.3.27-32), though he will still interact with him for business purposes. These moments of tentative venture into the realm of overlap, community, or continuity between Jews and non-Jews, and the hasty, fearful retreats from them, reveal, to my mind, a tacit acknowledgement that Jewish otherness is constructed instead of natural, an acknowledgement replete with anxiety. The plays’ statuses as works of fiction emphasize this

constructedness. Shylock, Barabas, and Benwash are not “real” Jews in historical or factual senses; the confluences between their characterization and those of non-Jews are literary choices, rather than historical truths. Whether intentional or accidental (and intent, to my mind, is largely irrelevant), Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Daborne create Jewish assimilateness. In a sense, they could have hardly done otherwise, since their stage Jews are products of English minds imagining what Jews must be like.

I base the theory that Jewish otherness on the early modern stage develops out of a rejection of similarities between Jews and non-Jews on Homi Bhabha’s critique of stereotypes in colonial discourses. Bhabha argues that stereotypes are fundamentally ambivalent things, because otherness is “at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (67). In order to construct a colonial subject, colonizers must define forms of difference. Power and exploitation require alterity in justification. Alterity may seem at odds with the “fantasy of origin and identity,” but that incongruence returns to us to the basic ambivalence of stereotypes, and to the psychological utility of rationalization. Stereotypes encode differences between groups of people, accompanied by an evaluation of that difference as inferior (buttressing Kaplan’s excavation of medieval racist ideologies about Jews). Underneath the need to render colonial subjects inferior and thereby justify their subjugation is an even deeper need for the colonizer to convince himself and others that the colonized space and peoples were always and already his. Shared origin and identity help to recast colonial appropriation as rightful ownership, but they also threaten to undo the differences that support hierarchical power structures. Under threat is not only the colonizer’s power, but also his identity, which may merge with the other beyond the point of recognition in his quest for origins.

Jews are not a colonized people, (at least not in the traditional sense of residents of a land invaded and controlled by occupiers), and not in the English early modern period. Nevertheless, though Jews are not prototypical colonial subjects, Bhabha's sense that stereotypes are comprised of competing pressures to articulate difference and discover origins and identity to my mind characterizes early modern understandings of Jews precisely. If Jews are not colonized geographically by a foreign military or political power, then they are colonized ideologically, by Christianity. This figurative extension of colonial stereotypes productively intersects with theological tensions underlying early modern representations of Jews. In her commanding analysis of Christianity and Judaism in *The Merchant of Venice*, Janet Adelman argues that the major work of the play is to reestablish separations between Jew and Christian against forces that undermine categorical distinctions, such as Venice's commercial openness to strangers (21). Adelman reads the Jew as a "figure for the disowned other within the self;" Shylock is a constant reminder of what the play wishes to forget or ignore - that "The Jew is not the stranger outside Christianity but the original stranger within it" (12, 4). To seal off such unwanted knowledge, *The Merchant of Venice* creates a monstrous Jew diametrically opposed to Christians (Adelman 133). Shylock's forced conversion at the end of the trial scene eliminates Jews from Venice, Belmont, and the play on a technicality (that is, Shylock is not dead, though he has been forced to relinquish his Jewish identity), but it also and simultaneously prohibits the total eradication of Jews from the play world – an apt theatrical analogue to the identity disavowal that lingers in Bhabha's stereotypes but can never be recognized as such. In both cases, the same questions of otherness and origins pertain.

The conflicting desires to establish inferior otherness and also to claim ownership over Judaism characterize Christianity's relationship with its parent religion. Christianity can neither

fully accept nor reject Judaism; it views itself as Judaism's legitimate heir, but it cannot eliminate its ancestor entirely because 1) it would not exist without it, and 2) it must believe in the efficacy of conversion. Paul's extended metaphor of the olive tree captures this supersessionist tension in his letter to the Roman congregation. The Jews are the "natural" branches of the tree, "broken off" "through unbelief," while Christians are branches from a "wild Olive tree," "graft in for them, and made partaker of the roote, and fastnesse of the Olive tree" (Romans 11:16-24). Jews are somehow simultaneously other – deservedly broken off because of their lack of faith in Christ – and the same – they share an identity with the Christians as branches of the same tree. That Christian gentiles are the wild branches grafted in to replace the original ones signals an awareness that Christians occupy the role of "other" to the Jews (and I will argue in my third chapter that the association of Christianity with the wild branches marks it as a hybrid, "renegade" religion). Christianity appropriates Jewish scriptures to create its own, a process which paradoxically requires both differentiation - the Christians must be different in order to claim that they are the new, true direction for Judaism, and identification - the Christians must be, if not the same as Jews, then at least sharers in Jewish ancestry in order to legitimize their inheritance.

Paul's metaphor brings up the issue of ancestry. In so doing, it frames religious concerns about spiritual reprobation in terms of biology. Adelman explains how anxieties about Christianity's and Judaism's shared ancestry played out in the early modern period through the example of John Foxe's sermon on the occasion of the conversion of a Jew in 1577. If the olive tree metaphor justifies Christian supersession by engrafting the Christian, gentile branches in place of the broken, reprobate branches of the Jews, then the other promise of the metaphor, that the Jewish branches can be re-grafted in again according to God's will (Romans 11:23-34),

suggests the possibility of genetic cross-contamination. Foxe declares that no scriptural excerpt other than this one from Romans could be “more agreeable for this present occasion” because it serves as a reminder of God’s election of the gentiles and discarding of the Jews (A2r-v, qtd. in Adelman 24), and he emphasizes the unmerited nature of this election by noting how inferior and belated the wild, newly grafted branches are in comparison to the original ones. To Adelman, “[Foxe] wrestles...with the awkward double conviction that though the Christians cannot have merited being chosen, the Jews must have merited being unchosen – or, more precisely, that though the distinction between Christian election and Jewish reprobation cannot strictly speaking be attributed to Jewish desert, the Jews must nonetheless be uniquely at fault” (30). Paul’s metaphor produces Foxe’s double bind, which carries with it three significant consequences: 1) the shared ancestry blurs the distinctions between Christians and Jews, creating a situation that Adelman terms “radical no-difference” (34); 2) the unmerited election of the “wild” gentile branches questions the efficacy of conversion (how can any individual choose to convert if it is up to God to choose whether or not to re-graft in the broken Jewish branches?); and 3) the metaphor racializes the Jews, because their unbelief is part and parcel of their lineage. In order to address the conundrum that Jews do not really deserve Christian hatred if they are merely the victims of God’s capricious choice, Foxe argues that “Iewish infidelitie...seemeth after a certaine manner their inheritable disease, who are after a certaine sort, from their mothers wombe, naturally caried through peruerse forwardnes, into all malitious hatred, & contempt of Christ, & his Christians” (B3r. qtd. in Adelman 34). Foxe’s solution to the problems of distinguishing between Jew and Christian, and justifying God’s rejection of the Jews, is to racialize Jewish lack of belief by making it congenital. The unavoidably monstrous Jew deserves punishment for his reprobation. Jewish religious and racial stereotypes are ultimately mutually constitutive – the

religious stereotype of the reprobate is a racial one, too, since Jews are thought to be intrinsically, bodily reprobate.

What Kaplan and Adelman show in their analyses of *Merchant*, Paul's letter to the Romans, Foxe's sermon, and the pictorial record of racialized Jews is that all such attempts to define and maintain a subordinate, inferior other come from a desire to achieve permanence and stability. In this sense too, Jews can be understood as Bhabha's colonial subjects. For Bhabha, stereotypes are a "discursive strategy of fixity" (66), but a fixity that is usually elusive, desired instead of achieved. The amount of evidence required to "prove" a stereotype will always be in excess of the amount of proof possible – there is never enough evidence to cement it, and so the stereotype must always be anxiously repeated (Bhabha 66). This quest for fixity and its near constant failure in the face of insufficient proof typifies the early modern theater's treatment of Jews. Barabas undermines stable Jewish difference by self-consciously performing different kinds of Jewishness, keyed to the expectations of his various observers. Even the most fixed set of Jewish stereotypes in the play - the list of past "Jewish" crimes he rehearses to Ithamore – fails to cement Jewish otherness or prove such otherness sufficiently because the only evidence we have of its truth is Barabas' own word – a voice the play gives us little reason to trust. In other words, Barabas' list of Jewish traits is falsified by being so obviously stereotypical that it seems like deliberate parody. *A Christian Turned Turk* consistently labels Benwash the "renegado Jew." Despite his conversion to Islam, the play rhetorically forces him to hold onto his Jewish identity. Benwash's murder of his Turkish wife, his wife's partner in adultery, and his servant Ruben Rabshake further support a sort of false permanence (false because "Jewishness" migrates to the English pirate, Ward) by effectively ridding the play world of Jews and opportunities for Jewish reproduction. And in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock shatters the

fantasy of Jewish otherness by forcefully reminding his audiences of the fundamental similarities that unite all humans, even as his speech's subtext reinforces Jewish otherness. This anxious compulsion to emphasize Jewish difference supports the broad argument that early modern representations of Jews form a paradoxical tradition of Jewish assimilateness. Looked at through Bhabha's lens, the repeated performance of differences can function as evidence of similarity: if it requires so much hard work to solidify Jewish difference, that same laborious process indicates that the differences are merely desired or imagined rather than actual. The unstable environments represented in these three plays form the grounds for testing and asserting difference at the same time that they reveal those differences to be a reaction against shared or similar identities.

Why Drama?

The assimilative aspects of stage Jewishness exist in tension with a difference that owes its significance to a racialized theological history of shared origins. But it still does not go without saying that Jewish assimilateness should be particularly significant within the historical and generic confines of early modern drama. In addition to making a case for Jewish assimilateness as an analogue to or version of colonial stereotypes, my other goal is to explain why this project concerns itself with commercial drama of the 1580s-1610s, and what that genre and period can allow us to understand about early modern representations of Jews, and vice versa.

The fundamentally dialogic nature of drama not only permits but also requires a multiplicity of voices to speak that other genres may, but are not obligated by virtue of their form, to allow. Because characters speak for themselves, rather than in reported speech, drama must be able to represent the idiosyncratic words of a particular prince, merchant, daughter, Turk,

Jew, etc. This structural feature of drama is true, of course, for all characters, not just Jewish ones, but to my mind its effects are the most interesting when it comes to representing the voices of a culture's marginalized figures, ones who usually occupy roles of racial, religious, and sexual otherness. Although a play may filter a Jewish voice through the lens of stereotype (such that we hear not a Jewish voice, but an English version of one), it is still, to audiences, a Jewish voice. Jews speak in drama, and what they say may exceed or violate the limits of stereotypes designed to restrict their representation to common understandings of Jewishness. Theater's poly-vocality breeds a lack of control over interpretation. Thus, Shylock can link Jews and non-Jews with disturbing and undesirable qualities while also inadvertently drawing upon some of the most damning Jewish stereotypes, yet certain critics can understand his famous speech to advocate for a tolerance that leads them to claim that Shakespeare "invented the human" or that "Shylock is Shakespeare" (Bloom, Gross). As misguided as I believe such critics are, I concede that their interpretations are possible (if not plausible) because a play can never mean one thing only. Though all texts are open to interpretation, dramatic ones must be open by default. The play text's openness allows for meanings to be layered, so that marginalized or occluded readings inform or push back against established ones. Drama's interpretive instability mirrors the instability of Jewishness (on stage and in history). In a multi-voiced genre, hallmarks of Jewishness can lose their certainty – their origins and applicability to a given situation may be questioned.

In George Herbert's poem, "Self-Condensation," the speaker deploys Jewishness as a short-hand way to denote those who have a disordered sense of the relative value of the worlds of flesh and spirit: "He that doth love, and love amiss, / This worlds delights before true Christian joy / Hath made a Jewish choice" (7-9). There are no Jewish figures in the poem – "he" is a

Christian who is inordinately attached to his worldly existence. Absent actual Jews, Jewishness becomes a static by-word for an intellectual and spiritual error, and the poem offers no opportunity for defense or rebuttal, since the negative feature of Jewishness is totally unattached to an individual (or the representation of one) who could contest it. In contrast, even a play that trades heavily on stereotypes such as *The Jew of Malta* creates space to question the long-standing belief in Jewish misdirected attachment to the world. Barabas embraces and gleefully performs Jewish stereotypes while also surrounding them with doubt. Doubt creeps in on the micro-level, at specific points in the characters' interactions: Barabas rehearses a litany of his past crimes to Ithamore that seems too outrageous and unsupported with evidence to be anything but a send up of the belief in Jewish perfidy (2.3.177-204). The friar Jacomo relates news of Barabas' latest crime to the friar Bernardine, who responds by asking if Barabas has crucified a child (3.6.49). Jacomo's swift negative response makes the possibility seem patently ridiculous. But doubt also suffuses the play on a macro-level, by placing Barabas in a world where he is far from the most egregious case of worldly attachment and greed, and where such attachments seem a sensible and even necessary route to survival. Within this context, even as the stereotype remains deeply embedded in Barabas' character, worldly attachment reads not as a "Jewish choice," but as a human one.

In addition to the multiple voices, another feature of drama compounds its generic instability: drama's in-between status as both a literary and performed genre lends itself to great uncertainty. Neither a printed text nor any one performance is the essential thing: both are necessary, but neither alone is sufficient to capture a dramatic work. This generic slipperiness, to my mind, parallels the instability of Jewishness. Just as Jewishness is a composite of beliefs and ideas that can never be fully evidenced or rejected, and which shift according to the needs of the

non-Jews who construct them, so too is a work of drama a composite unstable thing. A play's representations of its Jews will never be identical from one performance to the next. Play audiences can experience that slipperiness and lack of fixity more immediately than can a reader of a printed text. This theatrical slipperiness mirrors social, lived experience, and it is exactly this lived experience that interests me the most. Though I start with the theoretical aims to define Jewish assimilateness and to trace the origins of difference and otherness, what I really care about is how these theoretical, abstract, and invisible matters show up in human behavior. In that sense, drama is the *only* genre appropriate to my area of inquiry, for while other literary genres can stand as evidence of thinking about Jews, only drama can show us what it looks like when ancient beliefs about Jewishness manifest in human interaction, inflecting commercial transactions, romantic relationships, political power struggles, etc.

At the same time that drama makes religious, racial, and ethnic stereotypes about Jews felt and visible, the dating of these plays perforce leaves representations of Jews in the realm of the imagination. Jews had been expelled from England in 1290; they were not permitted to live openly in England again until the 1650s.¹¹ The timing may therefore seem incongruous, but the choice is a deliberate one. The theater of the 1580s-1610s often stages foreign commercial settings, and these settings are ones in which "real" Jews would have been present, unlike in England. Additionally, these commercially-focused plays were written and performed at a time when England's own international commercial ambitions remained largely unrealized, or at least very under-developed in comparison to Spain and the Ottoman Empire. Distant geographically from both major Jewish populations and Mediterranean centers of international trade, and

¹¹ See David S. Katz and Shapiro on the expulsion and readmission, especially on the complicating factors and debates surrounding each event. For instance, there are no official government documents attesting to the expulsion, and though Jews returned to England in larger numbers in the late seventeenth century, there had been small populations residing there beforehand.

relegated thus far to a relatively minor role in certain sectors of the international economy, England's theaters seek to close those gaps creatively, if not literally.

In the absence of extensive experience, the plays in this project imagine what it would be like to participate fully in the diverse and cosmopolitan international market, to interact with Jews and other exotic peoples, and to emulate or reject various models of how to live in such settings. *The Jew of Malta* is many things – a blistering critique of colonial and capitalist ambitions and the Machiavellian behavior necessitated by such contexts, an early-modern update of a morality play with Barabas as the vice figure – but it is also an allegory: Malta stands in for England. Both are small islands inhabited by people who desire to build a Christian economic powerhouse. *The Merchant of Venice*, according to Harris, can be read within the context of the Dutch Church libel and other anti-immigrant libels of the 1590s that name Jews as their targets, despite the paucity of Jewish immigrants and influx of Dutch and Flemings. “The Jew” becomes “a figure with which to lend a name to the hybrid identities that were increasingly a feature of early modern Europe and its network of transnational commerce,” reflecting fears about how international movement and mixture affects English identities in ways the country cannot quite predict (*Sick Economies* 62). And *A Christian Turned Turk* presents a cautionary (yet, I think, also admiring) version of English identity transformed abroad in the pirate Ward, a man for whom geographic and economic dislocation leads him to reject group allegiances of religion and country in favor of individual success. These plays do important cultural work with Jews, notwithstanding the Jews' absence from England. They evidence David Nirenberg's claim that western cultures are in part constituted by a tradition of thinking about and with Judaism for the purpose of defining themselves against an other. Nirenberg focuses specifically on anti-Jewish thinking: “anti-Judaism should not be understood as some archaic or irrational closet in the vast edifices of

Western thought. It was rather one of the basic tools with which that edifice was constructed” (6). I see moments in early modern plays in which anti-Jewish thought is a product of an initial, but rejected positive identification with or desire to emulate Jewish traits. In many ways, I read Jewish absence in England as a precondition for these early modern plays to synthesize theological, historical, racial, gendered, and economic beliefs about Jews into characters who serve as a complex and contradictory target for English animus, a mechanism to distance themselves from qualities they dislike and refuse to identify with, and a symbol of what the English could stand to achieve or lose in the worlds of international commerce and colonialism.

Chapters

The three chapters of this project explore various facets of assimilative Jewishness and its capacity to employ and/or undermine stereotypes. Each chapter addresses a different question about the effects of assimilative stage Jewishness in contexts of international traffic.

The first chapter, on Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*, asks: What assessments should we make of Christian economic and social culture when we understand Jewishness as the play’s protagonist, Barabas, does – as a metonym for universal corruption? The assessment must be a cynical one, for the universal application of negative qualities long deemed Jewish reveals the shared exchange-based logic of religion and commerce which necessitates competitive, selfish, untrustworthy, and treacherous behaviors of all participants. Marlowe, more than Shakespeare or Daborne, deploys a rhetorical strategy that Marx would later use: because Christian culture conceives of certain concepts as Jewish, both Marlowe and Marx understood that “these tools therefore could potentially produce the ‘Jewishness’ of those who used them, whether those

users were Jewish or not” (Nirenberg 3).¹² Marlowe’s universal Jewishness does not at all rescue early modern representations of Jews from the accusations of greed, Machiavellian cunning, or spiritual reprobation. Rather, in scenes such as Ferneze’s confiscation of Barabas’ wealth, the nun’s appropriation of Barabas’ house, and the final interwoven plots of Christian, Turk, and Jew for control of Malta, Marlowe shows that widespread “Jewishness,” though venal and corrupt, is the only appropriate response to the ruthlessness of contemporary commercial and colonial environments.

The second chapter, which addresses *The Merchant of Venice*, asks: how should we deal with the unraveling boundaries between kinds and categories of people, initiated in *The Jew of Malta*, and exacerbated in *Merchant* through Shylock and Antonio’s interactions? Is diversity or homogeneity better for facilitating commerce, and if diversity is permitted within a polity, how is it to be managed? Instead of seeing Jewishness as a universal catch-all term for human corruption as *The Jew of Malta* does, *Merchant* instead meditates on how to maintain human differences, particularly when such divisions impose restrictions on human interactions that could impede business. I read the flesh bond, Jessica’s and Lorenzo’s marriage, and Shylock’s oft-misunderstood “Hath not a Jew eyes” speech as moments which simultaneously seek to uphold and unravel strict boundaries on racial, class, gender, and religious identities. I draw on the writings of the Jewish legal scholar Menachem ben Solomon ha-Me’iri and on Christian doctrinal history in order to contrast Christian universalism and Jewish particularism. The chapter ultimately argues that *The Merchant of Venice* elucidates the necessity and appeal of

¹² Stephen Greenblatt has similarly argued that “Both writers hope to focus attention upon activity that is seen as at once alien and yet central to the life of the community and to direct against that activity the anti-Semitic feeling of the audience” (*Marlowe, Marx, and Antisemitism* 292).

heterogeneous toleration in order to facilitate commercial prosperity, even if such tolerance is never fully realized in the play.

In the final chapter, I examine the interrelation between stage Jews and another marginal yet attractive theatrical figure – the renegade, or an individual who threatens England’s integrity by rejecting religious and national ties for the sake of personal profit. How can assimilative Jewishness help us understand what the English thought about the tense balance between individual self-interest, and group affiliations and allegiances? Jews and renegades are linked in Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turned Turk* through their mutual tendency for (self-) destructiveness. Benwash, the Jewish renegade, exhibits a degree of dynamicity that has gone unremarked by critics and that mirrors (often as a comic foil), the changeable nature of the titular Christian, the pirate Ward. Benwash and Ward help to explain the bifurcation of the renegade into a figure that attracts both allure and censure – their rejection of religious and national obligations frees them to gain wealth, but it in turn appears to enslave them to their own desires for sexually unavailable women. As with the other plays in this project, *A Christian Turned Turk* envisions an environment that easily fosters the mixing of diverse peoples, and which rewards yet also fears and punishes independent people, Jews or renegades, who act without regard for categorical loyalties. By framing Jewishness, like renegadism, as a principle of extreme self-interest and untrustworthiness which must either be undermined through mockery or eradicated, *A Christian Turned Turk* heightens the dangers of renegades by indicating that, transitively, to be a renegade is also to some degree to be Jewish.

Blood and Manners – A Note on the Title

My title, “Blood and Manners,” references Jessica’s argument in *The Merchant of Venice* that “...though I am a daughter to his blood, / I am not to his manners” (2.3.17-18). Jessica

admits her unavoidable and unchangeable genetic link to Shylock, but at the same time disavows him as her parent in terms of passing on nurtured qualities. To Jessica, her argument that she is in some important way not Shylock's child (even if she is so in the most literal sense), neatly clears the way for her to convert to Christianity and marry Lorenzo. It is significant, I think, that Jessica feels no need to deny or erase her Jewish parentage altogether; the opposition she constructs between blood and manners suggests not that her blood is something other than Jewish, but instead that her Jewish blood is irrelevant.

Unlike Jessica, I am not at all convinced that the difference between blood and manners enables her easy admission into the Christian fold. For one thing, early modern thinkers about Judaism, Christianity, and the relationship between them expressed much uncertainty about the sources of Jewish difference. As this introduction glances at, and as my second chapter will explore in greater detail, a fundamental Jewishness was thought to reside in the body – it must have been so, or else conversion would not have been suspected as somehow insufficient to eliminate a formerly Jewish person's fundamental Jewish essence.¹³ Given these anxious and unresolved questions, it is not obvious that Jessica's descent from Shylock's blood is totally forgivable or forgettable, even as a female convert who brings her father's wealth over to the Christians, and in spite of the fact that it is not her genetic relationship to Shylock that makes her Jewish. Neither am I convinced that Jessica's manners are as different from Shylock's as she claims them to be. The Jessica who says that she is not of her father's manners is the same Jessica whose last spoken line in the play is, "I am never merry when I hear sweet music" (5.1.68) – a nod to her perpetual marginalization in the festive Christian world of Belmont, and a final

¹³ Many medieval and renaissance laws prohibit converts from marrying gentiles, or taking up positions of political and civic power. Before the reformation, there was often strong encouragement for converts to enter the church – a way to keep them in celibate occupations.

reminder and repetition of her father's resistance to revelry earlier in the play, when he commands her to shut his home's windows against the music in the streets. Whether by blood or by manners, Jessica cannot *not* be Shylock's daughter, at least not fully, and not to her Christian audiences.

In other words, my title captures in miniature the problem of assessing and describing the nature of Jewish difference, and whether it really is different, in early modern plays. It is a matter of both blood and manners, and the two are intertwined, not easily separable, as Jessica imagines them to be.

**Chapter One: ‘These are the blessings promised to the Jews’: Commerce, Colonialism, and
Universal Jewishness in *The Jew of Malta***

For a play with the word “Jew” in the title, Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* does little to make its titular character conform to a consistent definition of Jewishness. Instead, Barabas questions and reevaluates the defining features of Jewishness, even as he also confirms some of its most prevalent stereotypes. As he luxuriates amongst his attractive and plentiful possessions, Barabas declares,

These are the blessings promised to the Jews,
And herein was old Abram’s happiness.
What more may heaven do for earthly men
Then thus to pour out plenty in their laps,
Ripping the bowels of the earth for them,
Making the sea their servant and the winds
To drive their substance with successful blasts?
Who hateth me but for my happiness?
Or who is honoured now but for his wealth?
Rather had I, a Jew, be hated thus
Than pitied in a Christian poverty. (1.1.104-114, italics added)¹

To Barabas, the best heaven can do for “earthly men” is furnish material goods. His imagination of blessings stops short at those which can be enjoyed during his lifetime. His rhetorical question, “What more may heaven do...,” denies the existence of transcendent, spiritual benefits over and above material ones. The implicit answer to his question is “nothing”: “Making the sea

¹ All quotations from *The Jew of Malta* cite the Revels edition, Ed. David Bevington.

their servant” in order to increase wealth constitutes the height of God’s favors to men. God’s favor manifests in human domination of Earth’s physical resources (“ripping the bowels of the earth” to furnish men’s fortunes). In focusing so narrowly on concrete, tangible benefits, Barabas adheres to the stereotype of the greedy Jewish materialist whose love of wealth leaves him completely uninterested in any notions of value other than earthly “plenty.”²

Upon first glance, then, the above lines appear to invalidate my initial premise – that *The Jew of Malta* surprisingly lacks investment in using Barabas to reinforce Jewish difference. After all, Barabas takes pride in, even flaunts, his difference because he credits his wealth, the reason others “hate” him “thus,” to his Jewishness. Throughout the speech, Barabas gladly equates Jewishness with heightened greed: God’s blessings were promised specifically to the Jews; Barabas has ample personal evidence of these blessings in the form of wealth; he openly declares he is a Jew; and he prefers to weather hatred as a rich Jew than be a poor but pitiable Christian.

Despite its seeming invalidation, the particular terms of Barabas’ “Jewish” preference for wealth force us to understand it as much more than a way to pigeonhole him in the stock position of a greedy, materialistic, resolutely unspiritual Jewish merchant.³ By indicating his material wealth as the blessings that God granted “Abram,” Barabas discards the Jewish covenant’s

² Jewish greed is an incredibly tenacious stereotype, persisting even where inapplicable or seemingly irrelevant in Medieval and early modern literature. For instance, anger about economic exploitation frames the much graver accusation of ritual murder that is the subject of Chaucer’s *The Prioress’ Tale*: “Ther was in Asye, in a greet citee, / Amonges Cristene folk a Jewerye, / Sustened by a lord of that contree / For foule usure and lucre of vileynye” (1-4). And in *Selimus* (1594), Robert Greene takes pains to characterize the Jewish physician Abraham as greedy - “Bajazet hath with him a cunning Jew, / Professing physic; and so skilled therein, / As if he had pow’r over life and death. / Withal, a man so stout and resolute / That he will venture anything for gold” (17.96-100) – even though the character commits suicide in the very next scene and explicitly states that he cares nothing for the profit he earns from assassinating Bajazet (18.83-85, 89-94).

³ Robert Chazan has argued that proverbial Jewish greed and miserliness originates in the legal and economic disabilities imposed on Jews by Christian authorities, who barred them from owning land or pursuing occupations other than moneylending or tax collecting. Though warped, accusations of Jewish greed have some basis in “the cooperation, - perhaps collusion is a better term – between successful Jewish lenders and the royal authorities in England” (27).

genealogical restrictions, despite deploying the specifically Jewish name for the patriarch. Genesis presents God's covenant with Abraham as a promise limited to a family and its descendants:

Moreouer I wil establish my couenant betweene me and thee, and thy seede after thee in their generations, for an euerlasting couenant, to be God vnto thee and to thy seede after thee. And I will giue thee and thy seede after thee the land, wherein thou art a stranger, euen all the land of Canaan, for an euerlasting possession, and I will be their God. (17:7-8)⁴

Additionally, the covenant is limited further through the mark of circumcision: "Let euery man childe among you be circumcised: That is, ye shall circumcise the foreskin of your flesh, and it shalbe a signe of the couenant betweene me and you" (Gen. 17:10-11). In essence, the Jewish covenant is a particularized one, limited to familial relationships, and reinforced or proven with bodily evidence of those relationships.

Ignoring these strict rules for inclusion, Barabas redefines Jewishness along financial lines by replacing the limited Abrahamic covenant with wealth as the primary criterion for Jewishness. "These," in the first line of his speech, are Barabas' riches, not his spiritual, familial, and physically marked covenant. Barabas' definition of the Jewish community offers further evidence of his belief in wealth as a sign of God's covenant: "There's Kirriah Jairim, the great Jew of Greece, / Obed in Bairseth, Nones in Portugal, Myself in Malta, some in Italy, / Many in France, and wealthy every one" (1.1.123-126). The Jews Barabas includes in his community are scattered internationally, and they are all rich; he does not bother to include the poor Jews of Malta who appear briefly in the same scene. Although Barabas does not describe the causal

⁴ I cite the 1587 Geneva Bible, maintaining original spelling, here and throughout the dissertation.

relationship between riches and Jewish affiliation – are Jews rich because they are Jewish, or are they Jewish because they are rich? – he appears to believe the latter option because he excludes poor Jews on the basis of their poverty, despite their geographic nearness to him and their shared religious profession.

To Barabas, the prosperity of the merchants he names is the defining sign of their Jewishness, functioning much like circumcision does in the Hebrew Bible. But what Barabas does not acknowledge, or perhaps fails to realize, is that in redefining the Jewish covenant via wealth, he also de-particularizes it, potentially including anyone under the umbrella of Jewishness who has as many possessions or loves them as much as he does. “These are the blessings promised to the Jews” can enable opposing interpretations: either Jewishness is now open to anyone, or *only* Jews receive such material blessings. The case for the former interpretation is strong factually and thematically: it is simply untrue that only Jews have riches in Marlowe’s *Malta*, and I believe the play as a whole promotes the idea of a universal or shared Jewishness in colonial and commercial environments. The play repeatedly reminds viewers of what Barabas ignores: God can “pour plenty” into any man’s lap. The Spanish Martin del Bosco, the Turkish Selim Calymath, and the Maltese monasteries and nunneries stand on par with the list of scattered Jewish merchants in terms of wealth. *The Jew of Malta* spreads out riches among nearly all characters, without meritocratic, religious, or hierarchical designs. If we accept Barabas’ new standard of material wealth as the defining criterion for Jewishness (unintentional as it may be on his part), then Marlowe’s play is filled almost entirely with Jews.

I believe that in reading *The Jew of Malta*, we ought to take Jewishness as Barabas implies we should – as a strand of continuity linking otherwise disparate peoples, and as a category to which anyone potentially could belong. Marlowe’s play pushes back against various

literary, dramatic, historical, and theological traditions that view Jewish difference as distinct from other kinds of difference and uniquely threatening to the integrity of the Christian community. Against these assumptions, *The Jew of Malta* instead challenges audiences to take Jewishness as a signal of shared corruption, including its English audiences' own, corruption that spreads via international traffic. In contesting the specificity of Jewishness, but not its culturally-assigned negativity, the play demonstrates a fundamentally cynical outlook, one that delights in pointing out hypocrisy. Barabas' often non-instrumental, fetishized relationship to his material possessions helps to develop this cynicism, to direct it at the intertwining of religion and commerce, and to show that religion can only be deployed hypocritically in the face of colonial and commercial interests that induce all participants to behave identically. As key scenes in the slave market and the nunnery suggest, the logic of religion is one of exchange; likewise, commercial exchanges come to look more and more like religion, in that credit aims to transcend material demands. Through habitual confluences of the spiritual and financial meanings of biblical allusions, *The Jew of Malta* makes so-called "Jewish" qualities such as materialism, literalism, and Machiavellian cunning conditions of all who pursue commercial and colonial interests in the name of religion. In order to highlight such widespread moral and ethical debasement, the play envisions a Malta that acts as a fantasy of an ideal colony – one with no natives, laid open to unhampered exploitation. Finally, the self-referential and meta-theatrical means by which the play makes its critique – piling up layers of overtly performative behaviors and transparently self-serving rhetoric – implicates not only all the players in Malta but also audiences in its dark perspective on colonial commerce. For Marlowe, the assimilative or universally-applicable properties of Jewishness showcase humanity's most venal qualities, and explicate them as inevitable responses to the ruthless competition of the colonial environment.

Narratives of Jewish Otherness and Sameness

Through Barabas' insistence upon his Jewishness as an identity category that can be shared, *The Jew of Malta* works against the grain of historical and literary discourses that take for granted that Jews differ profoundly and essentially from non-Jews, and differ in ways which are inimical to non-Jews. This is not at all to say that the play mounts a critique of anti-Semitism, or that it rescues stage Jews from negative representations and instead cultivates a strain of philo-Semitism. Instead, *The Jew of Malta* exposes the irrationality of coding certain negative human behaviors – greed, violence, cunning, etc. – as Jewish, when they are quite obviously widespread and exacerbated by the play's capitalist and colonial settings. This capacity for exposure ought not to be mistaken for a moral argument against anti-Jewish prejudice; the anachronism of such an interpretation, combined with the play's overt cynicism and dark subversiveness, stops it far short of offering a moral corrective to the evils of negative stereotyping. Rather, *The Jew of Malta* makes an intellectual argument about the purposes and failures of stage Jewishness: deeming certain traits "Jewish" permits a kind of useful cultural and political blindness. The focus on Jews clouds the English's assessment of their own nation's and culture's position in the moment of colonial and commercial expansion, especially when that position may be an uncertain or negative one.

The Jew of Malta both represents and contests the phenomenon Zygmunt Bauman has termed "allosemitism," or "the practice of setting the Jews apart as people radically different from all the others, needing separate concepts to describe and comprehend them" (143). Avoiding the anachronism and conceptual limitations of anti-Semitism, a bio-racial term coined in the nineteenth century, allosemitism also prevents scholars from understanding anti-Jewish sentiment as an unchanging, extra-temporal and extra-contextual phenomenon (Chazan 126).

Because allosemitism is capacious, encompassing all relevant differences, the term thus requires that attention be paid to the contexts that produce Jewish otherness, and the kinds of otherness invoked at particular moments. The contextualization allosemitism requires is exactly the kind of work *The Jew of Malta* engages in: it holds up the stereotypes of Jewish greed, spiritual literalism, anti-Christian violence, and Machiavellian cunning to the harsh light of Malta's economic and colonial situation. It represents allosemitic thinking, for example, in Ferneze's attempt to brand the tax levied against the Jews as punishment for their Judaism, or in the friar's fears that Barabas crucified a child. The play also mocks and criticizes the tendency to think allosemitically, showing in the devious power plays of Turks, Spanish, and Maltese Knights the utter error of placing such behaviors in a special Jewish category.

Sylvia Tomasch has argued that English literary representations of Jews (particularly in the Middle Ages) are largely virtual ones; they draw upon legacies of ideas about a Jewish population that was essentially absent from England after 1290 (243). Nevertheless, the absent, abstract Jew proves conceptually generative, though unrealistic. Tomasch's idea of the virtual Jew "stresses the integral connections between imaginary constructions and actual people, even when they exist only in a fabricated past or a phantasmic future" (252), and this intertwining of conceptual and actual suffuses early modern texts about Jews as well as medieval ones. Mixed fear and curiosity lead many texts to treat Jews as even more "other" than the rest of the others they survey. Jews are perpetual outsiders even among the full cast of others of English experience – Turks, Moors, Gypsies, Scythians, heretics, etc. Unknowability and indeterminacy, especially concerning geographic, national, or ethnic origins, constitute the primary category of English allosemitism. English authors worry about Jewish indeterminacy because it gives rise to two opposed, yet equally pressing, fears: first, that Jews may sneakily infiltrate a group to which

they do not belong, or second, they may fail to integrate regardless of where they go or what they do, standing out perpetually as an annoying reminder of religious heterogeneity and error.

The singular intensity of attitudes about Jewish difference arises from the paradoxical difficulty of locating its source(s). Unlike other exotic peoples, the nature and origins of Jewish otherness are frustratingly difficult for early modern authors to determine. In his travel narratives, William Biddulph articulates the sense that there is something fundamentally slippery about Jewish identity, and for him, this slipperiness inheres in the group's name. Based on three different genealogies, Jews may be called Hebrews, Israelites, or Jews. Biddulph considers a range of biblical, phonological, and historical etymologies for the three names. "Hebrews" may come from "*Heber* the fourth from *Noah*, in whom the hebrew tongue remained at the confusion of tongues," or it may derive from Abraham, "with the alteration of a few letters, *He/braei quasi Abrahaei*, that is, *Hebrewes* as it were *Abrahites*" (72).⁵ Both etymologies claim authority from biblical stories, but the causal connection in each story rests on rather suspect phonological similarities. "Israelites" originates with Jacob, "surnamed Israel," the grandson of Abraham. And finally, "Jews" comes from the kingdom of Judah, established by the sons of Solomon (72). Each etymology successively moves Jewish origins forward in history, from the earliest biblical histories of the Tower of Babel and Noah, to the moment of familial definition from Abraham, and finally to the post-Abrahamic kingdom of Solomon. It is as if in order to arrive at "Jew" (the most common English usage), Biddulph's list of etymological possibilities must incrementally disinherit the Jews, curtailing their status as an ancient people. His ruminations on Jewish nomenclature emphasize their intrinsic otherness, and seek to make Jews "others" even according to the terms of their own history, to uproot the venerable origins that give them a

⁵ Italics are Biddulph's.

theologically powerful hold over the Christian imagination.⁶ Biddulph's question about the origins of names is really one about firming up differences while also de-legitimizing Jewish genealogy – at what point can the Jews be recognized distinctly as such, instead of as an unknown group with origins in the murky depths of the past?

The question of naming is not merely an academic one; for Biddulph, it gets at the heart of what makes Jews fundamentally different, and suggests appropriate behaviors toward them based on those differences. He reasons that the Jewish people's many names may be symptomatic of, or perhaps even causally related to, their indeterminate status as perpetual others: "One and the same people thrice changed their names, & often the place of their abode: And to this day the haue no king nor country proper to themselues, but are dispersed throughout the whole world" (72-73). Ignorant even of their "true" name, the Jews are doomed to wander, never to be masters of themselves or their own land as long as they cannot cement their own identity. The inconsistency of Jewish nomenclature perhaps provides a rationale for resisting integration and tolerance: those who do not know their own name or geographical origins cannot expect to feel or be treated as if they belong anywhere.

In settling on the indeterminacy of their ethnic and geographical origins as an important source of Jewish difference, Biddulph follows in the footsteps of the theologian Andrew Willet, who in his 1590 *Judaeorum Vocatione*, attempted to suss out the mechanisms of transmission of national and cultural heritage in order to address the problem of converting the world's dispersed Jews. Willet approaches Jewish indeterminacy not, like Biddulph, as a form of unknowability, but as a quality that makes Jews totally unassimilable. Willet gradually develops the argument

⁶ Bauman calls the abstract notion of "The Jew" in Western, Christian thought "ambivalence incarnate," precisely because of their centrality to a religion that wishes to disavow them (146-147). David Biale similarly attributes such ambivalence to a "relative lack of power combined with a myth of power" (28).

that emigration generally leads to cultural and national assimilation: the descendants of an Englishman who moves to Spain will be counted as Spanish, and those of a Scottish immigrant to France will adopt French customs and manners. Yet Willet resists extending this assimilative pattern to Jews: “a Jew, whether he journeys into Spain, or France, or into whatever other place he goes to, declares himself to be not a Spaniard or a Frenchman, but a Jew.”⁷ Strangely, despite their lack of clear-cut national origins, Jews cannot integrate into their new surroundings; their identification with Judaism, though tied to no particular geographical boundaries, nevertheless precludes instead of facilitates their assuming other additional national identities. Eventually, such lack of belonging becomes not a curious oddity, but a defining feature, the essence of Jews in the English cultural imagination. Samuel Purchas likewise declared Jews to be inassimilable migrants, perpetually “strangers where they dwell and travelers where they reside” (67), the absence of belonging defining who they are.

Biddulph’s, Willet’s, and Purchas’ articulations of essential Jewish difference make it appear as if such difference is problematic simply because it is confusing – its sources are obscure, and the reasons for its stubborn permanence unknown. If so, then Jewish difference and indeterminacy could be written off as merely one of many versions of “heterophobia,” a fear of difference that Bauman argues is unhelpful in parsing reactions to Jews and Jewishness throughout history because of its vagueness, and because it limits the terms of the conversation to difference only (144). Jewishness is more than just a confusing and unaccountable set of differences; it also seems dangerous. An early modern sensational news pamphlet exaggerates Jewish otherness to threatening, violent extremes. In “News from Rome,” Andrea Buonaccorsi announces the arrival in Turkey of an army composed of “an Hebrew people, till this time not

⁷ Translated from the Latin in James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (168).

discovered, coming from the mountains of Caspian.” This army consists of the descendants of “nine tribes and a half” of the ten lost tribes of Israel, who “will come to recover the land of Promise” (A4). Landlessness, which at first may have only seemed to be a mildly unsettling and confusing aspect of Jewish identity, here sets up dangerous conditions for war. Jewish itinerancy lays the foundations for a sort of “reverse colonization”: it unmasks the “true” owners of the promised land. In Buonaccorsi’s words, the lost tribes of Israel do not steal or invade the holy land, but, significantly, “recover” it, claiming back what rightfully and originally had been their own. Rather than fear of simple difference, then, “News from Rome” articulates what Bauman calls “proteophobia” – a fear of things that do not fit into the structures of an orderly world, of things that change, shift, and blur boundaries in surprising ways (144). The rise to power of an army from a group generally known to be small and weak is one such disorderly, boundary-shattering event. The Jews’ indeterminate relationship to geography becomes more than a point of intellectual confusion; it threatens bodily harm. Buonaccorsi’s pamphlet is of course anomalous in its representation of Jewish violence, which is generally depicted as small-scale, not systemic or institutionalized. Aside from “News from Rome,” there are no Jewish armies; well-poisoners, murderers of Christian children, and nefarious doctors work invisibly and on their own, but Buonaccorsi’s Hebrew army literalizes the implicit fear underlying all these smaller, localized examples of Jewish violence that Jews are by definition and as a group set on Christian harm.⁸

⁸ All such Jewish bogeymen are wrapped up together in the character of Zadok, the greedy, conniving, and violent Roman Jewish physician of Thomas Nashe’s, *The Unfortunate Traveler* (1594). Upon learning of the Jews’ banishment from Rome, Zadok declares, “If I must be banished, if those heathen dogs will needs rob me of my goods, I will poison their springs and conduit heads whence they receive all their water round about the city. I’ll ‘tice all the young children into my house that I can get and, cutting their throats, barrel them up in powdering beef tubs, and so send them to victual all the Pope’s galleys” (294-295). Jewish well-poisoning has a particularly rich presence in printed images: see Luborsky 449-453.

Without recuperating Jewishness' overwhelmingly negative affective valence, *The Jew of Malta* nevertheless counters these discourses of Jewish distinctiveness. It takes up accusations of greed, spiritual ignorance, and ritual violence and exploits their resonances in its imaginary version of Malta. Marlowe's play is also not alone in contesting allosemantic assumptions – it participates in a discourse defined not by its attempts to correct Jewish libels, but by its efforts to show that the libels apply diffusely to the societies from which they emerge, and are not uniquely Jewish.

Travel accounts of English and other Europeans in the Mediterranean give imaginative fodder to what the world of *The Jew of Malta* may have looked like, and that world openly acknowledges Jewish sameness, at least in terms of appearance. While physical appearances may not do much to contravene the negative behaviors commonly ascribed to Jews, it does undermine many of the proto-racial, biological, or somatic features understood to distinguish Jews and non-Jews.⁹ In *The Navigations into Turkie* (1585), Nicolas de Nicolay tacitly acknowledges visual similarities between Jews and non-Jews. The woodcuts that accompany Nicolay's text identify Jews by their image captions and by the related textual narrations; it is not possible to tell from the images alone that the figures are Jews. Nicolay compares a Jewish merchant with his neighbors. He is "apparralled with long garments, like unto the Gretians, and other nations of Levant" (133). Aside from sartorial legislation which required Jews to wear a different turban color from other ethnic groups, the Jews are indistinguishable from them. Clearly, visible Jewish difference could not be taken for granted, for if their differences were so obvious, then the narrative explanation and sartorial regulations would have been unnecessary. Likewise, the

⁹ For example, bodily features such as skin color, and nose shape, and medical conditions such as male menstruation and the "Jewish stench," addressed in the next chapter.

recognition of Jewish similarity finds its way into English literature. In the 1640 fictional pamphlet, *The Wandering Jew, Telling Fortunes to Englishmen*, the Jew in the title-page image is differentiated only by a mark on his cloak. A variety of laws requiring such identifying badges had been in place since the fourth Lateran council in 1215. Aside from the badge, the Jew looks much like the other two bearded men in the image. It is his clothing, not his body or face, that sets him apart. The text bears out the visual similarity depicted in the title page: It turns out that the Jew is in fact an Englishman who adopted the disguise after having been mistaken for a particular Jew while traveling in Venice. The tale thus implies that Jewish and English people looked similar enough for the ruse to be effective.

In the work of abrogating understandings of Jewish distinctiveness, the fifteenth-century *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* functions as *The Jew of Malta*'s dramatic predecessor. The Jews of *Croxton* are merchants whose businesses extend internationally, already making them an inextricable part of the society with which they are theologically supposed to be at odds.¹⁰ The scope and nature of the Jew, Jonathas', business links him to the Christian merchant, Aristorius. Both Jonathas and Aristorius brag about their wealth, and present themselves, in introductory monologues, as rich men with international connections throughout Europe, Asia, and North Africa. They are united in their cosmopolitanism.¹¹ The sense that international commerce erases religious difference, or at least renders it secondary, is one that *Croxton* only implies through the parallelisms in the two merchant's speeches, but it is a belief that, in *The Jew of Malta*, Marlowe

¹⁰ *Croxton* is not a cycle play. It departs from that medieval tradition by representing contemporary instead of biblical events, a change which enables it to move away from portraying Jews as archetypal reprobates and rejecters of Christ. This is not to say that medieval cycle plays, unlike *Croxton*, ought not to be understood as "realistic." Cycle plays are realistic not in terms of representing quotidian reality, but in their theological meaning for Christendom, and in the reminder they offer, in performing them, that all Christians may sin and thus may spiritually be Jewish. Still, *Croxton*'s setting in the time of its production complicates theological representations of Jews by adding a quotidian dimension of lived experience.

¹¹ See Aristorius' speech 88-124, and Jonathas' 149-196.

renders explicit. In response to the Maltese governor, Ferneze's question, "What wind drives you thus into Malta road?" the Bashaw, representative of the Turkish Selim Calymath, replies, "The wind that bloweth all the world besides: / Desire of gold" (3.5.2-4). In both plays, pursuit of profit, formerly rendered as Jewish greed, becomes a common (and necessary) behavior.

Though both plays represent international commercial endeavors as normal and not sinful, they become sinful when conflated with religious questioning. In this intersection of business and religion, *Croxtan* deploys the host desecration libel against Jews.¹² Jonathas hopes to use his riches to purchase the host in order to test it. He explains to Aristorius, "Sir, the entent ys if I myght knowe or undertake /Yf that He were God allmyght, / Of all my mys I woll amende make /And doon Hym wourshepe, bothe day and nyght" (291-294). Jonathas and his fellow Jews later attempt to stab, boil, and burn the host, farcically repeating the torments Christ experienced on the cross. On the surface, then, the *Croxtan* Jews fulfill their allosemitic function with regards to Christianity, first by being skeptics who require proof of Christ's divinity instead of faith, and then by torturing the host, forcing Christ to relive his sufferings. But the sin of their initial purchase of the host implicates the Christian Aristorius as well as the Jews – he steals it from the priest to sell it to them, naming his price twice in his disingenuous refusal: "I woll not for an hundder pownd /To stond in fere my Lord to tene, /And for so lytell a walew in conscyence to stond bownd" (288-290, 311-312). His refusal to enable the Jews' blasphemous host desecration is not a refusal at all, but a carefully coded price tag – nothing less than a hundred pounds could be worth committing the sins of stealing and selling the host. His reluctance to make the sale stems from wanting to make sure he gets his full monetary value from the host, and not from the moral gravity of the act.

¹² For the origins and permutations of the host desecration libel, see Rubin.

In a sense, Aristorius, as a Christian willing even to contemplate selling a Eucharistic wafer to Jews, is a worse threat to Christian integrity than is Jonathas, the Jew who wants proof that the Eucharist is indeed the body of Christ. Jonathas' explanation for purchasing the wafer is to "doon Hym Wourshepe" and "amende make" for his past errors, if indeed the Eucharist proves true. He is a closet, or nascent, Christian, and not really a Jew at all. Lisa Lampert has argued that Aristorius' corruption, internal to the Christian community, is just as destabilizing to that community as Jonathas' attack on Christianity from without (122). I would intensify Lampert's stance: Aristorius' corruption is *even more* destabilizing to the Christian community than Jonathas' because it reminds audiences that sin, violent threats, and human imperfection also originate within, and not only outside of, the Christian fold. At the end of *Croxton*, all the Jews convert; it is, from a certain perspective, both figuratively and literally (in terms of actors) a play with no Jews in it at all. Skepticism about Christian truths, the impulse to sell out Christ (as Judas did), and the desire to do violence to Christ's body, are, in the final assessment, widespread temptations and traits among Christians as well as (or instead of) among Jews. *Croxton* places the Jews within Christianity and within contemporary economic reality, much as Marlowe does in his version of Malta.

The Hermeneuticized Jew, Commercial Goals, and Religious Hypocrisy

Though *The Jew of Malta* exploits and contests most of the features of Jewish difference catalogued above in order to produce its subversive and dark version of Jewish similarity, it draws in particular upon Jewish spiritual literalism, and the greed and materialism believed to arise from it. Widespread spiritual literalism is the basis for the play's critique of Malta's colonial society and competitive economy. In Marlowe's Malta, Christian beliefs about Jews intersect with economic exigencies, and in the process expose the hypocrisy of both.

In explicating the prominence of Jewish spiritual literalism as a trope that *The Jew of Malta* both deploys and questions, I draw upon Lampert's concept of the "hermeneutical Jew." The hermeneutical Jew is an interpretive construct of Christian theology that views Jews as poor or error-prone readers and interpreters (Lampert 38). In that sense, Lampert's term could be better rendered as "Christian hermeneuticized Jew" – the Jew as subject to Christian perceptions of Jewish reading practices – a Christian hermeneutic, and not a Jewish one. For the purposes of understanding Marlowe's play, Lampert's term is most useful as a shorthand for the stereotype of Jewish literal-mindedness, a stereotype that encompasses both Jewish spiritual reprobation and the Jewish materialism, greed, and even atheism that arise from it. Barabas' concrete and material understanding of Abraham's "blessings" makes him a poor reader of spiritual worth, evidenced by his mistaken definition of the Jewish covenant, and subsequent careless opening up of it to any and all like-minded people. Barabas in the play's first scene is a theatricalized hermeneuticized Jew, conforming to Christian expectations of Jewish spiritual error. His love of material goods is really misplaced religious zeal.

Lampert explains that the meaning of the hermeneutical Jew developed out of Paul's assertion that "the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). In Paul's time Christianity and Judaism were not yet separate religions, so the differences between Jewish and Christian identities come down to differences in reading and interpretive habits within Judaism. I turn to Paul instead of other early Christian thinkers in order to explain the historical baggage of religious stereotypes that accretes around Marlowe's Barabas because Paul was particularly interested in questions of group belonging and exclusion – the same questions that are foundational ones for defining Jewish difference and similarity in Malta. Paul struggled with the paradox of God's particular covenant with Abraham, one that is nevertheless universal in its

reach: “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...” (Gen 22:18). Daniel Boyarin argues that Paul, a Hellenized Jew, was steeped in the Greek philosophical traditions of oneness and universality as much as he was in Jewish tradition, and that he was therefore very troubled by a promise from God that purported to be universal in scope, and yet privileged a limited familial group. Paul saw faith in Christ as the solution that would reconcile the restrictions of Jewish practice and the universal applications of Judaism’s promise.¹³ He champions allegorical interpretive strategies as a way to overcome this seemingly insurmountable divide. Literal or material ways of reading scripture direct focus to the facets of Jewish law that set Jews apart from others – dietary restrictions, circumcision, etc. This is not to say that the law itself must be renounced, only that it must be re-read.¹⁴ While Midrashic interpretive traditions emphasize “the meaning of the actual material form,” allegorical modes of reading treat meaning as a “disembodied substance [that] exists prior to its incarnation in language” (Boyarin 37, 14). If, after the Hellenic philosophical tradition of oneness, true meaning is an ideal and intangible reality that lies behind language, then the words that encode the practices of Jewish law are not wrong or bad, exactly; they just miss the mark, falling short of the invisible, spiritual, and universal meanings that exist prior to them, meanings to which allegory permits access. So, for circumcision, Paul understands the spiritual, universal meaning to be baptism; the historical Israel is a signifier of faithful Christians, and procreation is re-read as spiritual propagation (Boyarin 15). To Paul, belief in Christ allows Judaism to fully realize its

¹³ “The Torah, in which he so firmly believes, claims to be the text of the One true God of all the world...and yet its primary content is the history of one particular People - almost one family - and the practices that it prescribes are many of the practices which mark off the particularity of that tribe, his tribe. In his very commitment to the truth of the gospel of that Torah and its claim to universal validity lies the source of Saul's trouble” (Boyarin 39).

¹⁴ In Galatians, Chapter 3 (for example, verses 1-5), Paul chastises the Galatian congregation for believing that it is necessary for Gentiles to follow Jewish law in order to be included in the Christ-believing community. Paul is not against the practice of Jewish law *per se*; rather, he wants to make sure that his congregants know that it is not necessary for non-Jewish Christ-believers to adopt the Law, and to make sure they know not to confuse it with faith as the mechanism by which Gentiles participate in God’s covenant (Siker 36).

universal aims: Christ's dual nature – both human and divine – helps to resolve the tension between the universalism of the Torah's content, and the particular ethnic limitations of its form (Boyarin 29).

Despite Paul's wish to perfect the universal reach of Judaism for all through belief in Christ, it is not difficult to understand how his language could have later on been understood to denigrate Jewish modes of thought in comparison with Christian ones. The contrasts between material objects and abstract concepts, literal reading and figurative understanding, characterize much of Paul's language in Corinthians, and these binaries align with the differences between non-Christ-believing Jews, and Christians (whether Jewish or gentile in origin). While Jews read the laws of Moses, physically engraved on "tables of stone," Christians read the abstract laws of the spirit, "written, not with ynce, but with the Spirite of the liuing God...in fleshly tables of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:3). Through the juxtaposition of hard stone and malleable heart, these verses depict Jewish faith to be uncompromising, legalistic, and insensible to human feeling.

To Christians, the difference between Jewish and Christian ways of reading is not merely one of interpretive method; the Jews' method of reading the bible signals an underlying character flaw, an inherent weakness of Jewishness: "Jews become associated with a profitless way of reading and are figured as blind readers who read without comprehension" (Lampert 28). "Became associated" are key words for understanding Lampert's analysis: Christianity in its earliest days was a Jewish movement, but later on, as the Jesus movement came to be considered a distinct religion, and as more Christians had gentile than Jewish origins, Christian writers and thinkers understood disputes within Judaism as criticisms of Judaism as a whole.¹⁵ Though Paul

¹⁵ "...for many, 'the Jews' were no longer members (however much hated) of the family – they became, instead, a more alien and unknown opponent" (Pearce 57).

aims to perfect Judaism by making it truly universal, it is all too easy for post-Pauline Christians to understand Paul to accuse Jews of improper reading and hardened hearts. In Romans, Paul explains to the Roman congregation that God has not forsaken non-Christ believing Jews: “As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers sakes. For the giftes and calling of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:28-29). Yet, as Siker catalogues through the deployment of the figure of Abraham, within one hundred years of Christ’s death, writers instead claimed that God had disinherited and cast off the Jews, transferring the promise only to those who believe in Christ (13). Tertullian argued that the Jewish hardheartedness causes them to reject Christ and merits punishment, and Justin Martyr went so far as to claim that because the Jews “do not catch the spirit that is in [scriptures],” the scriptures are no longer theirs, but belong instead to Christians (qtd. in Pearce, 58, 63). Accusations of incorrect reading continue to occur well beyond the works of Tertullian and Justin Martyr: Luther felt that Jews are “ensnared in the pedantry and external texture of words, and miss ‘the clear word of God’” (Hallett, 94). Though Luther misreads Paul when he finds his anti-Judaism in Paul’s letters, he nevertheless shows that anti-Jewish readings of Paul were thinkable during the early modern period. Marlowe exploits anti-Jewish understandings of Paul in *The Jew of Malta*, particularly the ones that understand Jews to be inherently incorrect, literal-minded readers. For instance, he turns the non-allegorical, “profitless way of reading” into a financially profitable one. Barabas resolutely refuses to consider (or it never even occurs to him to consider) any meaning of profit other than material and economic. A character who pragmatically realizes that no one is “honoured now but for his wealth” (1.1.112), his obdurate materialism profits him very well indeed.

Returning to Paul's metaphor for Jewish law, the stone tables in Corinthians reify God's words and thus aid in cultivating the concept of Jewish literalism. The words *are* the physical medium upon which they are engraved, so that Corinthians depicts Jewish faith as a matter of following externally-imposed rules without understanding. Conversely, the "fleshy tables of the heart" turn the stone tablets back into an abstraction. The figurative tables of the heart signify increased intellectual flexibility and understanding. Christian faith requires abstract comprehension and internal conviction which Jews lack because they care about the actual, physical tablets. Christian salvation is true not because an authority compels belief, but because belief is impressed upon the heart. A Jew, then, is one who experiences spiritual death through reading the word literally, whereas to read "through the spirit, is to read as a Christian" (Lampert 38).

Second Corinthians' accusation of spiritual literalism through devotion to the engraved stone laws breaks down in its application to Barabas. Literal-mindedness does not inspire in Barabas a rigid adherence to Jewish law; instead, it leads him to restrict his attention to the material world of his business, to the total exclusion of his spiritual salvation. His atheism (perhaps strangely, to us) enhances his Jewishness to Christian audiences that would equate the refusal to worship Christ with atheism and thus designate all Jews as atheists by definition. A Christian could see Barabas' materialism as a sign of his reprobation: Paul writes that Jews' "minds are hardened: for vntill this day remaineth the same couering vntaken away in the reading of the olde Testament, which vaile in Christ is put away" (2 Corinthians 3:14-15). Caring only for his goods, Barabas epitomizes the Jew who fails to see beyond the misleading

veil of worldly matters to the Christian truth behind it.¹⁶ In the service of a Christian caricature of Jewishness, Barabas' identity loses the spiritual dimension that ought properly to belong to it: in his opening monologues he appears inveterately greedy and materialistic, without a thought to other aspects of his person and personal connections. But, Marlowe not only provides the caricature of a reprobate and spiritually literal Jew; he also demolishes it. It would be inaccurate to claim that Barabas reads through a veil of error; rather, he denies the veil's very existence. He happily agrees to see himself and all Jews as spiritual reprobates because he believes that nothing transcendent, nothing beyond commerce and wealth, exists, as his rhetorical question, "what more may heaven do for earthly men?" so clearly demonstrates. In other words, Barabas removes the veil not to find Christ, but more radically to reveal the emptiness at the center of the metaphor. Barabas cannot be a spiritual reprobate because he sees nothing to be a reprobate about. In *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas is correct. The hermeneuticized Jew is a Christian interpretive construct that in Marlowe's Malta characterizes everyone. He can be no more of a reprobate than anyone else in the play. All are equally venal, because the economic prosperity of each individual in this harshly competitive colony depends on it.

For those characters who treat Barabas as a hermeneuticized Jew, their knee-jerk habit of thought works to distract from the hypocrisy of invoking religious affiliations as a meaningful category in a commercial and colonial struggle. For Marlowe, (and, if I may presume to speak for audiences), casting Barabas as a hermeneuticized Jew reveals, not conceals, the very same hypocrisy. The validity of one faith over another in the play is contingent not upon spiritual uprightness but upon the faith's adherents' financial and political success. For instance, Ferneze

¹⁶ Here, the correspondences in Paul's metaphor break down, particularly with respect to Barabas. If the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament is covered with a veil of error, then what should the removal of the veil reveal but the original stone tablets? Christ then, would be the covering, or second layer veiling the original scripture, instead of the clarified, stripped down tablets.

seemed unperturbed by having to do business with Turks until Del Bosco arrives on the scene. At that point, Calymath's Bashaw informs Ferneze that "Desire of gold" (3.5.4) motivates his arrival in Malta, and Ferneze, with studied ignorance, replies that Malta does not produce gold: "Desire of gold, great sir? / That's to be gotten In the Western Ind. / In Malta are no golden minerals" (3.5.4-6). Ferneze knows the Bashaw refers to the tribute owed the Turks and not to gold mining, but Del Bosco offers a potentially more lucrative deal with another empire, and thus motivates Ferneze's disingenuousness toward the Bashaw. It does not matter that Ferneze heads an international Christian brotherhood dedicated to defending Christendom from the threat of Islam and that paying the tribute could avoid a conflict; his immediate goal is to ignore or deflect demands for payment. His alignment with the dominant power of the moment undermines the pretense of legitimate religious superiority, and even the belief in meaningful religious differences.

Ferneze's religious hypocrisy in part functions to justify the morality of commerce within a Christian framework. Acting as though one has religious instead of mercenary reasons for exploitation can help to remedy the potential incompatibility of commerce with Christian morals. This is not to say that *The Jew of Malta* is itself anxious about its own moral status, but that it raises issues of trust, honesty, and reliability, issues which only intensify as the geographic scope of commerce widens, and as the kinds of people engaging in trade become more diverse and less familiar to the English.

In placing the commercial risks of trust and morality in Malta, an internationally-contested and distant land, *The Jew of Malta* reopens a question that had largely been settled for the English by the late sixteenth century. From about 1550 onward, merchant handbooks and political texts that analyzed the role of the merchant in the state's prosperity represent merchants

as “expert, creditworthy, godly, and courageous” (Sullivan 17). The authors of such texts accepted that merchants could be moral, and even praised them as exemplars of community support and trust. Moral condemnation was directed instead at exploitative versions of older forms of profit-making, such as usury and forced enclosure of land. These forms of profit were criticized for enriching individuals at the expense of society, but profit gained by sale or labor was generally accepted as honest and socially beneficial.¹⁷ An ethic of industriousness and profit earned by honest labor characterizes the tone of these late sixteenth century merchant handbooks. Far from divorcing religious morality from commerce, “the church provided a convenient and convincing point of reference” for making bonds reliant upon individual merchants’ honor (Agnew 30). None of this is to suggest that the fear of unscrupulous businessmen was non-existent, but that the solution to the old tension between religious morality and commerce was not to rule all commerce immoral, but to insist on conducting it in as morally upright a mode as possible. One merchant handbook exhorts readers to “Take heede of using a false balance or measure, for it is an abomination before God” (*Merchant’s Avizo* 61). Such moral warnings are not uncharacteristic of the genre: others advise that “the marchant man ought more diligently serve and praie to God, then other Ecclesiasticall persones or laie people, that gette not their livynges and charges with such perilles and daungers as Marchants doo” (Ympyn A4v, A5r), and that “Our life and understanding given is / By God, to use (as Mony) not amiss; / How long t’ enjoy it, non knowes better / Than hee that made us first his debtor” (Dafforne, a6r, qtd. in Sullivan 40). The authors evince no ethical suspicion of profit; indeed, they integrate religion into their businesses, turning profit-making into a component of adherence to their faith.

¹⁷See Muldrew, “Interpreting the Market” 176; and Appleby 53.

If anxiety over the morality of commerce remains, then, it is not in the fact of the commerce itself; it rather lingers in the question of trust. The insufficiency of circulating coin in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth led to highly intertwined credit networks: “Individuals realized that others’ defaults could cause them to default as well, and that their own defaults could affect others in exactly the same way” (Muldrew “Interpreting the Market” 178). Because the prosperity of any one merchant was dependent on a network of others meeting their debt obligations, and was therefore highly precarious, commercial morality came to be defined in terms of trustworthiness and honesty.¹⁸ This stress placed on trust gives rise to an equally strong emphasis on secrecy: “the *Avizo* recommends that the trader ‘deale closelie and secretlie in all...affaires,’ and be ‘as secret and silent as is possible’” (Sullivan 38). Another early modern merchant explains that “...a Master maye kepe to him selfe (verye brefelye) a private recogninge of suche things as he mindeth to conceale to his owne secrete knowledge” (Peele, “Path waye,” qtd. in Sullivan 39). The importance of secrecy stands in tension with that of trust, for if trust were so readily available, then secrecy would be unnecessary. The prevalence of discussions of secrecy in mercantile texts, then, functions to acknowledge that trust, though necessary, can never fully be had.

The Jew of Malta taps into anxieties about the morality of commerce by reminding audiences of the ever-expanding, resolutely international scope of trade. The greater the distance over which trade occurs, and the more numerous the differences between those who trade, the less smoothly the mechanisms of trust and social credit will work. Muldrew argues that “the business of the world depended upon the trust which householders extended to their neighbors and to others they did business with; the expansion of the market made this trust problematic”

¹⁸ Sullivan’s and Muldrew’s works both document the high value that merchant writings placed on trust.

(*Economy* 173). Marlowe's Malta is a world in which Appleby's assessment holds true, (even if critics no longer regard it as completely representative of England domestically): "No longer visible and tangible, the economy became generally incomprehensible" (26). In Malta, the economy is partially visible, in that competition for wealth clearly motivates all actors, and partially obscured, in that its circulating objects originate from and travel to places too far away to see, and the mechanisms of circulation are unexplained. The economy is also incomprehensible: without visibility, its participants do not know how or why it works, and no one can be trusted. The Jewish trading network Barabas references as his community constitutes the only known and highly regulated system of trust in the play – Jewish merchants and bankers across the Mediterranean relied on ethno-religious solidarity to reinforce their trustworthiness (Trivellato 302). Other than this tenuous connection to a far-flung Jewish community, the world of *The Jew of Malta* has no mechanism to maintain the link between moral behavior and commerce. Appleby's argument that the early modern expansion of capitalist markets divorced the moral qualities and consequences of commercial decisions from the awareness of their makers perfectly characterizes the actions of Ferneze, Del Bosco, and the other major players in Malta (53).

In the gulf opened up by the international market's intangibility and uncontrollability, Ferneze injects a religious defense of his taxation policy, as if seeking to return moral judgment to commerce. Ferneze and his knights conceptualize the act of taxing the island's Jews exclusively with the cost of the Turkish tribute as a penalty to be paid for Jewish reprobation – an explanation that is really a convenient rationalization. Barabas astutely reads this moment of religious hypocrisy. His literal-mindedness – a characteristic smear of Jewish thought – stands as a valuable reminder of fact in the face of interpretive obfuscation. Barabas exposes the logical

convolution and unwarranted self-righteousness to which Ferneze and his knights resort in defense of the targeted tax. Citing Matthew 27:25, “His blood be on us, and on our children,” one knight retroactively justifies the tax as a deferred, but just, punishment for the curse the Jews earned by rejecting and condemning Christ. The knight says “If your first curse fall heavy on thy head, / ... / ‘Tis not our fault, but thy inherent sin” (2.1.108, 110). Barabas refuses this self-serving explanation, pointing out that the sins of his ancestors have nothing to do with Malta’s insolvency, the true reason for the tax. He replies:

What? Bring you scripture to confirm your wrongs?

Preach me not out of my possessions...

...say the tribe that I descended of

Were all in general cast away for sin,

Shall I be tried by their transgression? (1.2.111-112, 114-116)

Barabas’ literal interpretation is accurate, not spiritually suspect. His response casts doubt on the idea of genetically inherited guilt and thus contests the entire Christian belief in Jewish reprobation. It also shows that a religiously motivated explanation has no legitimate bearing on a situation that is really about the immediate problem of collecting Turkish tribute money. The knight’s reading of the biblical verse is spiritually unsound, and designed to conflate a poor tax policy with Jewish reprobation. The Christian theological interpretation of a taxation problem attempts to disguise, but really rearticulates, the general interest in wealth as a political tool or as an end in itself. Malta’s fundamental language, whether couched in terms of Christian judgment or not, is one of acquisition and profit.

Far from stopping his exculpatory efforts at labeling the tax a punishment for Jewish sin, Ferneze intensifies his justification with recourse to the word “profession.” “Profession” perhaps

best encapsulates the play's characteristic conflation of material interests and religious dogma. "Profession" shifts unpredictably between the senses of "occupation" and "membership in a religious community." When both senses are in play at once, they enable hypocrisy. In the same scene which sees Ferneze confiscate Barabas' fortune, the dual meanings of "profession" coexist uneasily as both condemnation and justification for materially motivated religious persecution. Barabas cites his unimpeachable behavior to criticize the motives for Ferneze's taxation: "The man that dealeth righteously shall live; / And which of you can charge me otherwise?" (1.2.117-118). Barabas is not sly or insouciant; thus far in *The Jew of Malta*, he has given us no reason to distrust him. His observable behavior matches his profession of "righteousness." Conversely, in justification of the tax, Ferneze's response criticizes Barabas' plea on both religious and commercial grounds. He says, "Shamest thou not thus to justify thyself, / As if we knew not thy profession? / If thou rely upon thy righteousness, / Be patient, and thy riches will increase" (1.2.120-123). Assuming the voice of a pious Christian, Ferneze's words critique Barabas' merchant and religious professions both. The former, because of its focus on worldly goods, leads to covetousness. Ferneze's exhortation to patience signals the faith-based component of his criticism. If Barabas were truly righteous, then his faith would teach him patience, which in turn would lead him to gain wealth without effort. Riches would be a sign of his desserts, earned through Christian faith.

Divergent definitions of righteousness explain the substance of the two characters' different understandings of "profession." Ferneze treats Barabas' impatience as a product of his adherence to the Jewish "profession," picking up on Barabas' particular way of using the concept of righteousness. Barabas speaks of "dealing righteously" as an appeal to the shared elements of Judeo-Christian scripture. The emphasis on righteousness threads its way through

both the Hebrew Bible and New Testaments, opening the possibility for a shared community within and despite the differences that divide Christianity and Judaism. But in the play, the possibility of community is restricted only to those whose mercenary and religious interests align with each other. In pleading for his righteous behavior on shared conceptual grounds, Barabas overlooks the qualitative differences between the Hebrew Bible's and New Testaments' treatments of righteousness. The two books diverge in their perspectives on human effort as a component of becoming and remaining righteous; the former stresses the benefits to be reaped from exerting effort, the latter promotes faith as the key to righteousness.¹⁹ In other words, Barabas is righteous only in the "Jewish," Hebrew bible sense of industriousness and upright, moral living, and not by the New Testament requirement of Christian faith. According to Ferneze's easily-offended faux piousness, Barabas belongs to the wrong profession in both senses of the word, his plea for recognizing a shared investment in righteousness across faiths and occupations serving only to highlight his difference.

Yet if Ferneze insists on the double definition of profession as a means to condemn Barabas both on occupational and theological grounds, then he does not realize that the same condemnatory analysis also applies to his own profession. In a hyperbolic fit, Barabas asks Ferneze if he will take his life now that he has confiscated all his possessions. Ferneze replies, "No, Barabas, to stain our hands with blood / Is far from us and our profession" (1.2.145-146). Here, Ferneze, uses "profession" to mean his ostensible Christian faith; he turns Barabas' accusation against him by implying that only a Jew would imagine that a Christian would stoop so far as to commit murder. Ferneze's disavowal of "stain[ing] our hands with blood" resonates

¹⁹ For a comparison, see, for example, Proverbs 10:16, "The labour of the righteous tendeth to life," and Romans 4:13, "For the promise that he should be the heire of the worlde, was not giuen to Abraham, or to his seede, through the Lawe, but through the righteousnesse of faith." In the latter, righteousness is virtually synonymous with faith, whereas in the former, it is a product of labor.

with Pontius Pilate's symbolic washing of his hands as he relinquishes responsibility for Jesus' execution. Pilate says, "I am innocent of the blood of this iust man: looke you to it" (Matthew 27:24). The refusal to acknowledge one's own participation in a violent injustice is the same in both cases. The similarities are especially striking in their visual language, with the removal of incriminating marks from one's hands somehow all the more condemning. When profession is considered in terms of Ferneze's occupation as governor of Malta and leader of a militaristic religious order, staining his hands with blood is not "far from [him] and [his] profession" at all; rather it is an integral part of his job. In his sanctimoniousness, Ferneze draws a strict boundary between theft of goods and theft of life: the former is justifiable in that goods have no salvific relevance and lead only to sins of covetousness and greed. Ferneze's loyalty to and ability to perform his profession, in both senses, depends upon the maintenance of this boundary, upon not recognizing the concrete and pragmatic connection between life and the means to sustain it.

Malta as Ideal Colony

In revealing Ferneze to be an equally poor reader as Barabas, and deliberately so, *The Jew of Malta* manipulates and subverts the paradigm of the Christian hermeneuticized Jew. Ferneze's coolly pragmatic deployment of the ersatz distinction between life and the means to live redirects attention away from religious difference, and toward the colonial environment that blurs them. In Malta, Marlowe constructs an ideal colony, and the same colonial pressures that provoke Ferneze's behavior offer fertile ground for deconstructing Jewish difference. The idealized and hyperbolized colonial framework functions as the perfect vehicle for making the case against Jewish distinctiveness, and for its widespread qualities, because in the colonial space of Malta, all participants' goals are identical, as are nearly all of their defining characteristics. No one who inhabits Marlowe's Malta comes from Malta; the only characters

with clear allegiances to a particular state are those who arrive from outside to impose their will on the island – the Turkish Selim Calymath, and the Spanish Martin del Bosco. In a land filled only with outsiders, it makes little sense to criticize Jews for being exactly that. Malta is a contested space that passes back and forth between the Spanish, Turkish, and Knights of St. John (itself a non-national entity with a contentious relationship to states), not a state of its own. Malta's status as a non-state, and its inhabitant's origins in other states, constitute two crucial component of its colonial idealness.²⁰

Malta is not colonial in a traditional sense – the foreign imperialists of the play do not come to subjugate and rule Malta's native people, who have a distinct identity tied to the culture and geography of the land in question. Instead, Malta is virtually empty of native peoples for the Turks and Spanish to colonize. Malta contains Barabas and the other Jews; Ithamore, of Moorish and Scythian background;²¹ Ferneze and his Knights, a multi-national collective recently transported from Rhodes; Bellamira and Pilia-Borza, the Italian prostitute and her procurer; and the nuns and friars. Out of the entire cast of characters, Barabas is in some ways the “most” Maltese of them all. The play's title names him “of Malta,” unlike anyone else. He self-identifies by location when he lists the rich Jews of his acquaintance scattered around the Mediterranean. Although Peter Berek has argued that Barabas is “‘of Malta’ only for convenience” (137), his motivations are hardly unique– in an imaginative version of a land practically brought into being by commercial competition, no character resides there for any other reason.

²⁰ Marlowe's exaggerated non-native Malta seems calculated to make the point that colonial designs minimize or even erase the significance of natives. Histories of Malta list the island's many conquerors – the “Phoenicians...Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Goths, and Arabs...followed by German, Spanish, French, and English possessors” (Ballou 6) – but openly admit to ignorance when it comes to records of the native Maltese populations, which “almost entirely disappeared from the historical record” during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Atauz 166).

²¹ Ithamore says that he was born “In Thrace; brought up in Arabia” (2.3.131).

Far from being an escapist fantasy, Marlowe's representation of a native-less island conjured up for the fulfillment of colonial dreams is enabled by contemporary realities. William Biddulph's list of the inhabitants he sees on his visit to Malta confirms the play version of a group of peoples living remotely from their home states: "The inhabitants are Renegadoes and Bandidoes of sundry nations, especially, Greekes, Italians, Spaniards, Moores and Maltezes: There are many Souldiers there, who are in pay vnder the Spaniards, and their Captaines are called Knights of Malta" (4). Not only is Biddulph's list of nationalities almost exclusively foreign, it is also full of criminals – "renegadoes and bandidoes" who deliberately eschew their original national affiliations. The exclusivity of the Order of the Knights of Malta reinforces the narrative of an external European establishment dominating, not protecting, Malta. The Knights left Rhodes in 1523 after surrendering to a Turkish siege, and they were granted Malta in 1530 by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, a Spaniard (Nicholson, 67, 116).²² Native Maltese were not allowed join the order, though they assisted it.²³ The Knights' presence in Malta attests to two levels of control by imperial power: the Holy Roman Empire over the Knights over Malta. The history of Malta as a strategic Mediterranean location inviting intense competition colors the nation's history to the present: the modern nation of Malta is the only place in the world where residents speak a Semitic tongue written in Latin script, evidence of the strong impact of cross-cultural interaction over centuries.

Malta's inhabitants' diverse origins makes it impossible to know who has the original claim to the island, if the word "original" can have any meaning at all (Bartels 91). The island of Malta, then, can be characterized as a strange hybrid of blank slate and palimpsest: blank

²² Also see Ballou 271-272.

²³ Members of the Order had to prove noble lineage. There were French, Spanish, Italian, and until the reformation, English "langues" – units of knights grouped by nationality, and literally, by native tongues (Ballou, 38).

because there are no native peoples to bear the brunt of colonizing activities, and a palimpsest because Malta piles up layers of competing colonists who try to impose their nations' wills on the island. Malta's lack of native inhabitants makes it a site of pure profit and exploitation. Represented as though it has no native history, it is a place "defined and delimited by domination" (Bartels 88). The lack of natives leaves an emptiness, a hollow core at the center of every competing party's colonial and commercial desires. Without natives, the utterly self-interested exploitation of the island for profit is laid completely bare, because the colonizers can offer no pretense of defense or protection. In particular, the rationale the Spanish provide of defending Christendom from the Turks becomes a poor excuse for a foundational interest in power and profit.

Everyone in Marlowe's Malta shares this interest in power and profit, for which religious faith is only a cover. However, to call religion a pretext for colonial interests is not to dismiss its importance, for it is the ostensible motivating factor that brings outsiders to Malta. Martin del Bosco, the Spanish captain who assists the Knights of St. John in protecting Malta from the Turks, makes it very clear that his involvement stems more from the commercial and colonial objectives of the Spanish king than it does from religious solidarity. Del Bosco makes it sound as though he is interested in Christian dominance by bracketing his speech with religiously-tinged concerns: first he explains that he has arrived in Malta upon defeating Turkish ships, and he ends by chastising Ferneze that "The Christian isle of Rhodes, from whence you came, / Was lately lost, and you were stated here / To be at deadly enmity with the Turks" (2.3.31-33). But sandwiched between these expressions of religiosity, Del Bosco illuminates his immediate commercial purposes: "Our freight is Grecians, Turks, and Afric Moors / ...Of whom we would make sale in Malta here" (2.2.9, 18). Ferneze demurs, citing his obligation to the Turks, and his

refusal changes the tenor of Del Bosco's commercial request into a demand, and an exertion of colonial authority. Del Bosco declares, "'My lord and king hath title to this isle, / And he means quickly to expel [the Turks] hence;" (2.2.37-38). Although Del Bosco will protect Malta from the infidel Turks, he does so not as his primary goal, but as a byproduct of his commercial interests and the Spanish king's assertion of colonial power. Even the fact of this mercenary and pragmatic protection is doubtful, though: Emily Bartels has shown that the original quarto version of *The Jew of Malta* reads "he means quickly to expel *you* hence" – an assertion of colonial dominance by Spain over the Knights of Malta. Virtually all editors emend the text to refer to the Turks, assuming that it makes no sense for Del Bosco to threaten his Christian allies. But Bartels reads the quarto as correct, and argues that it offers "a telling signal of Spain's intent to use rather than protect Malta" (90). Apart from this scene, Marlowe grants Del Bosco only one other insignificant line in the entire play; his primary purpose in his dual roles as a representative of Catholic Spain and as a slave merchant is to elide religious, mercantile, and imperial goals in one figure. Del Bosco's value lies in the competition he represents, and his cargo of slaves, "ominously associating him with the business of taking captives and making profits," makes him no safer to Malta's interests than the Turks (Bartels 90).

Colonial threats to Malta's autonomy originate both internally and externally. Despite seeming like insiders compared to the Spanish, the Knights of Malta exert colonial pressure from within their already-established post on Malta; they collapse the distinction between internal and external pressures. They represent themselves as Malta's defenders, despite being equally its exploiters. Ferneze matches the unprincipled behavior of Del Bosco, his Spanish overlord: he agrees to pay the Turks tribute in order to avoid a military conflict, then decides to avoid the financial burden of the tribute by collecting the money from Malta's Jews. Upon Del Bosco's

arrival, he decides not to pay the Turks at all, but still holds on to the tax money gathered for that purpose. The Order of St. John sets a precedent for Ferneze's behavior, corroborating Marlowe's depiction of the Order as a self-serving group that uses religion as "a convenient cloak to cover up their questionable purposes" (Ballou 36). Historically, the Order operated galleys specifically for the purpose of raiding and capturing other ships; their major source of income was the sale of slaves and other prizes (Atauz 166-167). The Order was just as piratical as the Turks and the Spanish, but Marlowe transforms it into a flawed, even failed, organization. Ferneze's knights have failed, first for losing Rhodes, and second, for agreeing to do business with the Turks – the opposite of the Order's mandate to defend Christianity against infidels. The changes the play makes to the historical order's successful exploitations help to make more obvious the point that the Knights' religious mandate conflicts with their true goals of domination and profit. In order to defend Christianity, the Knights of Malta ought not to placate the Turks financially, but stand as a Christian outpost, enemies against Turkish advances. Instead, the commercial imperative to sell slaves invites Turkish attacks; the weakening of Christian power in Malta originates within the Spanish and Knights' own profit-based decisions.

The Maltese residents' disunity shores up the primacy of money and power in the colonial space of Malta. With no native affiliation for Malta, the characters have no tradition of loyalty to one another based on ethnic, national, or religious ties. They fight against each other, instead of with or for each other. This internal competition shows most clearly in the chronology of events leading up to and including the Turkish demands for tribute. Malta's Jews are summoned to meet Ferneze *before* Selim Calymath arrives, suggesting that Ferneze had *already* planned to claim their incomes. In 1.1, the Second Jew informs the others that "...there's a meeting in the senate-house, / And all the Jews in Malta must be there" (166-167). It is not

until 1.2 that Ferneze inquires as to the Turks demands, and Calymath responds, “The Ten years’ tribute that remains unpaid” (7). Ferneze requests a month in order to collect the tribute from all of Malta’s inhabitants (1.2.20-21), but then immediately instructs his servant to “Go one and calls those Jews of Malta hither,” inquiring, “Were they not summoned to appear today?” (34-35). Ferneze’s question to his servant confirms that 1.1. and 1.2 occur sequentially, and not simultaneously – the Jews had already been summoned before Calymath’s arrival.

The Jews’ summons acts as equally good evidence for Jewish scapegoating as it is for the colonizing impulses of domination and exploitation. It seems probable that Ferneze planned to single out Malta’s Jews even before he had a rationale for it. But regardless of whether the move is best read as evidence of anti-Jewish animus, or as evidence of the widespread colonial exploitation of local residents, it shows the drive for money trumps Maltese cohesion. Ferneze’s targeted attack on the Jews’ wealth highlights the native-less feature of Malta’s ideal colonial status. In disputing the tax, Barabas does not contest Ferneze’s argument that he is a “stranger;” he merely argues that his foreign status does not justify targeting: “Are strangers with *your* tribute to be taxed?” (1.2.59, emphasis added). Far from contesting his alien status, the logic of his anti-tax position *derives* from it. The most Barabas is willing to concede is that the Jews should be taxed “equally,” along with all other Maltese residents (1.2.62). Barabas’ incredulity and righteous indignation is justified, especially because it is already clear by this point that everyone in Malta is a “stranger” of one kind or another, and that “...to be ‘of Malta’ really means not to be, originally, of Malta” (Bartels 91). Strangers not only stand in as proxies for native Maltese, they also perform that role for their would-be colonizers better than natives could, in that they are the most disempowered, and therefore the most easily targeted.

Despite the fact that Ferneze targets Barabas and the other Jews for the tax money, conceptualizing Malta as an idealized colony helps tear down notions of Jewish difference. Jews are simply one of the many groups who work to take advantage of the pressures and demands of a colonial atmosphere as well as they can. The nuns and friars take advantage of Barabas' dispossession to enrich their religious orders; Bellamira and Pilia-Borza hope to profit from the anticipated high volume of prostitution customers in a busy, centralized port; and Ithamore extorts Barabas for money by joining forces with them. Barabas' distinctive feature is not that he, too, cares about money, but that it seems comparatively easy for him to get it. After Ferneze confiscates his wealth, Barabas recuperates it in excess of what he had before – a process the play renders both invisible and swift. (“In spite of these swine-eating Christians... Am I become as wealthy as I was” Barabas says a mere scene and a half after Abigail recuperates his hidden savings (2.3.7, 11)). Yet his rapid re-accumulation of wealth does not mark Barabas' Jewishness, despite his claims that the Jewish covenant consists of riches. The distinctiveness is a Marlovian rather than Jewish one: Barabas becomes inexplicably rich again because Marlowe elides the very real dangers and difficulties of trade in *The Jew of Malta* just as his other plays tend to overlook the messy mechanics of success.²⁴ Tamburlaine gains an empire, but overtly registers very little effort in the process. Faustus masters all human arts and sciences before turning to the devil without showing his hours of study. Marlowe's plays do not make the mechanisms by which conquest occurs (whether of money, land, or intellect) visible. Marlowe's interest in the fantasy of domination, of human power stripped of but ultimately subjected to its limitations,

²⁴ For the actual difficulties Jewish travelers and businessmen faced in the early modern Mediterranean, see Shatzmiller 214, and Arbel.

places his dramatic worlds in an ideal realm where possibility matters but causal mechanisms do not.

Though desire for profit in *The Jew of Malta* is not distinctively Jewish, the Jewish presence in Malta does contribute to the island's representation as an ideal colony. The economic prosperity associated with Jewish merchants hearkens back to a cosmopolitan past for Malta, long on the wane by the time Marlowe wrote his play. After Spain expelled all Jews from their kingdoms (of which Malta was one, being part of the kingdom of Sicily) in 1492, Maltese and Sicilian authorities complained that the absence of Jews would be economically disadvantageous, because it would lead to significant depopulation (Wettinger 117). This decreasing population would also diminish the existence of valuable professional contributions: the Jews in fifteenth century Malta had been very involved in the cotton trade, and they also owned some farms and vineyards (Wettinger 34, 43). After the Jewish expulsion, no Jews other than captured slaves were allowed in Malta during the reign of the Knights of St. John.²⁵ Barabas' presence in the play's Malta is thus an infusion of an economically idealized medieval past into the early modern present.

The ideal Malta, then, includes Jews, and looks back nostalgically to a time that included Jews as productive members of Malta's vibrant economy. In creating an early modern world that coalesces around a Jewish presence, the play evinces an awareness that the structures of modern life are built on top of and rely upon successively older ones. The physical structure of the nunnery was once Barabas' house;²⁶ the pit contraption Barabas builds to trap Selim Calymath, and which leads to his own death, employs the same trap-door on stage which previously stood

²⁵ Jewish slaves captured by the Knights or other Christian corsairs were promptly put up for auction or ransomed to their co-religionists (Wettinger 144)

²⁶ Similarly, the synagogue at Mdina was turned into a nunnery after the Jewish expulsion, provoking hunts for abandoned Jewish treasures (Wettinger 148).

for the sewer by means of which he infiltrated the city (5.1 and 5.5). With these overlapping, multi-use structures, *The Jew of Malta* enacts the resurgence of Jewishness in the present moment of its erasure and oppression. In layering physical spaces with multiple meanings and histories, Marlowe inverts the temporal distancing of Jews common to other early modern texts, as chronicled by Jonathan Gil Harris. In the Old Jewry neighborhood of London, traces of the Jewish inhabitants connote the distant past. Whereas the “Old” of Old Jewry “ossif[ies] its noun and make[s] the phrase designate a singular Jewish place, people, and time, all of which were defined by their irrevocable pastness” (“Shakespeare’s Jewry” 42-43), Marlowe engages in the opposite tactic, dredging up the past into the present moment. The play creates an alternate present in which the Jews never left, and in which the underlying structures of Jewish habitation constitute the stage on which Malta’s current colonial power struggle plays out.

In a colony that must contain Jews to be ideal, stereotypical Jewish greed is repurposed as a fantasy of non-instrumentality, a desire for wealth to escape all pragmatic valuations. The fantasy of non-instrumentality conflicts with the obviously instrumental need for goods and power that fuels the plot. Nevertheless, it lurks at the edges of even the most mundane transactions, positing a world freed from necessity, in which material goods are valued for their beauty, and for their capacity to contain and broadcast the identities of their owners.

From the outset of *The Jew of Malta*, the risks and hazards of international commerce nearly disappear behind a fantastical, dream-like vision of infinite gain without toil, reflecting a Marlovian preoccupation with the extremes of human experience and achievement, and a de-emphasis of their causes. This disappearance occurs despite the fact that peripheral evidence of the effort required to become as rich a merchant as Barabas does sneak into the initial portrait of his opulent, luxurious wealth. We hear about his ships traversing the Mediterranean, about his

factors dealing with customs agents, and about the riskiness of sea travel. This knowledge of its impracticability only makes Barabas' wealth less intelligible. How he accrues it confounds explanation: his "Argosy from Alexandria / Loaden with spice and silks" (1.1.44-45) is in fact a "crazed vessel" (1.1.80) of questionable sea-worthiness, and yet his goods never fail to arrive safely in port.

His preferred kinds of goods and methods of acquisition, too, completely eschew reality. He rhapsodizes about the "wealthy Moor," who,

Without control can pick his riches up
 And in his house heap pearl like pebble-stones,
 Receive them free, and sell them by the weight –
 Bags of firey opals, sapphires, amethysts...
 And seld-seen costly stones... (1.1.21-25, 28)

"Without control," "heap," "Receive them free" – Barabas envisions a capitalism that is somehow free of its own constraints (the Moor acquires his wares effortlessly and without cost), yet still answers to some of its basic tenets (the Moor does not hold on to his wealth, as Barabas does – he "sells them by the weight" to increase his wealth even more). Barabas' wish to emulate the Moor of his imagination and receive his riches freely and easily would devalue the very luxurious goods he so desires. He cultivates an imaginative, idiosyncratic interpretation of the worth of material goods based not on their market value but on his own aesthetic preferences, singling out the sparkly, colorful jewels. His perspective on wealth dismantles the concrete and material basis of his profession.

Because Barabas is the primary (if not only) exponent of this strangely non-mercantile attitude toward wealth, the trait appears to be another distinctive feature of Jewishness. Ferneze

wants money to pay off the Turks; Del Bosco wants to sell his slaves; Calymath wants to collect the tribute owed his father – all purposeful efforts to enrich or maintain empire. Only Barabas seems to want stuff for no immediate, useful reason. His lack of instrumental motivation makes the play’s representation of wealth an odd one. The play obsesses over material goods, but in its protagonist’s case, it does so without registering their practical features – who possesses them, how they circulate, and what they are worth. Barabas exemplifies this unusual attitude: effortlessly prosperous, he scoffs at the “paltry silverlings” he receives in payment for his “Spanish oils and wines of Greece” not because they are worthless, but because they are unattractive (1.1.5-6). Barabas would far rather have a “wedge of gold” (9) than the silver coins, even if their monetary values were identical. The point, for Barabas, is aesthetic just as much as it is financial: as with his famous “infinite riches in a little room” (37), Barabas appreciates the wedge of gold because he finds the idea of compressing extreme wealth into a small and pretty package visually appealing. The visual appeal signals a class-based elitism and disdain for labor: Barabas says that only the “needy groom that ne’er fingered groat” would mind counting it (1.1.11). Though condensing value is a matter of practicality for a merchant with limited space in which to safeguard his riches, Barabas’ language in this opening scene privileges the attractiveness of such an arrangement over its utility. He calls the silver “trash,” which suggests he thinks it is ugly as well as less valuable (1.1.7). Through Barabas, Marlowe represents material wealth in terms of the aesthetic pleasures it can elicit in addition to its practical uses, and he codes such non-utilitarian pleasure as a particularly Jewish trait.

Theologically, Judaism is perhaps better placed than Christianity to understand and appreciate non-instrumentality when it comes to luxurious and aesthetically pleasing goods. The compression of value in Christianity has a transactional quality to it: the infant Christ compresses

the infinite value of salvation into one small, unassuming, human package, but Christ's salvific properties are gained only in trade – his life for humanity's sins. In contrast, Judaism, much like Barabas' non-utilitarian appreciation of his wealth, seals off beautiful, luxurious, and valuable materials from all human transaction in its most holy site. The Holy of Holies – the inner sanctum of the temple that contains the Ark of the Covenant – was ornamented elaborately (per God's instructions to Moses in Exodus 25 and 26), but it was also completely off limits to all but the High Priest on the day of Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:2). The decoration of the room and of the Ark itself – an ornate chest made of solid gold, containing the tablets on which the commandments were written – serves no instrumental purpose, not even that of a viewer's aesthetic enjoyment.²⁷ The ornamentation of the Holy of Holies and of the Ark is, pragmatically speaking, a waste of valuable goods, but its role in venerating Judaism's sacred texts is priceless. Exchange and monetary value are not the relevant intellectual and spiritual paradigms as they are for Christian salvation. Barabas' selfish adoration of his beautiful but unused wealth parodies Jewish religious devotion.

The binary alignment of Jews with non-instrumentality and non-Jews with utility is an overly simplistic one, delineated in order to complicate and dismantle it. Marlowe offers glimpses into Barabas' experience of utility and necessity, and into Ferneze's adoption of non-instrumental rhetoric for self-serving purposes. Upon having his wealth confiscated by the state, Barabas exclaims, "Christians, what or how can I multiply? / Of naught is nothing made" (1.2.104-105). Though his complaint is disingenuous – Barabas, unbeknownst to Ferneze, has emergency stashes of gold hidden beneath the floorboards of his house – his point is

²⁷ I am indebted to Hayward's *The Jewish Temple* for descriptions of the Second Temple, and for information about the restrictions on entering the Holy of Holies (50).

indisputable. Barabas angrily suggests that Ferneze might as well take his life as take his wealth. Because the former sustains the latter, the object of the theft is a distinction without a difference. Unlike Ferneze, Barabas refuses to recognize the difference between death and the deprivation of the means to sustain life, since the one must follow on the other. He says, “You have my wealth, the labor of my life, / The comfort of mine age, my children’s hope, / And therefore ne’er distinguish of the wrong” (1.2.150-152). Barabas repurposes the investment in the literal and the tangible as a sensible, humane, way of thinking. Ferneze acts as though the boundary he sets between theft and murder makes him morally superior, but instead it makes him seem willfully and cruelly unrealistic. He disingenuously adopts a theological defense for the non-theological and very political purpose of taking Barabas’ money to pay off the Turks.

Although *The Jew of Malta* constantly issues reminders that goods and profit cannot but be instrumental, Barabas’ strongly-felt desire for non-instrumentality permits the pursuit of acquisition and riches to be evaluated on an individual scale, rather than a structural or institutional one. Reducing the scope to an individual level permits a studied, deliberate ignorance of the connections between financial gain and exploitation, and between profit and religion. In the concluding move of his opening monologue, Barabas reduces the geographic scope of his wealth to as small and as restricted a focus as possible, and completely eliminates its socio-political resonances:

This is the ware wherein consists my wealth;
 And thus, methinks, should men of judgment frame
 Their means of traffic from the vulgar trade,
 And, as their wealth increaseth, so enclose
 Infinite riches in a little room. (1.1.33-37)

We know that Barabas wants these goods, but we can never be sure what he wants them for. He imagines that “men of judgment” can increase wealth without circulating it, the privacy of the “little room” intensifying the beauty of the “infinite riches.” Barabas presents as a greedy materialist who sees gain as a goal in and of itself, but he also warps the stereotype of Jewish greed by presenting it as a special talent belonging to an elite group – a way to differentiate himself from the “vulgar trade” which values the practical functions of goods over their beauty. It is a talent that all can cultivate, and a mark of distinction that can apply to all who share his ethos, Jew or not.

Anyone *could* assume the same ethos, but Barabas’ idiosyncrasies also limit and focus attention on him. His devious asides brand him as the only character that seems to take an interest in crafty machinations for their own sake. His private response to the news of the arrival of the Turks is to “...let ‘em combat, conquer, and kill all, / So they spare me, my daughter, and my wealth” (1.1.151-152) and “Assure yourselves I’ll look – unto myself” (1.1.172). These asides work to erase the very political nature of gain and conquest – he does not care about the reasons for the conflict, or even most of its effects, as long as he and his property emerge unscathed. His impulse for self-preservation is instrumental, but it is also apolitical and individual. Barabas’ attitude represents a desired impossibility: his apolitical and personal valuations of wealth exist in a world that is constantly impinging upon his self-fulfillment. Wealth can never be truly apolitical as long as others compete for it. The “infinite riches in a little room” can never be adequately protected or preserved from the demands of the outside world. Every act of act of acquisition in *The Jew of Malta* is really a kind of theft.

Both precarious and yet tenacious in its hold over *The Jew of Malta*, the concept of non-instrumentality does the important emotional work of separating out acquisitions from toil, and

from the likely exploitative nature of that toil. It allows domination and power via wealth, without requiring audiences to think about where such wealth comes from, or what it is used for. Ithamore's courtship of the prostitute Bellamira exemplifies the emotional resonances of non-instrumentality, along with its failure. His bathetic parody of Marlowe's own "Passionate Shepherd" poem mocks the idea of pastoral plenty, acquired effortlessly.

Content, but we will leave this paltry land
 And sail from hence to Greece, to lovely Greece.
 I'll be thy Jason, thou my golden fleece.
 Where painted carpets o'er the meads are hurled
 And Bacchus' vineyards overspread the world,
 Where woods and forests go in goodly green,
 I'll be Adonis, thou shalt be Love's Queen.
 The meads, the orchards, and the primrose lanes,
 Instead of sedge and reed, bear sugar-canes.
 Thou in those groves, by Dis above,
 Shalt live with me and be my love. (4.2.96-106)

Ithamore does not quest after Bellamira, as Jason does the fleece; he pays for her. Though elevated to the (poorly corresponding) register of Greek myth, their union is still an act of conquest. Their escapist fantasy sadly escapes nothing at all, but remains resolutely mired in empire: the pseudo-pastoral Greece Ithamore imagines is a relic of the distant past, if it ever existed at all, and his contemporary Greece belongs to the Ottoman Empire. The imperialism of Ithamore's fantasy takes the shape of human domination over natural settings. They throw carpets over the meads "meads, orchards, primrose lanes" (4.2.99). The vineyards are on the

verge of taking over the “woods and forests.” The gardens Ithamore envisions are all cultivated for aesthetic pleasure, not use. These are swiftly altered to “bear sugar canes” (104) – another colonial product in hot demand. Like pastoral poetry, Ithamore attempts to capture the plentitude and ease of the pastoral life without work, but human activity is what his faux-paradise hinges upon. He and Bellamira would escape with Barabas’ money, their theft exploiting his labor as a merchant. Ithamore and Bellamira themselves are products of colonial competition and encounter each other because of it: they are a slave and a prostitute, brought to Malta by the very demands of colonial competition Ithamore here dreams of escaping.

Jane Degenhardt makes the case that Ithamore’s and Bellamira’s relationship is a parody of “courtly love” with a perverse sexual relationship intended to make any Christian-Turkish league look like a form of miscegenation. In other words, their relationship is supposed to be a comic, flawed version of Ferneze’s and Calymath’s. Through Ithamore’s “bodily degradation” (he is ugly) the play asserts that although a Spanish-Maltese union is far from desirable, it is far preferable to a hybrid Christian-Turkish one (168-172). But pastoral, rather than courtly love, better capture the dynamic between Ithamore and Bellamira. Only the pastoral captures the idealized escape from human labor that is dreamed of but never accomplished. In pastoral, human effort is elided, but humans act upon and shape the landscape nevertheless. Pastoral fails to recognize labor, but ought to, just as Marlowe creates a world in which Barabas is rich without labor, but everyone around him labors to earn their share. By presenting a choice between a Turkish-Maltese alliance on the one hand, and a Spanish-Maltese alliance on the other, *The Jew of Malta* reinforces the island’s coloniality, and the inescapable work that goes into maintaining and competing over its colonial state.

Religion and Commerce: Systems of Exchange

In the competitive colonial world of Malta, religion and commerce share an exchange-based logic. *The Jew of Malta* presents any attempt to hide or eliminate this connection as futile. Material wealth acquires spiritual inflections in the play that make characters' relationships to it similar to those they have (or, *ought* to have) with religion. Most notably, Barabas' plot to retrieve his remaining hidden goods from the nunnery showcases the ideological similarities between his fervent devotion to those goods, and the nuns' devotion to their spiritual calling. For security against just such an event as Ferneze's taxation, Barabas tells Abigail that, "Ten thousand portagues, besides great pearls, / Rich costly jewels, and stones infinite, / Fearing the worst of this before it fell, / I closely hid" (1.2.246-249). Although his motivation is ostensibly to provide himself and his daughter with a safety net in case of loss, Barabas has stored away not just any kind of useful and valuable goods, but only the most beautiful and most exotic. He chooses the goods to which we already know him to be the most attracted.

The space in which Barabas has stored his remaining riches is insufficiently small for the amount he has socked away – "ten thousand portagues," and "stones infinite" are all impossibly hidden "close underneath the plank that runs along the upper chamber floor" in his former house (1.2.295-296). Barabas goes to great lengths to stage or imagine storage arrangements that seem incommensurate with the quantity he needs to store: first the infinite riches in the little room, and now "stones infinite" beneath a floor plank. And Barabas appears to love the incommensurability itself. Barabas likes "closeness" because of its paradoxical relationship to limitlessness – his obsession with small spaces pointing not to a love of restriction, but to an appreciation for the seemingly magical ability of these narrow confines to contain boundless plentitude. The very smallness of the space serves to set off the enormity of his wealth, making it appear even larger and more opulent through the contrast. This compression of value into a small space is not

merely an aesthetic preference which has acquired near-ecstatic overtones. Compression also merits attention in both commerce and religion because it is a form of efficient exchange. The logical but extreme extension of compressed value is credit, which makes the valuable material disappear entirely. Credit looks almost like a kind of magic – a miracle whose mechanisms defy explanation, because it makes an absence have value. Barabas turns himself into this valuable absence when he hopes his reputation can stand in for his presence when paying customs duties (1.1.57-62). Christianity employs the concept of credit as a tenet of the faith, just as Barabas' use of credit lends a faith-based element to his business.

Christ's redemption of humanity is the unseen value, something believers get in advance of actual payment. The small and unassuming package in which redemption arrives elicits its value and gives meaning to Christian faith. According to David Riggs, Barabas' opening tableau of 'infinite riches in a little room' allegorizes the limitless salvific force of Christ held in the narrow confines of Mary's womb (264). The allegory, though, is perhaps even more apt for the space beneath the floorboards of Barabas' house turned nunnery both because it is even smaller than the little room, and because it represents a second chance, a redemption, after all that Barabas has seemingly lost. The second chance from a small and unassuming space links fetal Jesus even more closely to the floorboard space than it does to the little room. Barabas' love of his goods assumes this devotional angle of understanding and appreciating incommensurability: his infinite riches and small containers cannot possibly relate to each other on any real scale of magnitude, and it is this very disjuncture which elicits his rapturous response to the gold's return: "O girl, O gold, O beauty, O my bliss!!" (2.1.54). Likewise, it is the small, unassuming package in which Jesus arrives that makes God's salvation through Christ comparatively so

miraculous – it is, according to appearances, all the more doubtful for his diminutive size and weakness.

The location of the hidden goods – beneath a floorboard marked with the sign of the cross – is significant not only for its small size, but also for its conflation of the literal and spiritual resonances of redemption. Because it is a way for Barabas to reclaim his wealth, the purpose of the hidden wealth references the literal, original meaning of the word, “redeem” – “to buy back,” or “to recover by purchase” – and ignores its symbolic use in Christian doctrine. But the sign of the cross on the board and the board’s location in a former Jewish home, now nunnery, references the Christian theology of redemption – Christ’s death atones for humanity’s sins. If Christ died to redeem humanity from its sins, then his death is the currency used to purchase salvation. God’s forgiveness is a business transaction – one human/God life in exchange for humanity’s sins. Money (a medium of exchange) lies at the root of Christianity in the same way that money mockingly and literally lies in the foundations of Barabas’ house-turned-nunnery. Barabas gleefully exposes the shared exchange-based logic of money and Christian redemption by driving home to Abigail that “The board is marked thus that covers it” (1.2.348, 354). His delight stems from the fact that, although Christianity saves its followers with a financial transaction, this particular collection of coins will redeem an inveterate Jewish reprobate.

Beyond the local site of the floorboard, the fact that Barabas’ house has been transformed into a nunnery extends both the spiritual resonances of his fortune, and his pseudo-religious devotion to it. In terms of plot, the transformation of Barabas’ house into a nunnery is a barrier, one meant to emphasize the mutual enmity of Christians and Jews. But read as a complication of the stereotypes of Jewish materialism and spiritual literalism, Barabas and the nuns actually

work in concert with one another to expose Christianity's fundamental kinship to monetary logic. As the nuns approach Barabas' former house, Barabas counsels Abigail about how to gain admittance to their order as a novice. He tells her to "Be close, my girl, for this must fetch my gold" (1.2.303). Using "close" to mean hidden (so that the nuns do not see the two of them conferring), Barabas attaches to Abigail the same quality that he so values in his riches – its secrecy, invisibility, and inaccessibility. The nuns, Abigail, Barabas, and Barabas' gold are all extremely similar to one another – hidden objects of value, and their hiders. The Abbess is happy to arrive in her new home, "for we love not to be seen" (1.2.306). The nunnery replicates exactly the enclosed environment in which Barabas so loves to hide his wealth, and the Abbess replaces those hidden goods, kept well out of reach of "the multitude." Although the nuns function in the play to block Barabas' access to his remaining goods, they are ideologically connected to him, their concern for remaining unseen demonstrating that the fundamental character of Barabas' house has not changed in its transfer from one religion to another, even if its inhabitants have.

Barabas' relationship to Abigail also demonstrates the essential connection between religious and economic modes of thought. Barabas presents her alternately as an object for sale, and as a shifting spiritual inflection point – a virgin, a daughter, and a sacrifice. She appears at times holy and untouchable, and at other times saleable, a commodified human, like a slave. Before she ever appears on stage, Barabas attaches emotional significance to her, mentioning her in order to delineate the extremely narrow limits of his community. His cares extend beyond himself only as far as his possessions and his daughter, whom he "hold[s] as dear / As Agamemnon did his Iphigen" (1.1.136-137). The allusion to the Greek myth makes her both a highly ironic religious sacrifice and a pawn to further her father's mercenary interests at the same time – Agamemnon is remembered for his quick acquiescence when asked to sacrifice

Iphigenia, not his fatherly devotion (Ephraim 113). Even Agamemnon's religious pretext for the sacrifice is all about expediency, not piousness. Barabas' equal evaluation of her and his possessions as his foremost cares causes Abigail to slide indeterminately between beloved human and valued property.

Barabas uses Abigail as a saintly, yet sexual, enticement to Ferneze's son Lodowick, whom he seeks to kill in retaliation for his father's extortionate taxation. He represents her as a diamond, painting the conversation, which takes place in the slave market, with the veneer of business. The diamond Abigail is pure – "ne'er was foiled" – and almost godly – she "Outshines Cynthia's rays," but she is also a sexually desirable object to be had only at great cost: Lodowick will "like it better far o' nights than days," but Barabas says in an aside that the price is "Your life an if you have it" (2.3.57, 63-64, 66). The transactional nature of the conversation works not in spite of, but specifically because it blends spiritual or devotional matters with commercial ones. Cynthia is another name for Artemis/Diana, the goddess of the moon, the hunt, and virginity. Granted, Cynthia is a classical goddess, not the Christian deity, but her origins make Barabas' reference no less spiritual. The comparison to the committed virgin Cynthia on one hand places Abigail out of reach of commodification because she is removed from the market of marriage and reproduction – the main ways women are treated as transactable commodities. On the other hand, virginity is highly valuable – a woman is not marriageable without it. Thus, it is precisely the religious overtones of Barabas' and Lodowick's exchange that make Abigail saleable – they compare her untouched virginity to a diamond, which can be assigned a specific monetary worth.

Immediately after confirming the sale of Abigail with Lodowick, Barabas transacts a second sale of Abigail to Matthias, this time conflating the sale of his daughter with the sale of

his religious history. As a ruse to hide the purpose of the business from Katherine, Matthias' mother, Barabas substitutes a "comment on the Maccabees" (2.3.156). For a second time in the play, Barabas cedes his Jewishness, this time by relinquishing Jewish scriptural authority to the Christian tradition. As a Jewish virgin, Abigail's body would have been inaccessible to Christian men twice over. She represents the inaccessibility of the virgin female body to men at the same time that her body, by means of the scholarly commentary, stands for Jewish knowledge hidden from Christians (Ephraim 114-115). As daughter and property, Abigail's sexual desirability is a commodity Barabas can sell, and she represents a second commodity – Jewish scripture – over which Barabas the Jewish father (father to his daughter, and, as a Jew, the religious "father" of Christianity) has power and to which he controls access. Barabas' religion and his daughter are equally for sale, and equally profitable.

Barabas not only links religion and economics in his actions; his very name also speaks to Christianity's monetary stakes. The biblical Barabbas, imprisoned for theft, actually duplicates Christ, even though their crimes, according to the Roman authorities, are different. Christ is a figurative thief, as "anyone who would take for himself the attributes belonging exclusively to God actually commits a form of 'robbery' insofar as this 'deprives' (*rapit*) God of his due honor" (Parker 198). Christ can also be considered a thief because the Romans and Jews treat him as a proxy of the thief Barabbas when they choose the former to die in his stead, and because of the etymological similarities between Jesus' and Barabbas' names. Parker explains that Barabbas' name means "son of the father," which strongly implies "son of God," as Jesus referred to God as his father. Additionally, in one tradition, Barabbas' first name is Jesus, making him the linguistic as well as symbolic equivalent of Jesus Christ. Thus, when Pilate allows the Jews to release a prisoner, the Jews are left to choose between "Jesus, son of the

father,” and Jesus the messiah, who called God his father. Considering Christ’s penchant for nominating himself the son of God at the expense of all the Jews, who called themselves ‘sons of God,’ Christ’s theft is an egregious one, such that “given their options [New Testament Jews] chose the lesser of two criminals” (Parker 199).

Despite his evident cunning, the play’s Barabas surprisingly offers a moral corrective to the thievery of the biblical Barabbas and of Christ. His namesake may be a thief, but he is not. Barabas steals only to right wrongdoing against himself – he reclaims his former goods in order to work around Ferneze’s persecutions. Ferneze targets him in order to spare the rest of Malta the Turks’ predations just as Pilate executes Christ instead of Barabbas to appease the biblical Jews. In terms of the injustices he is subject to, the play’s eponymous character aligns more with Christ than with his own namesake. His subversive replacement of Jesus in the Christian sacrificial narrative inserts the persecuted Jew into the center of Christian monetized religious logic. He is a sacrifice made to shore up Christian profit and to cover over it with sanctimonious self-righteousness.

The pretext for taxing Malta’s Jews makes Barabas’ sacrificial stance a matter of overt financial policy. Upon hearing of the tax levied against the Jews, Barabas is anxious to know that he will be taxed “equally.” Ferneze’s response, “No, Jew, like infidels” (1.2.62), injects Jewish reprobation as a religious justification for the tax into what Barabas would happily consider a matter of purely civic duty. When Barabas protests the tax, and asks Ferneze, “Is theft the ground of your religion,” the answer, of course, should be ‘yes,’ and in multiple ways, although Ferneze denies it (1.2.96). Riggs has pointed out that Ferneze’s response recalls Caiaphas’ judgment of Christ: his lines, “...we take particularly thine / To save the ruin of a multitude” (1.2.97-98), rearticulate Caiaphas’ rationale that “it was expedient that one man should die for

the people” (John 18:14). Ferneze rewrites Christian salvation in purely financial terms, and thus reveals his fundamentally selfish concretism. Riggs uses these lines as evidence that literal meanings always trump spiritual ones in the play, or put another way, the economic logic comes in and through spiritual language: “Where the Christian reader of the Gospel according to St. John hears the promise of salvation, Governor Ferneze discovers a prejudicial pretext for extortion” (Riggs 265).

Riggs’ reading of the way *The Jew of Malta* resolutely returns spiritual language to corruption and cold pragmatism is beyond reproach, but the play also engages in the inverse phenomenon – gleaning spiritual ramifications from the literal and concrete. As Jonathan Burton has shown, Ferneze in this scene accidentally and subversively reimagines Christianity’s foundational sacrifice. By acknowledging that the tax on Barabas is a convenient way to protect the other residents of Malta, Ferneze transforms Barabas into a Christ-like sacrifice. Ferneze loses control over the theological pretext for taxation he created: what was meant to be a justified punishment clearly shows as a case of convenient scapegoating. In other words, although none of the play’s characters may realize the spiritual resonances of their words, Barabas comes perilously close to replacing Jesus as their savior in this particular narrative – the innocent victim whose money, much like Christ’s blood does for humanity, saves all of Malta from ruin at the hands of the Turks. For Burton, the subversion of doctrine that is Barabas as potential salvific sacrifice functions in the play as a critique of hollow, self-serving anti-Semitism: “The Jew is thus essential to Malta’s survival, both in his capacity as a merchant and money-maker, and as an ‘infidel’ whose scapegoating shores up a dubious Christianity” (Burton 224).²⁸ Per Barabas’

²⁸ Ephraim also supports reading “Barabas as [a] Christ-like sacrifice” (116).

accusation, theft is doubtless the grounds of the Christian religion in Marlowe's vision of Malta; after so much conflation, the literal and spiritual meanings of words are finally indistinguishable.

Assimilative Jewishness as Metatheatric Performance

The worldliness, materialism, greed, and literal-mindedness of which non-Jewish characters such as Ferneze accuse Barabas, and for which they excuse their exploitative maltreatment of Malta's Jews, instead characterizes the behavior and language common to all players in Malta. Stephen Greenblatt argues that "Barabas is not the exception to but rather the true representative of his society...[his] avarice, egotism, duplicity, and murderous cunning do not signal his exclusion from the world of Malta but his central place within it" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 203-204). For Greenblatt, Barabas both exemplifies Christian society and is constructed by it ("Marlowe, Marx" 299). Contrastingly, Harris suggests that Barabas' empty, inconsistent identity "paradoxically constitute[s] his unique Jewishness within the play: For all Marlowe voids Barabas of discrete identity, this voiding is itself a crucial component of early modern and subsequent European constructions of the Jew" (*Foreign Bodies* 94). Greenblatt's and Harris' assessments of Barabas and his relation to Maltese society help to address the character's origins in a society that obscures them by being just like him. Does Barabas assume his diabolical, villainous behaviors by following the examples set by Malta's non-Jewish residents? In other words, does the Jew imitate the Christian, or conversely, does everyone in Malta become Jews? To my mind, these two possibilities, though seemingly contradictory on the face of it, offer up similar answers. No non-Jewish character in *The Jew of Malta* converts; I use "Jew" as a moral term rather than as a religious or ethnographic one when I ask if all figures in the play become Jews. In the moral sense of the word, becoming "Jewish" really designates a revelation of corrupted behavior that was present all along, not a shift to corruption. Barabas

imitates his creators, who have imagined an externalized scapegoat to represent nothing more than what they already are. The process of Jewish and Christian convergence is circular, and thus makes sense from any starting point. To take either route in recognizing the overlap of Jewish and Christian identities – calling the Christians “Jews” or saying that the Jew imitates the Christian – is, in Marlowe’s play, to expose the specious argument that there is anything “Jewish” about Barabas’ behavior at all. In both directions, the result is to eliminate an entirely corrupt society’s refuge in accusations of Jewishness.

To this cultural and ideological critique the play adds a dramatic one: its self-referential metatheatricality shows cunning, deceptive, Machiavellian facets of stereotypical Jewishness to be intrinsic components of theatrical performance. Assessing Jewishness in a generically-based light, *The Jew of Malta* makes the case that stage Jewishness articulates fears and anxieties related to performance. The play’s metatheatric turn expands the scope of its critique of Jewishness to implicate its own audiences, and the practice of theater itself. Jewishness is, finally, just another way of thinking about identity as a performance, and of marking out such performative behaviors as ones in which we are all complicit.

The Jew of Malta employs the very features that make stage Jews caricatures of Machiavellian villainous otherness in the service of developing dramatic figures with many layers, some of which may be inaccessible. In a soliloquy that explains his revenge plot against Ferneze, Barabas avers that “We Jews can fawn like spaniels when we please, / And when we grin, we bite; yet are our looks / As innocent and harmless as a lamb’s” (2.3.20-22). The several dimensions of Barabas’ character are visible precisely because they stand out in contradistinction to the false veneer of simple goodness of the “fawning spaniel.” Though Barabas claims that dissembling is his “racial birthright” (Harris, *Foreign Bodies*, 95-96), such layering is true of

non-Jewish characters as well. Although Martin del Bosco arrives in Malta primarily for business purposes, he gains his commercial ends by expressing insouciant religious offence that the “Knights of Malta will be in league with Turks” (2.2.27). The friar Bernardine hears Abigail’s deathbed confession as a devout priest, but privately mourns that she dies a virgin (3.6.41). Pilia-Borza and Bellamira lead Ithamore to believe that Bellamira is in love with him in order to access Barabas’ money (4.2). These are but a few examples, but each suggests the possibility that interior intentions, motivations, and thoughts may be inscrutable, at least from the perspectives of other characters. Barabas’ Machiavellian characteristics appear to deal in flat stereotypes and observable, external behavior, but instead, spread out among nearly all characters in the play, they suggest ironically that stage characterization may in part be a private business which cannot be known or understood by observers.

The cunning and secretive features of stage Jewishness open up a gulf between the knowledge and experience of a play’s characters, and those of its audiences. Barabas’ devious asides, such as “Assure yourselves I’ll look – unto myself” (1.1.172), make it clear that his true thoughts and intentions are unknowable to other characters within the play, but it is also these asides, along with the stage convention of the soliloquy, that allow audiences to imagine that the secret interiors of scheming villains can be exposed.²⁹ Positioned as omniscient observers, audience members see the multiple layers of any given character from a flattened perspective. The cases just cited, to an audience, may appear not deep and inscrutable, but all equally obvious and insincere, just as it does to Barabas when Ferneze claims that spilling blood is “far from us

²⁹ Stage Machiavels such as Barabas take a particularly ironic approach to unknowable interiors, because while their intentions and actions are hidden to other characters, they are always known to audiences (Maus, *Inwardness and Theater* 54). My thinking on the topics of secrecy, privacy, and the unknowability of the minds of others has been strongly influenced by Maus, whose *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* investigates how drama deployed the conflicting Renaissance fantasies that selves can be both totally hidden, and made completely known (28).

and our profession” – an assertion not believable in the slightest from the mouth of a trained Knight (1.2.146). To be sure, there is a strong strain of irony in finding interior, hidden components in a genre that by definition and by medium is external and performed (Maus, *Inwardness and Theater* 32). That Barabas is a Jew makes this ironic potential for depth frightening, and the need to unmask it all the more pressing, because he represents a threatening religious other who must be exposed in order to be controlled. This incongruous circumstance explains why theater would be so preoccupied with hidden interiors. Theater allows plenty of room for hiding and masking, especially from perspectives embedded within the play, but its openness and exposure also offers audiences a conspiratorial sense of access to otherwise private situations. Agnew has traced the popularity of prose fiction and emerging literary realism to the convention of entering “a social world from which the reader was made to feel at once excluded and privy. (67).” Agnew’s assertion applies equally well to theater, although theater reduces the sense of exclusion for the audiences, and transposes it onto the play’s characters via dramatic irony. The audience experiences such exclusion at a remove while still aware that being placed in a position of ignorance is always possible for them, too.

The conventions of the stage Machiavel, by combining surface flatness with multiple complex layers, and by promising secret knowledge while threatening exclusionary ignorance, do more to link Barabas to his fellow inhabitants of Malta than they do distinguish him from them. The stage Machiavel also connects Barabas to non-Jews within a broader theatrical tradition. Barabas is the descendent of the Medieval vice figure, and the precursor to other self-consciously theatrical villains such as Iago, Volpone, and Vindice (Deats and Starks 397). He also begins a tradition of Machiavels identifying with or disguising themselves as Jews. For instance, in Webster’s *The Devil’s Law-Case* (1623), Romelio disguises himself as a Jew in

order to exact revenge on the dying Contarino. Romelio remarks of his disguise, “Excellently well habited! Why, methinks / That I could play with mine own shadow now / And be a rare Italianated Jew: / To have as many several changes of faces / As I have seen carved upon one cherry stone...” (3.2.1-5). Romelio’s excitement about the disguise makes the point that inhabiting the role of Jew emotionally and mentally undergirds his actions and puts him in the right frame of mind to behave nefariously. The performance, and not the intrinsic identity, is efficacious – it enables Romelio to think and behave as he imagines Jews do. The theatrical component of Jewish Machiavellian opportunism undermines the stereotype’s own premise that it is a specifically Jewish quality. This tradition demonstrates how entrenched the mentality was that Jews were cunning deceivers, and it also undercuts the belief that such deceptiveness is *particularly* Jewish, since all it takes is a little imagination for non-Jewish characters to step into that role.³⁰ This ease of Jewish role inhabiting and shedding in Webster and Marlowe permits Harris to argue that the Jew is Derridean *differance* incarnate – “to be Jewish is to be not-Jewish, to assume ‘many several changes of face’” (*Foreign Bodies* 99). Though *The Jew of Malta* may highlight the machinations of a diabolical Jew in order to make him stand out, the effect of Barabas’ non-stop imitation, and of his imitativeness’ place in theatrical history, is to create an ongoing trope of performative “Jewish” Machiavelliansim that is by no means limited to Jewish figures.

Historically, too, Jews and Machiavels are linked for reasons that apply to all figures in *The Jew of Malta*, and not Barabas alone. Riggs has theorized that Jewish characters often personify the political precepts of Machiavelli on stage because “They bore the stigma of

³⁰ The opposite phenomenon can also occur - characters unofficially present as Jewish without any overt suggestion, such as the miserly father, Pisaro, in William Houghton’s *Englishmen for My Money* (1598). With his large nose, residence in the Crutched Friars neighborhood of London, reference to “Judas-like” behavior (1.1.26-28), and status as a Portuguese immigrant, he comes across as a recently converted Marrano.

stateless individuals with no fixed beliefs or lasting allegiance” (263). Because Jews lived in a state of perpetual exile, and were in many locations required to profess Christianity, they became symbols of duplicity. Furthermore, because Jews, as perpetual outsiders, often excelled at easily transportable and lucrative professions such as trade and medicine, they became objects of great curiosity. Although Riggs argues for a set of characteristics that pertain particularly to Jews, in *The Jew of Malta* his description of “stateless individuals” without “lasting allegiance” actually works as a mark of sameness – a supposedly Jewish trait which reveals that Barabas is just like everyone else in Marlowe’s Malta. Professionally, the situation is variable, as some characters (Bellamira, Pilia-Borza, etc.) come to Malta because their professions transport well and they are looking for a lucrative market, while others are more stationary (the nuns, Friars, and Ferneze, since the time he and his knights were transplanted from Rhodes). But in either case, their allegiance to Malta is pragmatic, not principled. More accurately, the stateless, colonial existence of Malta means that allegiance to Malta is not even the correct frame of reference or paradigm by which to think of loyalty; allegiance, when characters demonstrate it at all, is to the individual and his goals.

Barabas is no different from his neighbors, all of whom resort to deceit, trickery, and murder as necessities for survival in a cutthroat economic environment destabilized by the imperial wrangling of the Spanish and Turks. Jewishness, then, functions well as a vehicle for representing those particularly dislikeable qualities because, as a scapegoated group of people and religion it can be rejected as other and different while also being extremely similar and representative of the culture at large. But, far from shoring up a sense of superiority over Jews, the play is aware of this disconnect and weaves in moments that encourage audiences to laugh not at disdained Jewish qualities, but at the obtuseness of those who believe in the Jews’ extreme

difference. After Bernardine hears Abigail confess her father's plot to kill Matthias and Lodowick, he bewails this event to his fellow friar Jacomo, calling it "A thing that makes me tremble to unfold" (3.6.48). Before he hears the real story, Jacomo immediately assumes Bernardine refers to the most heinous Jewish crime imaginable: "What, has he crucified a child?" (3.6.49). Bernardine, and the audience, know such an idea to be patently ridiculous, because it completely contravenes Barabas' characterization to this point as someone who never acts unless it is in his own interest – the inutility of him crucifying a child makes the very notion of Barabas doing such a thing absurd. Jacomo leaps to that conclusion reflexively, not thoughtfully. The play turns the comforting notion of Jewish alienness on its head, in mockery of those who believe it.

The play's meta-awareness of theatrical conventions facilitates this simultaneous rejection of and identification with the Machiavellian Jew. Both estrangement and affinity come naturally to the theatrical mode. After all, drama succeeds as a commercial product, and as a convincing, entertaining escape, only as long as its audience forgets (or deliberately ignores) that it willingly chooses to believe that a representation which it knows to be false is real. The theater depends for its commercial viability on audiences who knowingly accept its deceptions as reality, at least temporarily, and who pay for the privilege of being deceived. In its known fictionality, *The Jew of Malta* distances audiences from the understanding and experience of shared Jewishness: it is only a play, and its existence begins and ends within the theater's walls. But as a representation that audiences are temporarily supposed to believe, the pandemic Jewishness, usually relegated and reviled, hits too close to home.

Barabas' final scheme to shift control of Malta back to Ferneze from the Turks relies for its effectiveness on this same simultaneous suspension of disbelief and meta-theatrical self-

awareness. He hires carpenters to build his own stage machinery, whom he praises for “[having] art indeed”– deliberately underscoring the artificiality of his plan (5.5.4). The device, “the floor whereof, this cable being cut, / Doth fall asunder, so that it doth sink / Into a deep pit past recovery,” self-consciously presents the structure and mechanics of the stage within the play: the “deep pit” functions in one instant as both the cauldron in which Barabas hopes to trap and murder Calymath and as the “hell” or space below the stage’s trapdoor (5.5.34-36). In its qualities of exposure, of bursting the bubble of performed “reality,” Barabas’ machinations dissociate his crafty Jewish villainy from the purview of the “normal” and from inclusion in the audience’s idea of “us.” What *The Jew of Malta* had previously established as a Jewishness that typifies all those involved in commercial and colonial pursuits teeters precariously close to being read as a marker of extreme difference, so distant from the reality of English audiences that we see the literal, physical structures (the cables, the floor, the pit) which comprise its artificialities. Far from exposing or demystifying the shared similarities of Jews and non-Jews, both within the play and out, Barabas’ meta-theatrical construction project instead works paradoxically as a form of escapism, allowing the audience to break its suspension of disbelief and reject the commonality of Jewishness that Marlowe has built up throughout the play.

Barabas’ plot not only engenders an opportunity to reject shared Jewishness; it also resonates in the opposite direction. It reinforces the continuities of Jewishness throughout the play by shifting its expression, and part of the responsibility of the plot, onto Ferneze. The seeming lack of motive for Barabas’ betrayal of Calymath places much of the responsibility for the scheme back onto Ferneze, reinforcing the two conspirators’ shared Jewishness. Ferneze offers Barabas “great sums of money” (5.2.88) for the betrayal, but it appears that Barabas has neither the need nor even the desire for Ferneze’s offer – he scoffs at the hundred thousand

pounds which constitute a drop in the ocean of his recouped riches (5.5.20-22). Without that financial motivator, the greedy facet of Jewishness dissolves for Barabas, leaving only the love of “stratagem” – his Machiavellian cunning – as his defining Jewish quality.³¹ But Barabas transfers this quality to Ferneze as well. He devises his next stratagem for Ferneze’s sake. He promises the former governor that “One stratagem that I’ll impart to thee, / Wherein no danger shall betide thy life, / And I will warrant Malta free forever.” (5.2.99-101). Barabas trades on Ferneze’s desire for continued power over Malta: for his own sake, he could have been content to stop right there – he only continues as long as he can “make a profit of [his] policy” (5.2.112).

Ferneze becomes the prime sustainer of Jewishness when Barabas employs him in his plans. Barabas himself has no direct involvement in the workings of the stage machinery; he tells Ferneze he will signal to him “when to cut the cord / And fire the house” (5.5.40-41). Ferneze implicates himself in the meta-theater of Machiavellian Jewishness when he first plays along with the plan and then turns Barabas’ schemes against him. Like Barabas’ quickly shifting loyalties, Ferneze’s betrayal of Barabas is not merely pointless; it is actually self-injurious. By showing Calymath “greater courtesy / Than Barabas would have afforded thee,” Ferneze delays Calymath’s death and the destruction of the Turkish army – the very threats Ferneze wishes to neutralize from the beginning of the play (5.5.60-61). Far from “Making a profit of [his] policy,” Ferneze in this instance embodies, with perhaps less forethought and deliberation, the pure and purposeless “will to play” that Greenblatt argues captures Barabas’ essence (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 191-221). In this way, the Jewishness which in some senses was diminished by the

³¹ And again, it is precisely this Machiavellianism that shows “Jewishness” to be universal, not particular to Jews. Harris explains, “All the attempts that Malta’s rulers make to turn Barabas’ poisonous otherness to account, to use it to clarify the boundaries of their Christian body politic and to assert the divinely sanctioned legitimacy of their authority, are undermined by the manifest Machiavellianism they display in the process” (*Foreign Bodies*, 105).

play's self-awareness as a work of drama returns to define, in part, the most prominently anti-Jewish character of the play.

Barabas' destruction by his own stage machinery makes inescapably apparent just how much both his identity, and the audience's, is tied up in a commercially inflected theatricality. His death in the cauldron located in the "hell" below the stage reminds us of the emptiness at the center of his performance: Barabas' very existence is contingent upon the disposition of a paying audience. The Jewishness which marks Barabas as a materialist and a literalist applies just as much to the theater audiences who bring that identity into being by paying to watch it be performed. Jewishness characterizes audiences who, in order to enjoy a play, must make the same interpretive errors of which Christians accuse Jews. Audiences must be temporary literalists and materialists; while they watch, they must accept that the materials of the stage, the literal objects which constitute the play world, are not an imitation or a false veneer, but the real thing. By forcing an awareness of theatrical artifice, *The Jew of Malta* first depicts a reality in which Barabas' Jewish identity differs little from the moral and spiritual status of the surrounding community, and then removes such similarity and replaces it with an identity which is entirely built on the commercial success of theater as a fictional entertainment.

When *The Jew of Malta* breaks the fourth wall, its self-consciousness also implicates the audience in an ever-expanding application of Jewishness. Barabas' only direct address to the audience occurs at the culmination of his plans. He asks, "Now tell me, worldlings, underneath the sun / If greater falsehood ever has been done" (5.5.49-50). Assuming that the audience is just as concerned with worldly self-promotion as he is, Barabas marks every observer of the play as a complicit Machiavellian. Although he recognizes his act as extreme in magnitude, it is still representative of the world's comportment at large in terms of kind or quality – a quality which

only his fellow “worldlings” in the audience can accurately assess. Barabas’ awareness of his status as a performer of worldly qualities in a setting that requires worldliness for survival connects the commercial and colonial goals of Malta, far away and seemingly unrelated to England, to the commercial goals of the English theater. In both places, the trade of choice is to sell not goods, but fictions about identity.

Chapter Two: ‘This is kind I offer’: Boundaries, Tolerance, and the Jewish Kind in *The Merchant of Venice*

The Merchant of Venice obsesses over the ambiguities present in the words, “kind,” and “kindness.” Though not original in its frequent use of the words (sixteen times in all variations), *Merchant* dwells on their power to define boundaries. “Kind” is a vexed word because it and its variants connote inclusivity and exclusivity at once. To be kind to another is an act of generosity and friendliness, but to be of a certain kind sorts people according to the limits and restrictions of group membership.¹ Jessica draws on the categorizing or sorting meaning of “kind” when she tells Launcelot Gobbo that his hope for her salvation through her mother’s infidelity is “a *kind* of bastard hope, indeed” (3.5.6).² As Shylock and Antonio’s tense interactions clearly show, the recipients of one’s kindness can stand as a litmus test for one’s group affiliation. Their relationship also highlights how kindness and group inclusion are inflected by a form of “kind” meaning “natural,” common in the Middle Ages, but far less so in the late sixteenth century.³

The fundamental, yet also shifting, boundary dividing what is considered natural and unnatural has serious implications for representations of Jews in English drama, because dramatic stereotypes encode assumptions about how Jews “naturally” think and behave. The fifteenth century Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* employs the earlier adjectival sense to express Jewish incredulousness at faith in the Eucharist – a sin of disbelief that to Christians, Jews by definition will commit. The Jewish merchant, Jonathas, exclaims, “For þe beleue on a cake – me thynk yt ys *onkynd*” (200, emphasis mine). Jonathas thinks it is unnatural to place religious faith in what he sees as an item of food, and in doing so he estranges what practicing Christians

¹ Cf. “kind, adj.,” entries 5-7 in comparison with and “kind, n.,” entries 1-9 in the Oxford English Dictionary.

² Unless otherwise noted, I cite *The Merchant of Venice* from *The Norton Shakespeare*.

³ Cf. “kind, adj.” 1 and 2 in the Oxford English Dictionary.

consider natural. The Medieval sense of “natural” haunts *Merchant* in the joking nomination of Shylock as a “gentle Jew” (1.3.173). According to Antonio, Shylock is an oxymoronic kind of Jew, one who troubles the religious and racial boundaries dividing Christianity and Judaism by being naturally friendly contrary to stereotype, and by punning on “gentile” as the opposite of Jew.

In the lead-up to Shylock’s offer to Antonio of the flesh bond, the repetition of “kind” and “kindness” casts doubt on exactly which senses of the words operate at any given moment. Shylock’s attempt to mitigate Antonio’s vitriol through kindness appears both touching and suspicious:

Why look you, how you storm!

I would be friends with you, and have your love,

Forget the shames that you have stained me with,

Supply your present wants, and take no doit

Of usance for my moneys; and you’ll not hear me.

This is kind I offer. (1.3.132-137)

The offer of an interest-free loan is a key component of the struggle to define kinds. The history of animosity between the two characters establishes Shylock and Antonio as two very distinct kinds of people on the basis of religion and profession. Shylock’s “kind” offer unsettles this difference, because he traces it to his desire to “be friends with you.” He implies that an interest-free loan constitutes a kindness one shows to those who belong to the category of friends (Shylock casually takes a free loan from his Jewish friend, Tubal). Invoking the restrictive sense of group definition and the generous sense at once, the passage suggests that if Shylock and Antonio are kind to each other, they may also be of the same kind. The convergence of kindness

and kinds enables two simultaneously operating interpretations of “This is kind I offer”: the explicit, “This is a nice thing for me to do for you,” and its implicit corollary, “This act shows that I am of your kind.”

The association of generous treatment with members of one’s own kind, which should at least make clear to whom one can behave kindly, fails to resolve the ambiguity in Shylock and Antonio’s respective kinds. Instead, the tension created by an offer of friendship that unites the two men temporarily and unwillingly in one kind precipitates their agreement to the flesh bond, which erases yet more distinctions, among them the differences between humans, money, reproduction, revenge, and justice. The flesh bond emblemizes the play’s efforts and failures to separate and define kinds of people and things consistently. The interactions between the Venetian Christian and the Jewish resident outsider bring economic risks and rewards which prompt the necessity and the desire to define kinds, and also highlight the difficulty of doing so.

The Merchant of Venice’s varying uses of “kind” reflect epistemological anxieties about defining race, ethnicity, and religion, anxieties which link the play as much to the concerns of contemporary travel narratives and legal charters as to its fellow literary texts. Despite the multiple shapes this anxiety can take, the play often expresses this categorizing impulse as a problem with serious economic consequences. Thus, Launcelot Gobbo jokes that the problem Jessica’s conversion causes is not religious and racial ambiguity, but an increase in “the price of hogs” (3.5.19).⁴ The problem of defining kinds in *Merchant*, then, is not only a theoretical one – how do Shakespeare’s Venetians know who or what different kinds are? – but also a concrete one – how do these kinds affect their social and business interactions? In order to understand how *The*

⁴ As Kim F. Hall has demonstrated, Launcelot’s quip about the price of pork (along with his illicit impregnation of the unseen Moorish girl) reflects real economic anxieties about food prices and availability in late 16th century England amid an influx of Moorish immigrants, which led Queen Elizabeth to issue a proclamation expelling Moors from the realm in 1596 (91-92).

Merchant of Venice responds to both questions, but especially the second one, it is necessary to address its engagement with the proper management of differences, or in other words, forms of tolerance and intolerance.

I argue that Jews, and English beliefs about Jewishness, occupy a central place in the precipitous unraveling of definitions of kind *The Merchant of Venice* envisions, and that the play's engagement with forms of tolerance (whether failed or successful) responds to the dilemma of how to maintain stable kinds without impeding commerce. In Antonio and Shylock, Shakespeare juxtaposes a fundamentally restrictive and anti-capitalist universalism against a particularism that enables commerce by permitting religious and ethnic plurality. The play generally designates universalism as Christian and particularism as Jewish. Shylock, though hardly qualifying as a paragon of tolerance, opens up the possibility for an alternative form of tolerance in his willingness to conduct business with Christians despite his disinclination to dine with them. Unlike his famous appeal to shared similarities – the “hath not a Jew eyes?” speech, which reveals the failure of a tolerance based on universalist principles – Shylock's representation of Jewish particularism draws upon medieval and early modern discourses on the feasibility of religious co-existence, epitomized by the work of the thirteenth-century rabbi and legal scholar, Menachem ben Solomon Ha-Me'iri.⁵ While surely unknown to Shakespeare, Me'iri's theory of mutually beneficial co-existence without homogenizing differences uncannily reflects the limited form of pragmatic tolerance that emerges tentatively in *Merchant*. As such, Me'iri functions as a starting point for a set of definitions of tolerance, intolerance, and religious pluralism in the play. Though the play ends with a forced Christian homogeneity, it also

⁵ Me'iri's Talmudic commentary, the *Beth Ha-Behira*, composed between 1287-1300, remains untranslated into English. Large excerpts have been translated in the scholars' works I've consulted. For each quotation, a parenthetical citation will indicate the source of the translation.

considers that heterogeneous toleration, coded as a Jewish concept, could be a more stable foundation than Christian universalism on which to cultivate commercial success.

Tolerance in Literature and History: Me'iri in Context

When considered in relation to its literary sources, that *The Merchant of Venice* concerns itself with solidifying the boundaries between Christian and Jewish kinds cannot be taken as a foregone conclusion. Not all literary and dramatic texts are as worried about the muddled line separating Christians and Jews as *Merchant* is. For example, Robert Wilson's 1584 play, *The Three Ladies of London*, contains a forgiving Jewish usurer who dissolves the Italian merchant's debts in order to prevent his conversion to Islam for mercenary motives. The presiding judge in the case declares that the "Jew seeks to excel in Christianity" (14.49), and thereby declares Jewish and Christian religious affiliations to be context-dependent moral states, rather than stable identifiers. In Giovanni Fiorentino's tale of the flesh bond, the unnamed Jewish moneylender provides the bond in order to "say that he had killed the greatest of the Christian merchants," but the motivations of such an extraordinary desire go unquestioned.⁶ Fiorentino's moneylender maintains the stereotype of the Jew as an enthusiastic murderer of Christians without offering an explanation for his particular case. The play certainly draws upon this stereotype – "I hate him for he is a Christian," Shylock says (1.3.37) – but it also offers a history of Shylock's maltreatment at Antonio's hand to account for Antonio being the specific target of his hatred. Shakespeare focuses on Jews as a source of confusion when solidifying the definitions of kinds in commercial environments – an interest particularly well suited to a work of commercial theater, and one not shared by these two antecedents.

⁶ The tale is included in *Il Pecorone*, a Decameron-like collection of prose stories that dates from the late 14th century, and was first printed in Milan in 1558. The English translation of the first story from day four is quoted in *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown, 149.

What *Merchant* does share with its literary and dramatic milieu is an interest in the reliability of written and spoken languages. Shakespeare turns the presumably written act of sealing the flesh bond into a verbal performance, a speech-act which forces Jews and Christians, and money and flesh, into uncomfortable proximity. Though Antonio says he will “seal unto this bond” (1.3.167), meaning sign a written contract, the act of signing is not staged, and we do not see the written bond until Shylock somehow produces it during the trial. The staged performance of a speech-act carries with it intrinsic irony; the artificiality of the stage makes it the one setting in which such acts can be performed without becoming binding. In its simultaneous realization and artifice, the flesh bond adds another layer of suspicion and tension to Jewish-Christian interactions. The suggestion that theatrical words are non-binding intensifies fear and picks up on a dramatic trope of linguistic and written uncertainty which looks back to Pedringano’s promised but missing pardon in Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (3.5 and 3.6) and which anticipates Feste’s quip in *Twelfth Night* that “words are very rascals since bonds disgraced them” (3.1.18-19). Shakespeare makes this failure of verbal communication to engender trust or community the vehicle for exploring the transmission of racial and religious stereotypes. As word meanings slide around, so too do stereotypes find themselves in unstable territory. In this way, the play connects a linguistic problem common to dramatic literature with the interests and concerns of contemporary prose writing.

Merchant picks up on concerns about the mingling of diverse strangers in commercial settings that histories, travel narratives, and legal texts of its time document with unusual intensity. European travelers to the Mediterranean apparently feared losing the ability to tell intermixed peoples apart. The French geographer Nicolas de Nicolay explains that the purpose of the residents’ head coverings in Salonika is to differentiate ethnicities and religions: “[the Jews’]

attire on their head is a yellow Tulbant safroned, that of the Grecian Christians is blew, & that of the Turks white, for that through the same diversitie of colors, they should be known the one from the other” (149). Without the turbans, each group is apparently indistinguishable from the others – a challenge to the common belief in the physical readability of ethnic, national, and religious differences, for if their differences were obvious then the turbans would serve no purpose.⁷ While in Nicolay’s account the turbans separate many groups, in others they function as a disabling restriction particularly for Jews. William Biddulph describes special clothing as a form of discrimination: “...they [the Jews in Istanbul] were accustomed to weare red hatts without brimes...But lately...they are constrained to weare hatts of blewe cloth, because red was accounted too stately and princelike a colour for them to weare” (72). The physical likeness of Jews, Turks, and Greeks threatens an erasure of clear group affiliations; clothing makes up for the indeterminacy by subordinating Jews to the ruling Turks.

The same urge to differentiate peoples based on religion and ethnic origin underlies many of the provisions in the Venetian charters that permitted Jewish residence. Beginning in 1589, Levantine and Ponentine Jews were allowed to work as merchants in Venice for a period of ten years with possibility of renewal, as long as they resided in an enclosed ghetto and wore a yellow head covering.⁸ The charters maximize the commercial benefits to Venice of Jewish presence while minimizing Jewish-Venetian contact and Jewish participation in Venetian civic life. Ironically, though, the charters’ efforts to construct strict definitional boundaries require exactly the diversity that their existence is meant to prevent. Many of the Ponentine Jews who came to

⁷A common paradox, apparently. M. Lindsay Kaplan articulates it in reference to medieval English images of Jews: “Since there were laws that required Jews to wear identifying badges or hats, English Jews probably didn’t look much different from English Christians; therefore, these images may be trying to convey the idea of Jewish darkness even in the face of empirical Jewish lightness” (10).

⁸Interestingly, separate charters were drawn for Jews from different locations. Tedeschi Jews, those of German extraction, had maintained a charter with Venice since 1513, valid for five-year periods, and permitting them to work only as moneylenders, pawnbrokers, and as salesman of second-hand goods. Shylock, a moneylender who supports trade but does not engage in it himself, is most likely a Tedeschi Jew (Ravid, “An Introduction,” 209-210, 222).

Venice in the mid to late sixteenth century were New Christians (Marranos) escaping persecution in Spain and Portugal who reverted to Jewish observances upon arrival in Venice (Ravid, “An Introduction,” 210-211). The return to Jewish practice was not entirely a choice; the Venetian state required the immigrants to do so, as the charter applied exclusively to Jews. Though the presence of these nominally Christian former Jews could have helped to preserve a Christian unity in Venice, the law prefers to admit obvious Jews instead of uncertain and unclassifiable Christians.⁹ Better, apparently, to cultivate stark divisions between groups of people than to face categorical uncertainty.

In choosing to adopt tolerance as a theoretical framework for understanding *The Merchant of Venice*, I deliberately place myself against a temporal narrative which dates the emergence of tolerance to secular philosophies of the late seventeenth century.¹⁰ Even though the play’s apparent telos is the preservation of white Christian unity in Belmont, the conflict between Antonio and Shylock clearly raises the specter of tolerance. Their relationship emblemizes the tension between Jewish and Christian conceptions of justice and modes of interreligious interaction. The entire play’s, and especially the trial scene’s, situation at the intersection of law, commerce, and religion necessitates a form of tolerance that permits differences in such matters

⁹ Even, apparently, in the face of Papal counterreformation pressure (Ravid, “An Introduction,” 211).

¹⁰ R.I. Moore has famously called medieval society a persecuting one, and defines the period by a concerted effort on the part of both secular and sacred authorities to root out, punish, and eliminate dissent. Perez Zagorin also premises his investigation of the rise of tolerance philosophies on a large-scale shift away from medieval persecution (1-3). Marc Shell argues that religious toleration arose in the late seventeenth century out of political expediency: in the wake of the destructive reformation, political philosophers realized that the Christian belief in universal sameness did not match the reality that diverse groups exist in close proximity and must somehow nevertheless form functioning societies (“Marranos” 319-320). Generally, these critics cite John Locke as a primary exponent of tolerance philosophy. In his “Letter Concerning Toleration,” Locke writes that “...the civil ruler has no more mandate than others have for the care of souls. He has no mandate from God, for it nowhere appears that God has granted men authority over other men, to compel them to adopt their own religion. And no such power can be given to a ruler by men; for no one can abdicate responsibility for his own eternal salvation by adopting under compulsion a form of belief or worship prescribed to him by another person, whether prince or subject” (trans. Silverthorne 7). Locke may have been among the first to codify tolerance in political philosophy, but I believe we should not overlook earlier literary attempts to grapple with the concept.

to persist, instead of eliminating them. With the failure of the trial comes the failure of Venice's capitalist economy – all wealth is reconcentrated in Belmont in the hands of Bassanio, Portia, and Antonio. From an aristocratic Christian perspective, the outcome is a happy one – the trial's discriminatory resolution allows a comedic fifth act of wealth and abundance for the married Christian couples. But the demands of commerce, equally important to the play as its Christian moralizing, call for pluralistic attitudes and practices instead.

In raising the question of tolerance's utility, *Merchant* joins with a diverse array of literary, legal, and religious/philosophical texts. The use of tolerance to mean an absence of bigotry or harsh judgment does not emerge until 1765, but the word could be used in Shakespeare's time and before to signify official license or permission.¹¹ Though this older usage says nothing about the sentiment or judgment underlying official license, the meaning of tolerance relating to the permission of authorities can be understood as a precondition for tolerance defined as cultural acceptance and non-judgment. Antonio explains that government's tolerance of Shylock's (and other foreigners') presence in Venice allows the city's economy to prosper (3.3.26-31). Though officially legislated tolerance may or may not impact individual beliefs about foreign residents, it nevertheless forces Venetians to live in a society tolerant to the presence of outsiders. The licensing of difference thus gives rise to a legal and economic order that can only be maintained by tolerant behavior (in the modern sense). The trial scene shows how the failure to uphold tolerance (in both senses – official and moral) leads to lawlessness: at the last minute, Portia seemingly discovers or invents a loophole that allows the state to confiscate Shylock's property and leave his life in the hands of the Duke. *Merchant* may only address the modern sense of tolerance obliquely, but in that respect it is similar to many earlier

¹¹“Tolerance, n. 2-3” OED online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 2 September 2013.

texts which draw attention to the possibilities for, and ramifications of a moral philosophy of tolerance.

Boccaccio's tale of the three rings in the *Decameron* considers religious pluralism an intellectually responsible response to a lack of empirical certainty. The tale concerns the Sultan Saladin, who asks a Jew, Melchizedek, which of the three monotheistic religions is best. Melchizedek replies with a parable of a father who wished to leave a precious ring to one of his three sons to designate him as heir. Unable to decide which son should have the ring, the father has two identical copies made. On his death, the three sons discover that the rings are indistinguishable. And thus, Melchizedek reasons, "each people deemeth itself to have [God's] inheritance, His true law and His commandments; but of which in very deed hath them, even as of the rings, the question yet pendeth" (29-30). Though Melchizedek's analogy assumes that a single "true" religion does indeed exist, the fact that it remains unknown to humans suggests the wisdom of withholding judgment.

This refusal to articulate religious superiority is even stronger in *The Book of John Mandeville* than in the *Decameron*. *Mandeville* is a mid-fourteenth century compilation of pilgrimage and travel narratives that recounts the travels of the eponymous English knight (now regarded as a fictional construct, and not a historical person). Sir John's approach to his experiences varies from neutral description to fascination and wonder without judgment. For example, he describes how the Orthodox church's practices vary from those of the Roman church (such as whether the Eucharist should be made of leavened or unleavened bread), but without offering any commentary on which ones are correct (14-15). Likewise, he calls the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem "a very fine religious house," preferring to describe its features and setting rather than condemning the "Saracens" and their religion (49). His interest in how the

world looks and how monuments, cities, and nations relate to one another spatially reveals a neutrally curious disposition. Sir John's curiosity resolves itself into a clear philosophy of tolerance when he visits the Brahmins, who are virtuous through "natural law," despite lacking knowledge of Christianity. He turns for the moral foundations of his philosophy to the story in Acts of Saint Peter's vision of the angel who invites him to eat meat from animals prohibited by Jewish dietary laws (10:9-16). Sir John interprets Peter's vision: "And this was a sign that one ought not to despise any earthly people for their diverse laws, nor any one person. For we do not know whom God loves and whom he hates" (175). Even more strongly than in Bocaccio's tale, lack of certain knowledge breeds a commitment to refrain from evaluation and maltreatment based on such potentially faulty judgment.

Melchizedek's presumption that a true religion exists suggests that tolerance is only necessary until humanity learns the truth. Unlike Bocaccio's tale, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* lays a literary foundation for true, not temporary, religious plurality; Raphael Hythloday reports of the Utopians that "it is one of their oldest institutions that no man's religion, as such, shall be held against him" (74). This is not to suggest that Hythloday is More's mouthpiece; the relationship between the values of the fictional traveler, whose very name may mean "nonsense peddler,"¹² and More's own, is famously unstable, especially in the retrospective light of More's later persecutions of religious dissidents. Nevertheless, More articulates a form of tolerance rooted in legally recognized religious plurality.

In contrast to this assuredness, Michel de Montaigne sets up an intellectual basis for tolerance in religious skepticism and cultural relativity. In his essay, "Of Cannibals," he acknowledges that "each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice," thereby

¹² Hythloday may be a combination of the Greek roots, "huthlos," meaning "nonsense," and "daien," to distribute (Adams 5 n9).

exposing the tendency to label difference as bad merely because it does not conform to “the opinions and customs of the country we live in” (152). For Montaigne, “truth” in matters of cultural differences is just a name for judgment based on one’s own experience, because there is no objective standard.

Jewish thinkers, too, contemplated the degree of acceptance different religions should be accorded. Maimonides is perhaps the most influential thinker for medieval Jews on this topic. Maimonides affords pious monotheistic gentiles a place in the afterlife, but he says that they may not “create a religion or innovate commandments” (Blidstein 31), because to do so would be idolatrous. Maimonides thus concerns himself primarily with external forms of worship and ritual rather than private faith. His stance legitimizes non-Judaic religions in theory, since he does not wish to constrain belief, but in practice, strictly curtails the exercise of religious ritual that does not conform to Judaic laws and customs.

Despite the gap in time, languages, and cultures, the Rabbi Menachem ben Solomon Ha-Me’iri’s Talmudic commentary, the *Beth Ha-Behirah* (1287-1300), can help us interpret Shakespeare’s theatrical experiment on managing religious kinds because it defines kinds in a way that both preserves meaningful differences and also permits commercial and social interactions. Me’iri also synthesizes practical requirements and moral philosophy. Such synthesis constitutes another point of relevance to *Merchant*, where the absence of a Me’iri-like system of tolerance causes the breakdown in commercial relations between Jews and Christians. This failure is rendered all the more palpable by the oblique suggestion, originating primarily with Shylock, that such tolerance could exist.

Me’iri can cultivate religious pluralism because he develops it out of Halakha (Jewish law). Halakha opens the way to tolerance by granting legal rights to non-Jews in a Jewish state.

Gary Remer has argued that the Me'iri advanced "a uniquely Jewish theory of religious toleration" (71) which was unique because of Judaism's concern for orthopraxy over the more typically Christian stress placed on orthodoxy, its lack of interest in proselytizing, and because of its historically contingent decoupling of religion and state authority (75, 76). The claim to uniqueness may seem strange; after all, legal protection of religious minorities existed in Christianity and Islam as well, although in varying degrees and reliability. Islam has the concept of the *dhimmi*, or protected minorities residing in Muslim lands (Tolan, Veinstein, and Laurens 2). Christianity had a less consistent policy towards Jews that combined Roman freedoms with later Christian restrictions and was first articulated in the Theodosian Code of 429-438, and adopted into Canon law by Pope Gregory IX in 1234 (Cohen 32, 37). Despite the commonalities, the Jewish approach remains unique for its lack of emphasis on conversion and for having no governmental apparatus of enforcement. Islam acquired a universalizing impetus during its periods of conquest, and Christianity grouped Jews and Muslims together with heretics in the Fourth Lateran Council (Tolan, Veinsten, Laurens 29, 39). These particular Muslim and Christian legal apparatuses and disabilities concern themselves with policing thought and faith in addition to outward comportment. The emphasis on conformity of belief goes some way toward explaining how it is possible for the fourth Lateran council to lump Christian heretics together with non-Christians, since heretic are those who, like non-Christians, engage in incorrect thinking and believing. In contrast, Me'iri's analysis privileges the juridical and moral components of religion instead of its revealed aspects. Those who adhere to the socially beneficial institutions of religion Me'iri calls "nations bound by the ways of religion" (qtd. in Remer 80), and he includes contemporary Christianity in that category. These useful elements of religion in practice, to

Me'iri, grant religions other than Judaism legitimacy, even if they “misconceive some points according to our belief” (qtd. in Jacob Katz).

Me'iri's justification of Jewish/Christian interaction on the principle of “nations bound by the ways of religion” had a significant impact on the ways in which minority communities of Jews living in the midst of Christian Europe could conduct their lives and their business.¹³ Jewish law traditionally restricts interactions with non-Jews, and these restrictions fall into three categories: prohibitions on certain forms of commerce which might indirectly facilitate idolatry; the juridical rights and obligations of non-Jews; and measures intended to distance Jews socially from non-Jews (Halbertal 3-4). Prior to Me'iri's *Beth Ha-Behirah*, Talmudic and Halakhic analyses sought to ease the restrictions' commercial and social handicaps by providing an excuse for each case in which a law must be circumvented. For example, some argued that the ban on conducting business with idolaters applied only to items, such as candles or wine, that may be used in the service of idolatrous practices. Others justified breaking prohibitions by arguing that it would be wise to avoid any practice which would make Jews conspicuous and engender hostility against them (Remer 78). These excuses fail to constitute a means of tolerance because they operate under the assumption that Christianity constitutes a form of idolatry, interaction with which must be rationalized, rather than allowed on principle. Me'iri, in contrast, stood by the precept that contemporary Christianity was no longer an idolatrous religion, stating that, “...these things [Talmudic prohibitions against interactions with idolaters] were said concerning periods when there existed nations of idolaters...but other nations, which are restricted by the ways of religion and which are free from such blemishes of character...are, without doubt, exempt from

¹³ See Katz 115-117; Halbertal 2; Blidstein 28-29; and Novak 351.

this prohibition.”¹⁴ By recognizing the legitimacy of Christianity, Me’iri offers a principled reason for cross-religious interactions, instead of a temporary justification.

Me’iri’s theory of tolerance unifies multiple religious groups through a shared commitment to the laws which maintain safe, coherent societies, without also seeking to homogenize the beliefs of those who participate in the society. By speaking of “nations bound by the ways of religion,” Me’iri emphasizes a group affiliation which rests on behavior and shared social responsibilities, and not on biological or racial characteristics which are perceived to be intrinsic and unalterable. It is precisely this combination of shared laws and divergent beliefs that Me’iri hopes to preserve through his case for tolerance of Christians. Of the three Halakhic categories prohibiting certain interactions between Jews and non-Jews, the only one which Me’iri leaves unchanged is that which regards the cultural practices that create distance between the two religions. He maintains the ban on intermarriage, and the restrictive dietary laws, for if sharing customs regarding family and food were valid, “we would almost become one people” (qtd. in Jacob Katz, 127). Though he accords Christians religious legitimacy, Me’iri still balks at the idea of sameness. His desire is not to integrate and erase differences, but to live in harmonious proximity – an admittedly limited goal from our current vantage point, but one that is expansive for its time and a positive counterpoint to the notable absence of a useful and stable tolerance in *Merchant*.

The Collapse of Kinds: Friendship, Flesh, and Money

The Merchant of Venice exhibits a set of competing tendencies: against the urge to codify and separate kinds, distinctions collapse nevertheless. Obscured boundaries make a poor vehicle

¹⁴ Additionally, the Me’iri believed it was not only possible for Jews to interact with non-Jews, it was also a morally positive action: “But in so far as we have to deal with nations which are restricted by the ways of religion and which believe in the Godhead, there is no doubt that, even if he [the Gentile] is not a friend, it is not only permitted, but even meritorious to do so” (Katz 117).

for Me'iri-an tolerance because they erase the differences on which such tolerance relies.¹⁵ The scene of Shylock and Antonio's first meeting and agreement to the flesh bond calls into question what is assumed to be one of the most fundamental differences that separate people into kinds – religious belief. The confluence of behavioral and categorical kinds hardly seems surprising: after all, such in-group kindness provides the motivation for Bassanio's appeal to Antonio, to whom he "[owes] the most in money and in love" in the first place (1.1.131). Yet in Shylock's "kind" offer of friendship through an interest-free loan, the convergence of generosity and friendship troubles Antonio because it indicates that the differences between him and Shylock are constructed instead of natural. The idea that Shylock can be friendly toward Antonio because they belong to the same kind erases the boundaries between Jew and Christian, usurer and gift-giver, boundaries which Antonio assumes to be inviolable, and yet works so assiduously to maintain. Antonio makes a point of requesting a loan that would underscore his difference from Shylock: "lend it not / As to thy friends...But lend it rather to thine enemy, / Who if he break thou mayst with better face exact the penalty" (1.3.127-128, 130-132). He prefers a loan with interest even against his deeply held antipathy to usury, because he does not wish to enter into a connection with Shylock that could be perceived as anything other than a business transaction.¹⁶ To Shylock, the offer of friendship and its accompanying implication of similarity is equally

¹⁵ Tolerance by definition requires differences to exist. The term presupposes differences or dissent that must be allowed or indulged.

¹⁶ Lars Engle has provided a class-based explanation for the vehemence with which Antonio refuses all possible connections with Shylock other than a purely business-like one. Antonio, a merchant, stands somewhere between Bassanio, a nobleman, and Shylock, a usurer, in the class hierarchy. Shylock's entrance into Bassanio's and Antonio's relationship threatens to align Antonio more closely with Shylock, as a member of a professional class who deals with money, than with Bassanio. Of course, it is necessary to ask whether class divisions trump religious ones in this case – by the standards of his time, could Antonio ever be considered more similar to a Jew than to any other Christian? – but the class divisions do go some way toward explaining Antonio's intense repudiation of the similarities between himself and Shylock (86).

undesirable.¹⁷ He has already made plain his “ancient grudge” against Antonio and his commitment to “[his] tribe” to bear it eternally (1.3.42, 46). Both characters resist the possibility of bringing Judaism and Christianity under the umbrella of one kind, united in friendship, even as Shylock’s proposal disturbs their deeply held belief in their difference from one another.

Through his request for a loan, Antonio cannot help but violate at least one sense of “kind.” Either he accepts an interest-free loan which places Shylock within the boundaries of his friendship circle, or he insists on paying interest, which maintains the difference between him and Shylock, but violates his theological and moral objections to usury, complicating his membership in the Christian kind.¹⁸ Even before Shylock suggests counting Antonio among his friends, Antonio has already placed himself knowingly in a situation in which at least one “kind” violation is inevitable: “Shylock, albeit I neither lend nor borrow / By taking nor by giving of excess, / Yet to supply the ripe wants of my friend, / I’ll break a custom” (1.3.56-59). Antonio breaks the boundaries of his Christian, non-usurious kind in order to help someone inside of them, an act of violating one kind in order to protect another.¹⁹ Shylock’s offer to “take no doit / Of usance for my moneys” in fact seeks to forestall Antonio’s boundary-breaking decision to pay interest, but his kindness in doing so transgresses another boundary – that between Jews and

¹⁷ If the idea of friendship is equally unpalatable to Shylock, then why does he make the offer? This is a question I continue to contemplate. On the one hand, Shylock could offer the interest-free loan as a bait-and-switch to lead to the flesh bond he had always intended to offer, and which after all, is technically interest free. But such a cynical and cruel reading of Shylock stands at odds with how he takes pains to emphasize Antonio’s role in their mutual enmity – “you have stained me,” “you’ll not hear me,” (italics added). The answer seems resolvable not in any ultimate sense, but only in performance.

¹⁸ In light of both English and Venetian laws, Antonio’s hatred of usury can be seen as an extreme and idiosyncratic take on a much less stringent legal proscription. In England, interest rates of up to 10% were legal after 1571 (Hawkes 24). The Venetian state required Tedeschi Jews to cap interest on loans at 5% (Ravid, *Economics and Toleration*, 27-28, n 24). Shylock can hardly be considered usurious by early modern English or Venetian standards. Thus, Antonio’s vehement reaction against usury reflects unofficial English attitudes rather than law, and functions more as a concerted effort to maintain a division between himself and Shylock than as a legitimate complaint. Engle anticipates my reading of Antonio’s anomalous reaction to interest (87).

¹⁹ The problem with friendship is that unlike marriage or a commercial relationship, it isn’t clear what friends owe to each other – there is no legal mechanism to determine it, because friendship is a way of exerting individual and idiosyncratic choice. Maus argues that *Merchant* grapples with the problem of what ought to be given and received between friends (Being and Having 75-79).

Christians. Antonio's double bind exposes the lack of natural difference between the two characters, a lack made all the more apparent later on in the trial when Portia asks, "Which is the merchant here? And which the Jew?" (4.1.169).

To further complicate Antonio's position, both options violate his kind in yet one more way: they require a tacit admission of maltreatment toward Shylock. Shylock's seemingly conciliatory words undo the assumption of just Christian persecution of Jews as spiritual reprobates. Shylock's offer to "forget the shames that you have stained me with" presupposes that Antonio behaved with unwarranted cruelty instead of due disdain. If Antonio were to accept Shylock's proposition of friendship he would first have to transition from viewing Jews as morally and spiritually inferior people to viewing them as victims of Christian scapegoating. Shylock employs placating words – friends, love, kind, etc. – as a strength, one commonly wielded in Christian rhetoric: in order to accept forgiveness, the forgiven must first admit to the charges of wrongdoing. Shylock's choice to speak forgivingly instead of grudgingly lends his proposal an ambiguous moral status, given that in his previous aside he has sworn vengeance on Antonio. The offer's ambiguity potentially undermines the distinction Christianity makes between itself and Judaism. It is important to remember that Antonio does not hear Shylock's dark aside; though it injects uncertainty for audiences, for Antonio, this is a moment when forgiveness comes from the Jewish Shylock for Antonio's unprovoked cruelty, reversing the typical ascriptions of mercy and hardheartedness to Christian and Jewish kinds, respectively. Within a few short lines, Shylock breaks open the seemingly natural boundaries between Christian and Jewish kinds, and there is no choice Antonio can make in response that will not further erase the distinction between them.

In a sense, the flesh bond remakes the lost distinctions. Shylock's offer for the "forfeit"

of “...an equal pound / Of your fair flesh” (1.3.144,145-146) is not friendly or generous in the least. The dangerous bond seals off anew the broken boundaries between the two men’s kinds: by accepting the bond, Antonio avoids having to pay interest in violation of his religious principles, but neither need he include Shylock as a member of his kind through friendship. But while repairing some boundaries, the bond also breaks others. The bond makes money and flesh equivalent in life-threatening and illogical ways – how are we to rate human flesh in monetary terms?²⁰ Shylock’s nomination of “...an equal pound / of [Antonio’s] fair flesh” requires his audience to consider the question of what the pound is equal to dispassionately and rationally, even as *The Merchant of Venice* elsewhere insists that we recognize the very question of whether flesh and money can be equivalents as an inherently immoral one.²¹

Shylock’s proposal for the flesh bond warps the scene’s previous definitions of kindness. By the time Antonio agrees to the bond – “...I’ll seal to such a bond, / And say there is much kindness in the Jew” (1.3.148-149) –the meanings of “kind” and “kindness” have completely emptied as the conditions under which they are uttered rapidly change. Originally, Bassanio agrees that Shylock’s offer is “kindness” indeed (1.3.138), but following immediately on his

²⁰ One way to rate the monetary value of human flesh is, of course, through Jesus’ sacrifice, whose blood redeemed (or bought back) humanity from its sins. But Christ’s is a payment of infinite value, and thus cannot provide a practical or literal exchange rate between Antonio’s flesh and Shylock’s money. Turning to Christianity for a model answer to the question raised by the flesh bond only underscores how impossible such equivalence is. Though the exchange of flesh and blood for salvation is the root of the Christian system of value, it is by definition an exchange that cannot be transacted by any human other than Jesus: “According to scripture, God accepts restitution...only not in cash and not from you. Christ alone provides the necessary ‘ransom’...And Christ pays your debt in blood” (Parker 88).

²¹ Merchant accepts the equivalence, but makes us wince at it. In the trial scene, Shylock’s justification for claiming the forfeited bond rests on the Venetian/Christian legal legitimacy of slavery: “You have among you many a purchased slave, / Which like your asses.../You use in abject and in slavish parts, / Because you bought them” (4.1.89-92). Shylock’s argument presents an indictment of the legal equivalence in Christian society between persons and money; an ironic criticism, given that Shylock uses the same logic to justify taking Antonio’s flesh. The law in Shakespeare’s Venice, as Engle explains, is morally bankrupt, as it “has no categorical respect for the moral autonomy of persons” (104). The custom, though, is not universal. Looking back to the Old Testament tradition of exact retaliation, Marc Shell explains that “In Jewish law there is no commensuration between human life and money. Christian jurisprudence, unlike Jewish, does make life and money commensurable” (*Money, Language, and Thought* 64).

confirmation of kindness, Shylock changes the terms of kindness to include the pound of flesh penalty – “This kindness will I show” (1.3.139), where “this” now refers to the flesh bond and not to the interest-free loan. The sense of “kindness” shifts yet again when Shylock calls the flesh bond a “merry” one (1.3.169), indicating that the contract might not be serious. Antonio’s remark emphasizes the cruelty of the bond, while also nullifying the threat by treating it as a joke.

Through the bond, the void of meaning where “kind” once stood expands to encompass all language that concerns itself with definition. Antonio accepts the bond with ease because he confidently expects “return / Of thrice three times the value of this bond” (1.3.154-155). The deictic “this” is deliberately unclear: does Antonio expect a return on his investments equal to nine times the three thousand ducats of his loan, or a return equal to nine times the value of a pound of his flesh? The two possibilities leave Bassanio, Shylock, and audiences to contemplate how Antonio could possibly expect a yield on his investments greater than the value of his flesh without a previously agreed-upon means to assess its worth.²² Shylock’s reply, meant to reassure Antonio and Bassanio of his innocent intentions, instead sustains the equation of money and human flesh that the play has enabled but not defined numerically. Shylock claims disinterest:

...what should I gain

By the exaction of the forfeiture?

A pound of man’s flesh taken from a man

Is not so estimable, profitable neither,

²² Engle’s thesis that Shakespeare’s plays often dwell on “the contingency of evaluation” (1), and that *Merchant*, “more than any other [play]...presents the world of human relations as a market of exchangeable values” corroborates my reading of the flesh bond as an exchange in which values that are not and should not be translatable are improperly conflated. Of course, there are limits to the exchangeability of items, limits that 1.3 ignores. Engle cautions that, while “economies are set in motion to take advantage of difference through exchange... they do not function to ensure that all parts can be exchanged for all others” (6).

As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats. (1.3.159-163)

His insistence that he has no personal stake in Antonio's failure because human flesh would be useless to him continues the "unkind" equivalence between money and human flesh. He places human flesh in terms of relative value with various animals' flesh, which has both a definite utility for humans and a fluctuating market price. The comparative construction, "not so estimable...as," upholds the erasure of kinds by making all forms of evaluation utilitarian and commercial. The differences between Jews and Christians, friends and enemies, money and human flesh, thanks to the exchange of the flesh bond, exist in Venice on a continuum of commercial profit and utility, rather than in separate, inviolable categories or kinds.

What are different kinds, and How can one tell?

If Shylock's proposal of an interest free loan threatens to unite him and Antonio in one kind through friendship, and if the flesh bond erases distinctions between human and non-human kinds, then the parable of Laban's sheep works temporarily to repair the unstable foundations of kinds by isolating a difference between Jews and Christians. Shylock justifies usury through a comparison with Jacob's ingenuity breeding sheep: the "skillful shepherd" found "...a way to thrive, and he was blest; / And thrift is blessing if men steal it not" (1.3.80, 85-86). Antonio responds to Shylock's interpretation, "This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for, / A thing not in his power to bring to pass, / But swayed and fashioned by the hand of heaven" (1.3.87-89). Antonio rejects Shylock's claim that Jacob's effort and cleverness produced the desired results. Rather, the breeding of the spotted sheep was, to the Christian interpreter, an unpredictable enterprise, not controlled by human efforts but directed by the will of God. In his rejection of Jacob's labors as the key to his success, Antonio mirrors the 1587 Geneva Bible's glosses on the tale. Jacob states that through his work, "I haue serued your father with all my might...Thus hath

God taken away your fathers substance, and given it to me” (Gen 31:6, 9). In Jacob’s telling, while God exercises his will in blessing him, the blessing came about in response to his efforts. The Geneva’s gloss contradicts Jacob, as if fearful that a claim to success through effort constitutes a prideful lie: “This declareth that the thing, which Iaakob did before, was by Gods commandement, and not through deceit” (Gloss to Gen 31:9). The dispute between the two men about Jacob’s sheep reveals two contrasting attitudes to the biblical tale which imply divergent philosophies toward work more generally. In Shylock’s interpretation, human labor produces results commensurate with the degree of effort, whereas in Antonio’s, no amount of human effort can account for the success granted by God’s favor. Antonio’s perspective facilitates a convenient conflation of business practices and religious conviction – Shylock, to his mind, offers loans at usurious rates because his reprobate theology pridefully devalues the importance of God’s will out of a preference for human labor. Shylock’s Jewishness inflects the meaning and value of his professional choices.

In addition to its function as a way to distinguish Jews from Christians via beliefs about work and human effort, the parable of Jacob and Laban’s sheep parallels Shylock’s status in the Venetian economy. Engle has argued that just as Laban tries to prohibit Jacob’s success, and just as Laban hates Jacob for breeding his own flocks, so too is Shylock “not allowed full participation in the economy,” and “hated for making money out of the money with which he supplies, (or ‘blesses’) the ventures of the Christians around him” (Engle 90). I would extend Engle’s argument: the similarities between Jacob’s and Shylock’s stories reveal economic discrimination to result from a tacit admission of the importance of human effort. The admission troubles the distinct boundaries between Christians and Jews the parable just erected, and it also requires Antonio to recognize the commercial links between himself, a merchant, and Shylock,

the bankroller of mercantile activities. Denying the productivity of human effort permits Antonio to refuse Shylock the credit he is due.

Antonio's interpretation of the parable conveniently obviates personal responsibility not only in his duty to Shylock as a fellow participant in the economic machinery of Venice, but also in his own mercantile dealings. If his business brings him too close to the "Jewish" behavior of striving actively for material gain, then at least he cannot be held accountable for the results since his successes or failures lie entirely in God's hands. The Christian interpretation of Jacob's sheep as a sign of God's will and favor helps the play further to emphasize the differences between a Jewish businessman and a Christian one, even though their practices are essentially identical. The Christian characters of *Merchant* tend to speak as though their own efforts can neither harm nor hinder their endeavors. Salerio mentions "a wind too great" (1.1.24) and "dangerous rocks" (31) as among the hazards to Antonio's ships, while Solanio imagines vague "misfortunes" (21), but neither attributes the relative safety or danger of Antonio's business to his own agency, and not to his risky decision to send out all of his ships at once. Surprisingly, Antonio does account for his own decisions in providing for the success of his ships; like any cautious merchant, "My ventures are not in one bottom trusted, / Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate / Upon the fortune of this present year" (1.1.42-44).²³ Antonio holds to Christian religious interpretations while conducting "Jewish" business practices in order to reassure himself that his profession does not make him an exponent of Jewishness. Hawkes has argued that the sixteenth and seventeenth century English considered usury an attitude as much as an action (Hawkes 66). Any self-interested capitalist pursuit necessitates treating all other human participants as "strangers," thus reproducing the Biblical conditions under which usury may be

²³ Intriguingly, and despite his caution in diversifying his trade, Antonio (nor anyone else in the play), makes no mention of marine insurance, a practice which flourished in England beginning in the mid-16th century (Ibbetson 293).

offered. According to this sense of usury as an attitude as well as a practice, Antonio is by default a usurer. In Antonio's admission of effort and caution, Christian and Jewish ways of thinking about work and risk permeate one another.

Despite the weakening of real difference exposed by the story of Jacob and Laban, *The Merchant of Venice* continues to maintain a tenuous sense of Jewish difference through the Jews' literal and material reading practices. Bassanio pegs Shylock as a literal, materialistic reader of character. He interprets Shylock's statement that "Antonio is a good man" (1.3.11) as a question that insults his friend's character, but Shylock clarifies, "My meaning in saying he is a good man, is to have you understand me that he is sufficient" (1.3.13-14). Restricting himself only to the sense of the word "good" which has relevance in the context of the loan, Shylock appears to confirm the stereotype that Jews interpret worth only literally and materially. The literalism which marks Jewish difference links back again to Lampert's "hermeneutical Jew" of the first chapter – a tool of Christian exegesis that interprets the Jew as representative of the incorrect reader who ignores the metaphorical and spiritual value of biblical texts (Lampert 9). Lampert reads *The Merchant of Venice* as a continuation of the medieval exegetical tradition into the early modern era, in which moments of "correct" Christian reading lead to the consolidation of commercial wealth in Christian hands, and in which the practical necessity of openness to strangers and to commercial activity "[corrodes] religious discourse" (141). The central assumption of Christian hermeneutics, according to Lampert, is that there exists "an opposition between external and internal realities" (140), an opposition which Shylock cannot or chooses not to recognize in his evaluation of Antonio. Antonio's goodness, as far as Shylock is concerned, is equivalent to his financial security.

And yet, the difference represented by Lampert's phrase, "hermeneutical Jew," is another that the play erodes. Though Lampert's term is useful for understanding historical and theological continuities in understandings of Jews, *Merchant* also shows that this opposition between external and internal realities is not wholly functional or trustworthy. It misrepresents how the play's Christian characters actually think. Given the primarily moral meaning of "good," it is really Bassanio who uses the word in a strictly literal way. Shylock, in applying goodness to financial solvency, adds an atypically figurative meaning to the word. Though Christians should divine internal as well as external realities, Bassanio does not, in his successful attempt at the casket test, rely upon the discrepancy between inner and outer meanings. His speech "draws upon the lure of the ornamental" in order to remind himself in the process of choosing that "The world is still deceived with ornament" (3.2.74), but he makes his final choice based on the material from which the caskets are made (Lampert 157). Though Bassanio does look beyond appearances when he refuses to deem lead worthless for its dullness, his Christian hermeneutic habit of mind leads him to make superficial assumptions just as do Portia's other suitors, Aragon and Morocco. Bassanio's interpretation is predicated on different assumptions than theirs – he has been taught always to question the worth of ornamentation, whereas Aragon and Morocco admire it – but insofar as he reads according to this basic assumption, he will always automatically view ornamental objects with suspicion. Gold and silver, for Bassanio, are by definition, and by appearance, less valuable than the plain surfaces that may hide inner worth, despite the irony of having borrowed Shylock's money in order to arrive in Belmont in as ornamented a style as possible.

The spiritual and interpretive differences which are thought to divide Jews and Christians, as we see, tend to fall apart or merge into one another eventually. In search of a stable

source of lasting difference, *The Merchant of Venice* inscribes Jewishness in the male body in the form of circumcision and symbolic castration. When Jessica escapes from her father's house to elope with Lorenzo, she first pauses to "...gild myself / With some more ducats" (2.6.49-50). Solanio equates Jessica's theft from her father with castration: he reports that Shylock bemoans "two stones, two rich and precious stones, / Stol'n by my daughter!" (2.8.20-21). The physical changes which circumcision makes to the male genitalia, and which embody Jewish difference, are here echoed and intensified by metaphorically castrating Shylock, cutting him off from passing on his genes and his patrimony.²⁴

This seemingly straightforward and unalterable physical difference, too, is questioned when Antonio is called upon to forfeit the flesh bond, and to undergo a cut which greatly resembles both circumcision and castration. Adelman argues that "anxiety about the status of circumcision as a reliable marker of difference plays itself out in the incision that Shylock would make on Antonio's body" (99-100), an incision which migrates first from "what part of your body pleaseth me" (1.3.147) to "nearest his heart" (4.1.249). The change of location from which the flesh may be taken allows the pound to come potentially from Antonio's genitals, and also to replace the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision (Gen 17:11) with the Pauline "circumcision of the heart."²⁵ As Adelman points out, the trial scene, particularly through Portia's articulation of

²⁴ Kaplan has argued that historically, Jewish women were seen as more easily convertible to Christianity than Jewish men, because they lack the permanent mark of circumcision and because they will be subordinate in the gender hierarchy to Christian men (13,17). Applying this reading to my own interpretation of Shylock's "rich and precious stones," Shylock must be figuratively castrated in order to allay fears that he will merge unnoticed into the Christian fold and taint its bloodline. But Janet Adelman has taken issue with Kaplan's interpretation, arguing that Jessica's integration into Christianity should be scarier than Shylock's precisely because she lacks the distinguishing mark of circumcision. She appears physically no different, and thus can infiltrate Christian society more easily (69). My perspective stands at the mid-point between those of Kaplan and Adelman: Jessica, because of her gender, can indeed convert more easily than can a male Jew, but to my mind, it is precisely the ease with which she can disappear into the Christian fold that creates discomfort with her conversion.

²⁵ See James Shapiro on the Pauline tradition of the metaphorical circumcision of the heart, and on Paul's obsession with "uncircumcision." Shapiro also ties the pound of flesh tale to a later story told in Gregorio Leti's *Life of Pope Sixtus the Fifth* (1693), which reverses the roles of Christian and Jew. In this tale, the Christian wants to claim his

the bond as a pound of flesh to be “cut off” (4.1.227) – a preposition normally applied only to appendages that stick out – rather than “cut from,” emphasizes the phallic source of the flesh and links Shylock and Antonio together as circumcised men (Adelman 110). Antonio himself draws this equivalence when he calls himself a “tainted wether of the flock,” (4.1.113), a wether being a term for a castrated ram. The very feature, then, which should solidify Jewish difference from Christians by attaching that difference to the male body transforms into another sign of actual and potential links between the two religions, links which are further strengthened by Jessica’s convertibility. The differences in kind which *The Merchant of Venice* cultivates it is unable to uphold.²⁶

How should different kinds be dealt with?

In *Merchant*, the answer comes through a fact of the plot: Jews, and Jewish funds, fuel it. Christian marriage and Christian mercantile success cannot occur without Shylock’s money. Antonio could not fund Bassanio’s courtship, and Jessica could neither convert nor elope without her father’s stolen riches. Lampert has argued that the drive to gain wealth through commerce “allow[s] the presence and desire of aliens to crack Venice’s once-stable foundation” (160), but I argue instead that the cracks occur because of the Christian Venetians’ inability to accept the unalterable fact of alien presence and the similarities which unite aliens and Venetians. For example, Solanio mocks Shylock’s reaction to the discovery of Jessica’s elopement and theft: “My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! / Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats! /...My ducats and my daughter!” for his apparent conflation of money and persons in his grief

pound of flesh from “that part of his body which it is not necessary to mention” (123), thus strengthening the associations between the flesh bond tradition and circumcision, for both Christians and Jews (117-121, 126-130).

²⁶ A telling characteristic, I think, to support Adelman’s assertion that “The Jew is not the stranger outside Christianity but the original stranger within it” (4). The sense that Jewishness lies at the heart of Christianity preoccupies medieval literature as well. Steven Kruger argues that medieval Christianity erases the Jewish presence in its midst even as it requires Judaism’s existence to define its own (5-6,10).

(2.8.15-17). “Christian ducats” resonates both as an absurdity – that ducats, like people, could have a religion – and an accusation – that ducats ought to be kept in the right hands. The conflation occurs only in reported speech; Solanio’s scorn exposes him as reading through the lens of the long-standing cultural stereotype of Jewish greediness and materialism. “My ducats and my daughter,” according to Solanio, is the kind of thing a Jew, who incorrectly values money and people equally, would or ought to say. Yet, interpreting Shylock’s reaction through the lens of a stereotypical and abstract Jewishness provides only a partial assessment of the play’s Venice. The equivalence between people and money is not just a “Jewish mistake;” it is also the purpose of the marriage contract which it is the fundamental goal of the plot to advance. In giving herself to Bassanio, Portia converts “Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours” (3.2.166); she, together with her possessions merge in one identity with her husband under the legal principle of coverture.²⁷ Portia further underscores the connection, in Shell’s words, between “purse and person” when she reclaims her money upon hearing of Bassanio’s bond to Antonio. The prior bond, cemented with a monetary exchange, prevents the single identity formed in marriage. When Portia gives Bassanio money to free Antonio, she bestows it as her own to give, symbolically disconnecting herself from Bassanio until he severs ties with Antonio by discharging his debt to him (3.2.305-312). The foundations of Venetian society are not broken by an alien equation of ducats and daughters, money and marriages, but are constructed out of it and depend upon it for their continued successful existence.

One method the play proposes, then, to deal with different kinds, is to manipulate the alien presence to a religiously restricted commercial benefit. This method characterizes Christian

²⁷ Shell states that “Marriage is a mutual and total alienation of person between a man and a woman,” and that a marriage contract, like the legal bond between Shylock and Antonio, and the emotional bond between Antonio and Bassanio, depends on an equivalence between “purse and person” (*Money, Language, and Thought* 63). See also “Coverture, n. 9” OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 4 September 2013.

behavior: their care for money is stereotypically “Jewish,” but their attention to keeping it in Christian hands insulates them from “Jewishness.” Lorenzo’s and Jessica’s elopement is one such example of the Christian restrictions drawn around the circulation of wealth. Lorenzo values Jessica’s fidelity to him because of the “gold and jewels she is furnished with” (2.4.31). Jessica’s theft, an act of betrayal to her father, constitutes her loyalty to her husband and to Christianity. She transfers her wealth, along with her converted person, into the Christian fold. Portia’s father’s casket test is another such instance: it ensures that only an insider, a Venetian Christian trained in reading exteriors suspiciously, could access Portia’s hand in marriage and with it her fortune. But the casket test also demonstrates the limits and failures of the Christian approach. Controlling the circulation of money is ultimately an illusion – to relegate wealth to such narrow confines requires an escape to the fantasy world of Belmont, a world in which money belongs only to Christian aristocrats who gain it effortlessly. Intrusions from the commercial world of Venice repeatedly compromise the escape. The invaders – Jessica, the Jewish convert, and Antonio, urgently needing money and legal representation – forcibly remind the Christian characters of the impossibility of restricting the flow of money entirely. Antonio accrues wealth precisely through encounters with diverse people and places – he has ships in Tripoli, the Indies, Mexico, and England (1.3.15-18). The goal to return all money to Belmont to be redistributed by Portia can only be accomplished at the expense of eliminating all economic productivity from Venice. Subordinating a “Jewish” focus on money to the Christian goal of social and economic homogeneity, then, fails both Christians and Jews alike.

The play offers another solution to the question of how different kinds should be dealt with – a solution balanced against the Christian one and coded as Jewish, both because of its source and because of the nature of its response to competing differences. Shylock offers a

model of relative moderation in contrast to the Christians who deny the alien presence in Venice. In his model, commercial exchanges and social interactions between members of the same kind or members of different kinds each have their own protocols.²⁸ In tracing Shylock's comparative moderation, I do not suggest that he is a wholly trustworthy or sympathetic figure. On the contrary, he is often just as reluctant to redefine or cross boundaries as Antonio is, as when he curses his daughter for eloping with a Christian (3.1.28). Yet, to Shylock's mind, a range of possibilities permit interaction but still protect the distinctions of kind he values. In this sense, Shylock creates a narrow opening for a practical if limited tolerance (for which Me'iri provides the model). Shylock defines his limits in his response to Bassanio's invitation to dinner, "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). Shylock makes space for a moderate form of inter-religious communication in public and commercial interactions, and saves personal and religious ritual for the private space of his own kind.

In his limited model of inter-kind relationships, Shylock has a justifiable point about the degree to which separate kinds may be maintained for the purposes of cultural and ethical integrity. Bassanio's invitation to Shylock, "If it please you to dine with us" (1.3.27), seems a friendly way to welcome a stranger into his social circle. But in his invitation, Bassanio fails to realize what Shylock knows automatically, that to eat with them would be "to smell pork, to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into!" (1.3.28-29). Granted, Shylock does respond with an unwarranted degree of disgust, but dining together assumes a sameness that does not exist for Shylock and Bassanio. The sameness, rather than leveling the

²⁸ For which we've already seen evidence when Antonio expects to pay interest on his loan, but Shylock anticipates a free loan as favor from Tubal (1.3.50-52, 130).

differences between the two men to create an inclusive, boundary-less community, would in fact occur on Christian terms at the expense of Shylock's integrity as a Jew.

Shylock's refusal to "smell pork" at a Christian meal underscores the difference between a communal event that mixes kinds without merging them, and one that permits his presence only by subsuming his Jewishness in Christian cultural practices. The explanation Shylock provides for his refusal to dine underscores his religious difference from Christians by offering what could be called a "Jewish" interpretation of a New Testament story, or rather, a Christian imagination of a Jewish reading of Christian scripture.²⁹ In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus casts demons out of a possessed man and into a herd of swine, which then rushes headlong into a lake and drowns (5:1-13). Counted among his many miracles, the tale serves to enhance and spread Jesus' messianic legitimacy. After the exorcism, Jesus commands the man to "Go thy way home to thy friendes, and shewe them what great thinges the Lorde hath done unto thee, and howe hee hath had compassion on thee" (Mark 5:19). Pork then, arguably resonates for Shylock not simply as a forbidden food, but as one that is bound up in the dissemination of a presumptuously belated religion. Whereas Christians might celebrate Jesus' exorcism of the demons from the man, a Jew might focus on the fact that Jesus "conjured the devil into" the swine. Per Shylock's understanding, Jesus did not defeat the demons; he merely moved them from one receptacle to another. The tale's displaced demon-holder offers a sound though retroactive rationale for an already long-standing dietary restriction. The now demonic nature of swine provides a perfectly legitimate justification to refuse to eat pork and to share a meal with pork-eaters. By questioning Christian dietary and interpretive practices, Shylock indicates that breaking down kinds entirely is not the desired antidote to defining them too restrictively. The Christian version of community

²⁹ For a figure who is supposed to fill the role of ultimate rejected outsider in Christian Venice, Shylock knows a good deal about the Christian bible. His knowledge unsettles the very notion of extreme difference and otherness he is meant to embody.

suggested by Bassanio is a homogenizing one, not one that permits interactions despite difference.

We have seen that the scene of the flesh bond addresses the question of how to build communities in the face of divergent kinds and develops two possible answers. The “Jewish” answer is to cultivate community in and through differences, while respecting the limitations those differences impose. The “Christian” answer is to eliminate differences altogether. Shylock complicates this rather schematic framework by contemplating the role of moral hypocrisy in the formation of community boundaries. Shylock privately expresses his hatred of Antonio with a vague, equivocal insult, “How like a fawning publican he looks” (1.3.36). While we must first attribute Shylock’s privately expressed animosity to his explicitly stated grievances, “I hate him for he is a Christian/.../He lends out money gratis, and brings down / The rate of usance here with us in Venice” (1.3.37, 39-40), an analysis of his antipathy ought not to stop there, because both the divisions and connections between the two characters run deep. Shylock’s quip about the publican begs two questions: what is insulting about looking like a publican, and why is this particular insult appropriate for Antonio? One modern edition of *The Merchant of Venice* glosses “publican” in a way that overtly fails to elucidate its relevance to Antonio’s character and to his relationship with Shylock: “Perhaps Shylock uses it as an inexact but bitter term of reproach” (Myrick 16). Instead, as an epithet for Antonio, “publican,” gets to the heart of *Merchant*’s difficulty assessing the appropriate and most functional divisions between kind of people.

A term familiar to Elizabethans, a publican, or innkeeper, embodies the act of mixing kinds and violating boundaries. A publican must welcome strangers into his house: his hospitality comes not from honoring ties within kinds or among kindred, but from the desire to make money. Fundamentally, the publican’s business is kindness. Any recipient of a publican’s

hospitality must be aware that his true sympathies and kindnesses may or may not actually match his appearance. The business requires the performance of kindness. Hence Shylock attaches the adjective “fawning” to the publican. The publican has the potential to behave hypocritically as he crosses boundaries and mixes kinds; his business virtually guarantees it. Shylock’s insult carries the subtext of distrust because no means exist to assess Antonio’s sincerity. When Antonio states, “I’ll seal to such a bond, / And say there is much kindness in the Jew” (1.3.148-149), Shylock can only take him at his word. As a “fawning publican,” Antonio appears friendly to most (Shylock excepted), but his kindness is a facet of his trade; he limits real kindness, as evidenced by his generosity, to those within his own kind.

The biblical resonances of “publican” shed further light on forming communities within religious contexts. In ancient Roman history, a publican was “a person who farms the public taxes; a tax-gatherer, esp. any of those in Judaea and Galilee in the New Testament period, who were generally regarded as traitorous and impious on account of their service of Rome and their extortion.”³⁰ The term may be insulting in any context given the general dislike of tax collectors. More specifically, the biblical resonances of “publican” expose Antonio as a hypocrite. In the Gospel of Luke, the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican compares the prayers of the two eponymous men as a lesson on the importance of humility. Jesus directs the tale specifically toward “certaine, which trusted in themselues that they were iust, and despised other” (Luke 18:9). The Pharisee may seem appropriately thankful to God, but he is also proud of his actions, seeking recognition for his fasts and tithes.³¹ The Publican, instead, is appropriately humble, aware of his faults and sins. Although the Publican’s occupation, because of its worldly concerns

³⁰ publican, n¹ 1a. Oxford English Dictionary

³¹ Luke 18:11-12, “The Pharisee stode and prayed thus with himselfe, O God, I thanke thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, vniust, adulterers, or euen as this Publican. I fast twice in the weeke: I giue tithe of all that euer I possesse.”

and support of imperial government, earns him social scorn, ultimately, “he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14). For Christians, the story functions as a reminder both that Jesus welcomes the cast-offs, scapegoats, and marginalized of society, and also that true faith in God requires humility, the surrendering of one’s agency to God’s. Materially, the Pharisee is better off than the Publican, but spiritually, the publican comes out ahead.

In light of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, it makes sense for Shylock to turn the phrase, “fawning publican,” into an insult. The term ought to connote a humble person who is aware of his own sinfulness. Antonio, by contrast, is a hypocrite. Falsely humble, he cares more to concern himself with Shylock’s sins than with his own. Antonio makes the very fact of Shylock’s Jewishness his crime. He calls Shylock “misbeliever, cutthroat dog,” (1.3.107), but gives no thought to making Bassanio the exception to his own religious convictions, taking a loan with interest even though he falsely insists, “I do never use it [i.e. practice usury]” (1.3.66). At the end of the trial scene, Antonio once again breaks his prohibition on usury because it is convenient to him: he asks the court to cancel Shylock’s fine of one-half his goods and income provided that “he will let me have / The other half in use” (4.1.377-378), in other words, allow him to collect the interest on the remaining half of Shylock’s income.³² Both Shell and Engle keep track of the ways in which Antonio, hypocritically, either already is or becomes a usurer over the course of the play. Shell speaks of the “spiritual usury” Antonio engages in by hoping for gratitude from Bassanio in return for funding his courtship. Engle links this form of usury to the more general “advantage,” Shylock speaks of, which could include the emotional profit Antonio reaps from being generous to Bassanio (Shell 75; Engle 87). Antonio exhibits self-abnegating behavior, which could be read as humble, but which in fact indicates a desire to have his suffering observed – “Pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay his debt, and then I care

³² Shell’s interpretation (*Money, Language, and Thought* 72).

not!” (3.3.35-36).³³ Antonio is a falsely-humble hypocrite, who, against the warning in the Geneva Bible’s gloss on the parable, has “confidence of [his] owne righteousness, and the contempt of other: and an humble heart is contrary to both these” (Gloss to Luke 18:9). He harps on the sins of others to the exclusion of his own, and engages in self-indulgent displays of self-loathing and pitying which seek an audience for his unworthiness. Shylock’s use of “publican” as an insult highlights the irony of applying the term to Antonio. Antonio is a publican – that is, a humble, self-aware man – only in an outwardly apparent sense. Under the surface, he is a “fawning” publican, more aligned with the Pharisee than the Publican of the parable, his humility exposed as self-righteousness.

Shylock, as a Jew conjured up by a Christian author, also employs “publican” in a way that speaks to Christian assumptions about how a Jew would interpret the Christian bible. “Publican” carries both positive and negative connotations throughout the New Testament. The story of the Pharisee and the Publican constitutes one positive example, or at least one in which the negative aspects of the publican’s profession are mitigated by his good character. Elsewhere, Jesus is referred to as a “friend unto Publicanes and sinners” (Matthew 11:19), an insult coming from Jesus’ detractors, but a reminder to Christians of Christ’s acceptance of all ranks of humanity. Jesus also employs “publican” negatively. He commands his followers to ostracize the reprobate who will not recognize the true church, saying, “let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a Publicane” (Matthew 18:17). The Geneva Bible’s commentary on this verse explains the connection between heathens and publicans in terms of Jewish condemnation: “Prophane, and voyde of religion: such men, the Iewes called Gentiles: whose company they shunned, as they did the Publicanes.” To a Christian theater audience, that a Jew would use the word

³³ Antonio’s desire to have Bassanio witness his death also provides ammunition to the argument that the play is in part about Antonio’s repressed homoerotic desire for Bassanio (Adelman 116). Lawrence W. Hyman argues that “...the main action of the play is centered on the struggle between Portia and Antonio for Bassanio’s love” (109).

“publican” as a disparaging term makes sense, as the Jews displayed a historical dislike of them. Shylock’s response is not Jewish, but “Jewish” – a Christian’s imagination of a Jewish response to the New Testament.

The way in which “publican” criticizes Antonio returns to the definitions of kind and kindness – instead of seeing Jesus as one who openly welcomes sinners and publicans into the fold for redemption, Shylock sees a person who is not selective enough in his friends and associates. Likewise with Antonio – he lacks the discernment to exclude the impecunious Bassanio from his close companions, so it seems just that Shylock would not want to risk association with either of them. For Shylock, the recipients of one’s kindness are not determined simply by belonging to one’s own kind, as defined by religious devotion. One should also designate ‘kind’ according to financial reliability. Rather than kind, Antonio should be careful.

Reevaluating Expressions of Tolerance

As a point of comparison with *The Merchant of Venice*, Me’iri’s philosophy of tolerance through the preservation of differences highlights the play’s shifting understandings of the boundaries that separate kinds. On the one hand, *Merchant* seemingly develops a decidedly un-Me’iri like call to tolerance: Shylock’s “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech appears to endorse a tolerance which arises through the acknowledgement of human similarities, ones shared by all people regardless of religious or racial specificity. But on the other hand, contextualized by early modern beliefs about Jewish physical difference, universal similarity becomes suspect as a rationale for tolerance. Shylock lists his grievances against Antonio, and underscores Antonio’s motivations for persecuting him:

He hath disgraced me, and hind' red me half a million, laughed at my losses,
 mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my
 friends, heated mine enemies – and what's his reason? I am a Jew. (3.1.46-49)

Initially, nothing about Shylock's words argue for a form of tolerance based on shared traits; Shylock's report of bullying highlights his particularities in business, friendship, and religion by emphasizing *my gains*, *my nation*, *my bargains*, etc. What Shylock's rhetorical question does insist upon is that his Jewishness is an insufficient motivation for seven out of eight of Antonio's offences against him. Bargains, losses, and gains are all business concerns which properly should have no relation to Shylock's religious profession. The only one of Antonio's actions we can directly attribute to Shylock's Jewishness is that Antonio "scorned [his] nation." Up to this point in his speech, then, Shylock argues not that he desires universal tolerance, but more simply that religious difference constitutes an inadequate reason for persecution.

Shylock's logic for rejecting religious intolerance appears to rest on the assumption that all humans are fundamentally similar; the appearance leads to the mistaken belief that tolerance can be achieved through a recognition of universal sameness. Shylock's parallels between Jews and all other humans, which convince a modern audience that Jews differ not at all in the essentials, are exactly the ones which his interlocutors and early modern audiences might have questioned. Shylock's first rhetorical questions, "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?" (3.1.49-51) are on a literal level answerable only in the affirmative. But instead of developing a trend of similarities, the senses and passions Shylock lists curtail it, because his own are idiosyncratic and ungeneralizeable. Shylock's passions mark him as different from others in Venice, instead of similar to them. Gratiano believes that Shylock's desires are "wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous (4.1.137), and

Solanio insists that Shylock's reaction to the news of his daughter's theft and elopement is entirely dissimilar from any other emotional outburst he has witnessed: "I never heard a passion so confused, / So strange, outrageous, and so variable / As the dog Jew did utter in the streets" (2.8.12-14). Both Gratiano and Solanio rhetorically transform Shylock into an animal; his canine passions place him outside the realm of a tolerance enabled by shared human traits.

Shylock's additional rhetorical questions further destabilize his already tenuous appeals to tolerance because he selects precisely those characteristics which, in relation to Jews, were subject to much debate among historians, clergy, and doctors. He asks if Jews are not

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?
 And if you poison us, do we not die? (3.1.51-55)

Shylock's questions relate to the human body's seemingly universal physical qualities and needs. But early modern thinkers may not have accepted such bodily sameness with respect to Jews. The medieval tradition of the blood libel indicated that Jews and Christians were not, in fact, "subject to the same diseases" and "healed by the same means." Jews were thought to kidnap and ritually crucify Christian children.³⁴ One common explanation for this ritual is that Jewish men menstruated, and thus needed Christian blood to replace their own lost blood – both an illness and a cure to which only Jews are subject.³⁵ Another focus of Jewish bodily difference was the *foetor judaicus*, or Jewish odor, which pervades Jewish bodies, but depending on the reference,

³⁴ According to Robert Chazan, while Jews had been seen as generally murderous and hostile to Christians throughout the Middle Ages, the blood libel, in its specific sense of murder for the purposes of Passover rituals, emerged in the mid-13th century (71). Common mythic histories of ritual murder include that of William of Norwich (1144), Hugh of Lincoln (1255), and Simon of Trent (1475). The blood libel's most famous literary representation is Chaucer's "The Prioress' Tale." For more on the blood libel tradition, see Langmuir 266, 298-299, and Felsenstein 32. On the blood libel as it makes its way into the early modern period, see Shapiro 89-111.

³⁵ The first known reference to Jewish male menstruation appears in a work by the 13th century anatomist, Thomas de Cantimpré (David S. Katz 448).

either disappears immediately upon conversion or never fades despite conversion.³⁶ Shylock's assertion that all humans can die by poisoning evokes the belief that Jewish doctors excelled in their knowledge of poisons and used it to kill invisibly and untraceably – Jews were more likely to administer poison than to die from it.³⁷ Even a fairly straightforward question, “If you prick us, do we not bleed?” is complicated by the fact that “prick” conjures up the Jewish physical difference of circumcision.³⁸ Working against his ostensible intent, each of Shylock's rhetorical questions emphasizes fundamental Jewish difference instead of universal human similarities. What seems to be the play's most robust call to tolerance fails to function as such both because the initial concept of universality obviates the need for tolerance, and because the coding of Shylock's differences as intrinsic, bodily, and threatening renders them incompatible with the universal framework for which he appears to advocate.

I have argued that Shylock's language betrays him because of the suspicion of bodily difference his choices arouse in his listeners; he seems unaware of the double-edged meanings of the objects he chooses as markers of sameness. But I would also suggest that the “hath not a Jew eyes?” speech fails because, as it progresses, it shifts focus away from somatic similarities among humans and toward behaviors which question the accepted loci of responsibility for the tensions and violence in Venetian Christian/Jewish relations. Shylock abruptly ends a heartfelt

³⁶ Thomas Browne rejected a racial explanation for the Jewish odor, believing first of all that the evidence for the existence of the smell was weak, and that if a smell did indeed exist, it must be attributable to environmental factors, since Jews were hardly homogenous geographically. See Shapiro, 172, and Katz, 462. Thomas Calvert, on the other hand, believed in a Jew's “mal-odoriferous breath” (*The Blessed Jew of Marocco* 31). See also Adelman, who discusses the *foetor judaicus* in the context of contradictory assumptions dating from the middle ages onward that Jews were both physically distinct and sneakily impossible to distinguish from other people (79).

³⁷ John Stow reports on a Jewish and Saracen conspiracy to poison wells in 1319. *The Annales of England* (1592) (322, qtd. in Shapiro 97). The Jew as poisoner is a commonplace in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama; two examples are Barabas in Christopher Marlowe's, *The Jew of Malta* (1589), and Romelio (a Christian who disguises himself as a Jew) in John Webster's, *The Devil's Law-Case* (1623). There is also a historical basis for accusations against Jewish poisoners, although the Jews function as puppets of the Christian authorities. In 1471, Venice negotiated secretly with Jacob of Gaeta, the Jewish physician to Sultan Mehmed II, to poison the sultan, promising Jacob banking privileges in Venice if he succeeded (Jacoby 155-156).

³⁸ “Prick” as slang for “penis” dates to the 1550s. “prick, n.” Oxford English Dictionary. I am indebted to Katz for this reading of Shylock's use of “prick” (461).

plea for tolerance through shared similarities with the darker corollary to that sameness – the sameness of violent impulses. He asks,

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. (3.1.56-61)

These lines undo, rather than sustain, the parallels Shylock has built up between Christians and Jews over the course of the speech because they envision a response to experiencing a wrong which the Christian characters would not, at least conceptually, endorse – that of revenge. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ exhorted his followers to abandon the doctrine of revenge:

“whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39).

Though the Christians of *Merchant* are hardly uniformly charitable and forgiving – indeed, we learn that Antonio is a bully who routinely “spit upon [Shylock’s] Jewish gabardine” (1.3.108) – the act of revenge is one they would, at least conceptually, disavow. The impulse to revenge presupposes a wrong – a condition of Shylock’s speech unlikely to be met in the minds of his Christian listeners, who share no sense of having wronged him. “The villainy you teach me” reverses the causal assumption that Jews are the sources of villainy evoked earlier in the speech, and thus have earned their maltreatment. In shifting his emphasis from bodily to behavioral distinctions, Shylock trades potentially acceptable bodily similarities for a likeness in ideological kinds that cannot be countenanced (that is, he accuses both religions of supporting revenge, with Christians leading and the Jews following). Shylock asks for and offers to his audience the possibility of forging community and understanding with the marginalized elements of society,

only to rescind it, to place the promise of community in tension with the lasting fear of his intrinsic, violent difference.

Christian and Jewish Approaches to Universalism and Particularism

Shylock's speech fails to act as a call to tolerance because it is predicated on a fundamental misreading of the Christian universalism to which he appeals. This misreading exposes the Christian desire for sameness as the root of discrimination rather than as an avenue to tolerance. Shylock asks for his listeners to recognize his human similarities *despite* their differences religious profession. He follows up each mark of sameness with a reminder that "I am a Jew." These reminders of religious difference stand in opposition to the goals of Christian universalism, which seeks to absorb others and to eliminate all characteristics which differentiate. The Christians of Venice tacitly express such a desire. In the trial, Portia/Balthasar's exhortation for Shylock to be merciful presupposes a sameness that does not apply: "in the course of justice, none of us / Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy, / And that same prayer doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy (4.1.194-197). Portia intends "us" to encompass all humanity; in truth, "us" excludes Shylock both because as a Jew, he has no hope for Christian salvation, and because, according to Jewish law, Shylock need not accept the stress Portia places on mercy. Likewise, "we" is more particular than Portia realizes – it includes only those who pray "that same prayer" – the Lord's prayer, i.e. Christians. Universalism, as Portia expresses it, is either exclusive (that is, not universal at all, because it stops short of including non-Christians,) or utterly homogenizing. In championing an extra-legal principle of mercy, Portia speaks to the wrong person, according to both his terms and hers.

Portia's call to mercy shows that Christian universalism provides a poor foundation for a philosophy of tolerance because it homogenizes instead of diversifies. Far from the openness and

flexibility the word connotes, Christian universalism is actually rather rigid in terms of who or what it will admit to its confines. To Cary Nederman, Christianity “... was universalistic and exclusivist. That is, the Christian faith claimed validity for all people at all times and in all places, and it was unwilling to accommodate [others].”³⁹ In other words, Christianity manages to be universal only by refusing to allow any diversity of belief, and by bringing all humanity under the umbrella of one doctrine. “Catholic,” commonly glossed as “universal,” comes from two Greek roots: *κατά* (*kata*), and *ὅλος* (*holos*), meaning “according to the whole.”⁴⁰ “Catholic,” then, presupposes either that the whole of humanity shares (or should share) one set of beliefs, or alternatively, that the whole includes only those who are of like minds – a homogenous Christian body that has never truly existed, and toward which this post-reformation English play set in Catholic Italy can only gesture longingly. Christian universalism cannot cultivate tolerance, because complete homogenization obviates the need to tolerate difference. Shell explains the ideological shift which accounts for Christian intolerance. “The doctrine crucial to Christianity that ‘all men are brothers’ – or ‘all human beings are siblings’ – turned all too easily into the doctrine that ‘only my brothers are men, all ‘others’ are animals and may as well be treated as such’” (Shell “Marranos” 307). Erasure of particular categories of human, then, does not lead to the inclusion of all humanity under one single category, but to a strict limitation on who may be considered human. Christian universalism, which unites all humans as siblings through their belief in Christ, leaves no room for a category of people who are human but not siblings. In

³⁹ Nederman articulates this fundamental paradox in the context of ancient Roman rule, but it applies equally well to *Merchant* (16). Perez Zagorin has articulated this hypocrisy in even balder terms: “Of all the great world religions past and present, Christianity has been by far the most intolerant... In spite of the fact that Jesus Christ... preached mutual love... the Christian church was for a great part of its history an extremely intolerant institution” (1).

⁴⁰ “catholic, adj.” and “catholic, n.” Oxford English Dictionary.

Christianity, if one is not kin, one also fails to be kind; kindness (likeness) and kinship are conflated.⁴¹

It may at first glance seem counterintuitive to label fundamentally intolerant the religion that dispensed with ethnicity, class, and gender as criteria for membership, as Paul does when he proclaims, “There is neither Jew nor Grecian, there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Iesus” (Galatians 3:28). After all, the very fact that Christianity’s early leaders looked beyond the Jews when attracting adherents demonstrates a willingness to include individuals who might otherwise have been ruled out. But evidence for Christian intolerance comes from its scriptures as well as the history of its institutions. At the same time that Jesus ministers to the poor, the sick, and the otherwise marginalized members of society, he also heaps social and spiritual condemnation on those who do not accept his ministry. Matthew’s Jesus admonishes those who offend his followers that “...it were better for him, that a milstone were hanged about his necke, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). Those who cannot be reached are better ignored or ostracized: “...and if he refuse to hear the Church also, let him be unto thee as a heathen man, and a Publican” (Matthew 18:17). Paul adopts the same uncompromising attitude when he exhorts the Corinthian congregation to brook no variety in opinion and practice: “Nowe I beseech you, brethren, by the Name of our Lorde Iesus Christ, that ye all speake one thing, and that there be no dissensions among you: but be ye knit together in one mind and in one iudgement” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Paul’s order shows a desire to control interpretation and practice among Christians. Intolerance could be directed internally, to dissenting members, as well as externally, to non-believers. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 set canon law regarding the extermination of heresy, defined

⁴¹ Shell best explains which of the two kinship models would provide a more favorable existence: “...it is better to be an outsider in a particularist kinship system, where there are human kin and human aliens, than to be an outsider in a universalist kinship system, where there are only humankind and animals” (*The End of Kinship*19).

auricular confession as a precondition to taking communion, and introduced inquisitorial procedures – all ways of monitoring conformity of belief (Elliott 1, 14-15). Even the comparatively tolerant Christian humanists of the Reformation stopped short of advocating a tolerance that encompassed religious pluralism. Tolerance of breakaway sects, for thinkers such as Erasmus, was a temporary solution in the longer process of reconciliation and reform that would once again reunite everyone in one church (Lecler 476).

Christianity can be considered intolerant if it demands adherence to specific interpretations and practices; while it can accept diversity in the origins of its members, it cannot countenance plurality of religious thought –the very kind of diversity most salient to the divisions in *The Merchant of Venice*. The crucial precondition of tolerance, as I have defined it, is that human difference does in fact exist: if tolerance is the tendency to deal generously and patiently with difference, then differences must first be real and meaningful. Here we see the logical incompatibility of tolerance with Christian universalism (broadly characterized). If “universality” means that which is all-encompassing in scope, application, or relevance, then by definition it cannot accept the existence of anything or anyone outside of that universal collective (or else the “whole” would no longer be universal). Universalism cannot be tolerant, because tolerance would require an impossible insertion of difference into a system of homogenized sameness. Thus, the welcoming Christian invitation that anyone may join its ranks morphs into the dictum that everyone must join – the legitimacy of Christian universality requires it.

In contrast, the form of particularism most relevant to *Merchant*, which I label as “Jewish,” engenders tolerance, rather than the perhaps expected discrimination. Particularism denotes any set of doctrines, rules, principles of faith, privileges, or rights which are accorded to a limited group. To the degree that particularism excludes those who do not meet the criteria for

belonging to the group, we must concede it to be intolerant. But, as with the case of Judaism, there need be no special animus against those who do not belong to the group for the mere fact of their not belonging. In fact, one version of the Jewish covenant extends God's blessings universally. Though God previously told Abraham that "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations," he later declares that "in thy seed shall *all* the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 17:7, 22:18 emphasis added). Speaking of various nations, and without requiring an erasure of human diversity, God transmits his blessings by means of the Jews.⁴² Judaism "does not demand, or permit, the persecution of gentiles for the 'sin' of not being Jewish" (Remer 76). The religion makes space for a type of human who is not Jewish kin, but who nevertheless has a right to exist undisturbed. For example, Me'iri, in his case for tolerance of Christians, references the Talmudic example of the *ger toshav*, or resident gentile alien in a Jewish state who nevertheless follow the "seven precepts of the sons of Noah" (qtd. in Jacob Katz 121). The Noahide laws bind all human beings regardless of religion under the covenant between God and Noah. By following the Noahide laws, members of diverse religious groups can function together while also maintaining their separate identities because they share the same civic values. The *ger toshav* illustrates a tolerance that presupposes and accepts differences, as long as those differences do not threaten social order. There can be no offence to Jews in the fact of difference, since the legitimacy of Judaism, though extending its blessings universally, was never predicated on the universal applicability of its laws.

Universalism, Particularism, and Race

The Christian bible declares that God "hath made of one blood all mankind" (Acts 17:26); there can be no humans who do not share this single bloodline. In *Merchant*, Christian

⁴² The paradox of a universal blessing transmitted through a particular people greatly troubled Paul, and leads him to see faith in Christ as the resolution to this contradiction (see Boyarin).

characters conform to the single-bloodline dictum by avoiding mention of or breaking the link between reproduction and religious profession: as Antonio's quip, "The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind" suggests (1.3.174), Shylock might become kind (or humane) not because he was born so, but because he could convert, his future Christianity finally placing him within the human kind. Launcelot jokes that Jessica's only hope for salvation comes from a perverted bloodline – that her mother cuckolded Shylock – but Jessica quickly rejects this possibility, saying "I shall be saved by my husband. He hath made me a Christian" (3.5.15-16). Launcelot would not fear for Jessica's salvation if he believed that conversion alone were sufficient to eradicate her Jewishness. Hence, he comes up with the retroactively salvific hope that Jessica is a bastard, and not Shylock's daughter at all, which would damn her instead for being the product of an adulterous relationship (3.5.8-9). Launcelot raises the genetic, racial components of Jewishness which Jessica then shuts down through talking about conversion instead of heredity. Jessica denies racialized Jewishness in order to fit into a universal Christian kind that transcends race. It is not that Jessica refuses to acknowledge that Shylock is her father; instead she denies that that relationship matters. For Jessica, Christian humanity comes down to choice through conversion, and not through biological generation, even though that possibility haunts the background in Launcelot's suggestion.

The Christians in *Merchant* (counting Jessica among them for the moment) cannot reconcile their belief that sexual reproduction should only produce one kind – human, Christian kin – with the impulse to categorize Jews as fundamentally, biologically different. The tension between permanent biological inheritance and chosen belief generates skepticism about the efficacy of conversion. Christian characters obsess over the differences in kind between themselves and Jews, proposing racial divisions in order to solidify difference, and also rejecting

them as they come into conflict with the prior belief in a universal human kind. The result is that conversion appears to be a necessary, but insufficient, tool of integration. Jessica inadvertently expresses the insufficiency of conversion alone when she claims a lasting genetic connection to her father, despite their differences in character. Meaning to establish her distance from Shylock, she simultaneously announces her origins: “But though I am a daughter to his blood, / I am not to his manners” (2.3.17-18). Though Gratiano insists, with a pun on “gentile,” that Jessica is “a gentle, and no Jew” (2.6.51),⁴³ the bodily source of Jessica’s Jewishness cannot be fully eliminated or forgotten. *Merchant’s* Christians rely on the very division of humanity into proto-racial groups and kinds which Antonio reviles in the Jews and commands Shylock not to talk about in the episode of Jacob and Laban’s sheep. Even if differences in ideology and belief could be overcome, a fundamental, proto-racial difference would remain, leaving the Christians of Venice in an unsatisfactory (to them) state of compelled coexistence of heterogeneous peoples, instead of consensus within an imaginary homogeneous Christian unity.

Gender further complicates the relationship between Christian universalism, race, and conversion. Launcelot’s hope that “...your father got you not – that you are not the Jew’s daughter” (3.5.8-9) begs the question, if her mother, Leah, bore her, is Jessica not still “the Jew’s daughter?” Kaplan has traced the medieval constructions of Jewish racial identity which allows Jessica to escape hereditary associations with Shylock. The neo-Aristotelian belief that women contribute only empty matter to a child, whereas men contribute the “essence,” undoes Jessica’s connection to Jewishness through her mother, Leah (Kaplan 16). The Aristotelian model butts up against the Jewish tradition of matriarchal descent. As a conveyor of Jewishness, Leah plays an important role in Jessica’s identity, but as the contributor of raw, unformed matter, her

⁴³ Here the Norton edition reads “gentile.” I have instead quoted the Signet classic edition, which reflects the spelling printed in Q1.

motherhood hardly matters. Furthermore, a gender hierarchy which deems women subordinate and pliable makes Jessica the perfect convert: her blood, more different from Shylock's than the difference "between red wine and Rhenish" (3.1.35), is more easily assimilated into a Christian patriarchal hierarchy because she is female (Kaplan 20).⁴⁴ But despite Lancelot's comic yet pointed hope, Jessica is, in fact, Shylock's daughter (at least, the play provides no evidence to the contrary). Aristotelian medical theories finally reinforce the degree to which she is a "daughter to his blood," not exempt her from it.

Universalism and Particularism: Religion of Commerce

Economically, too, the two models of kinship and otherness – a universal Christian one and a Jewish particularist one – compete for influence in *Merchant*. Conceptually, the Venetian Christians live according to the former model, which makes a poor foundation for commerce. Bassanio's request for a loan, the action which sets in motion the entire plot, epitomizes the failure of universal kinship to facilitate business. Antonio anticipates Bassanio's request, offering his "extremest means" (1.1.138) out of "[his] love" (1.1.154) despite Bassanio's outstanding debts. Upon agreeing to provide Bassanio with another loan, he instructs him to "Go presently inquire, and so will I, / Where money is; and I no question make / To have it of my trust or for my sake" (1.1.183-185). Speaking as though money simply exists to be found instead of needing to be earned, Antonio assumes that his friends will secure the same free loan he provides to Bassanio. And yet, Antonio's words slide between a focus on friendship – "for my sake" – and a focus on the very business savvy he eschews – "my trust." Though believing that generosity

⁴⁴ Jonathan Gil Harris offers a close reading of how the wine metaphor can startlingly accomplish an effect diametrically opposed to the one Salerio intends – including Shylock among the Venetians and excluding Jessica. Red wine is Mediterranean in origin, so if Shylock's blood is like the red wine, then he is "one of us" to the Venetians, but a foreigner to the English. Conversely, the English associated white Rhenish wine with the Dutch who lived in London, making Jessica a foreigner to the Venetians, but a close associate of the English. Both characters hold insider and outsider statuses at the same time because of Salerio's comparison of their blood to types of wine (*Sick Economies* 75).

should be shown out of love, he nevertheless relies on his credit, his reputation as a reliable merchant, to secure a loan for Bassanio.⁴⁵

Antonio takes for granted that all friends will be equally generous in supplying his needs as he is theirs. *Merchant* does not allow us to see the steps that lead Antonio and Bassanio to turn to Shylock for a loan; this immediate turn to a Jewish usurer suggests that Antonio avails himself of Shylock's services because his assumption was incorrect – no one will return the favor out of pure friendship. The striking absence of other generous Christian friends from the play deviates from the source of the flesh-bond tale, *Il Pecorone*, in which no Christian friends offer Ansaldo (Antonio's counterpart) the money initially, but they "joined together to pay the money" when the Jew calls in the debt (Brown 149). Where *Il Pecorone* leaves a puzzling gap – it is not clear where the Christian merchants were when Ansaldo needed money to supply his ship in the first place, if they are in fact so willing and able to rescue him from the Jewish usurer – Shakespeare eliminates the Christian mercantile community altogether. The absence of a Christian community of merchants puts even more pressure on the universal kinship system, revealing its impracticability.

The practical limitations of Christian universalism come from the clashing requirements of commerce and kinship. The biblical prohibition against taking interest on a loan applies only to brothers. Between strangers, loans with interest may be offered and accepted.⁴⁶ The division between brothers and strangers functions with clear-cut distinctions in the Hebrew Bible, in which the Jews are brothers to one another through their common descent from Abraham, and all others are human, descended from Adam, but not kin. The play makes this distinction apparent when Shylock considers how he will collect funds for Antonio's loan. Though his business is to

⁴⁵ The source of Antonio's good credit is a curious lacuna – where does it come from? His thinly-spread ships suggest he is a risky investment.

⁴⁶ "Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usurie, but thou shalt not lend upon usurie to thy brother" (Deut. 23:20).

loan money with interest, Shylock makes up the difference between his “present store” (1.3.48) and Antonio’s request through an interest-free favor between kinsman: “Tubal, a wealthy Hebrew of my tribe, / Will furnish me.” (1.3.52-53). The importance of knowing who belongs to a kinship group and who does not for the purpose of offering permissible usury explains both why, in negotiating the bond, Shylock begins to recite Jacob’s lineage and why Antonio interrupts him.⁴⁷ Shell states, “By speaking of the generation of Jews, Shylock is distinguishing precisely between others and brothers” (*Money, Language, and Thought* 52). And, by pairing Jacob’s lineage with the story of his clever breeding of Laban’s sheep, Shylock connects the generation of Jews to the generative properties of capital which, when carefully cultivated and mediated according to the boundaries of kinship, support the continued generation and livelihoods of people both within the kinship group and without. Economic profit and reproduction, ostensibly two distinct kinds of things, are in fact interconnected. Antonio misses the point when he declares Shylock’s tale of Jacob’s ancestry and his clever breeding of sheep inapplicable to the current context of his need to procure a loan. He asks Shylock, “...is your gold and silver ewes and rams?” (1.3.91). He refuses to acknowledge the connection Shylock draws between the sexual generation of the Jews and the economic prosperity that comes from financial “generation” because to do so would be to admit both to the benefits of loaning money at interest and to the productivity of cultural, racial, and religious heterogeneity which it is his impulse to decry and then either to assimilate or erase.

The injunction against usury among brothers arrests virtually all profitable transactions in a Venice filled with Christian kin (Antonio lends money gratis, then loses the ships he depends

⁴⁷ “And what of him? Did he take interest?” (1.3.71). Shell argues that Antonio’s espoused beliefs and practice do not cohere – “generation should be irrelevant” to him as a Christian universalist, and yet he cares greatly to maintain the distinction between himself and Shylock, insisting that he “lend it rather to thine enemy” (1.3.130). (*Money, Language, and Thought* 52).

on to pay back Shylock). The all-encompassing application of the Deuteronomic law eliminates valuable degrees of nuance in financial interactions: all kin deserve unstinting generosity.

Because all relationships in Shakespeare's Venice have financial transactions at their roots, the kinship system, with its demand for unqualified generosity, disables the ability to be financially judicious. Gratiano's request to travel to Belmont with Bassanio illustrates the resulting damage. He tells Bassanio, "I have suit to you," and before he can state his request, Bassanio declares, "You have obtained it." (2.2.159). Gratiano's reply, "You must not deny me" (2.2.160), sounds odd given that Bassanio has just approved his request without hesitation. But his instinctual belief that he could be denied, or at least his habitual exclamation against the possibility, is indicative of the meaning lost when generosity is not contingent on deserts. In a sense, Bassanio absolutely should deny Gratiano for all the reasons he subsequently lists – he is offensive and uncouth. Operating under the expectation of immediate and unquestioning generosity between friends, Christian friends who are really kin, Bassanio has no choice but to risk with Gratiano's wild behavior what is in fact if not in appearance a business venture – his courtship of Portia.⁴⁸ Reducing all distinctions to the most basic ones of kin and non-human makes it impossible to assign relative values to relationships. The differences, under the Christian repurposing of Deuteronomy, are meaningless. Just as Antonio assumes that his nameless, unseen fellow merchants will be by default as generous to him as he is to them, so too does the occasion of Gratiano's suit to Bassanio reveal a practice of sameness that does not cohere with a reality of diversity and particularity.

Taken to an extreme extent, the concept of Christian universalism permits only two economic models: complete generosity based on the faith and trust of kinship, or slavery, the treatment of humans as property because the kinship system cannot recognize their humanity.

⁴⁸ Bassanio's first praise of Portia is that she is "a lady richly left" (1.1.161).

Antonio criticizes Shylock's comparison of ewes and rams to money because it equates life with soulless capital, but Antonio is guilty of the same equivalence to a greater degree. He offers to Bassanio "my purse, my person" (1.1.138), the alliteration linking the two items just as their equivalence in Antonio's mind does. This equivalence is realized literally in the trial. Antonio's person stands in for his purse when the bond becomes forfeit. His flesh will substitute physically for the missing money. The Christian bible replaces exact retaliation with sympathetic and reciprocal understanding;⁴⁹ a life cannot therefore be exchanged for a life, but a life could feasibly be bought or sold for money. Shylock uses the Christian law permitting exchanges of purses for persons to defend the legality of the flesh bond. Just as the Venetians treat their slaves "in abject and slavish parts, / Because [they] bought them" (4.1.91-92), so too can Shylock take a pound of Antonio's flesh because he purchased it with the loan that has not been repaid.

Shell believes the exchange between people and money is not accidental, but characteristic of Christianity: "The apparent commensurability between persons and purses that this enactment [i.e. Shylock calling in the flesh bond] reveals turns out to be more typical of Christian law, which allows human beings to be purchased for money, than Jewish 'iustice' and practice, which disallows it" (*Money, Language, and Thought* 55). The very possibility of Christian salvation rests on the foundations of an exchange of flesh for money in Judas' betrayal of Christ for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15). But interestingly, the logic of the incarnation, the originating act of Christianity, returns to what Shell would consider the more "Jewish" practice of exact retaliation. God became human, and sacrificed his human son, Jesus Christ, in order to rescue all other humans, a case of trading like for like. Shylock and Antonio's flesh bond, which both the play's Christian characters and Shakespeare's sources blame on Jewish perfidy and vengefulness, instead resembles the specifically Christian tradition of

⁴⁹ "Therefore whatsoever ye woulde that men should doe to you, euen so doe ye to them" (Matthew 7:12).

inventing an abstract equivalence between the two unlike substances of money and flesh. The flesh bond grossly parodies Judas' betrayal and Christ's redemption of humanity,⁵⁰ but the suggestion remains that the flaw which renders the bond so perverse comes from a Christian mode of justice, and not a Jewish one.

The Christian equivalence of purse and person which Antonio uses to bind himself to Shylock in debt and to bind Bassanio to him in love indicates the version of tolerance a Christian system of universal kinship is prepared to allow. Tolerance, in *The Merchant of Venice*, functions, at least for the Christian characters, as one temporary step on the way to concordance, a policy which seeks agreement among divergent parties, rather than allowing coexistence with dissent (Nederman 6). The prevalence of concordance in *Merchant* can be seen in the Christians' selective application of the purse/person equivalence, and of course, in Shylock's forced conversion. Accepting that Antonio's unrepaid loan is essentially the same thing as the loss of his life, the Venetian Christians understand the fundamental connection between life and livelihood – that the one cannot exist without the other. However, they recognize this truth only in Antonio's case. As Shylock's position in the trial shifts from plaintiff to defendant, the Duke deems it merciful that Shylock live, though his wealth is confiscated. Shylock rejects the interpretation that the Duke's decree is merciful:

Nay, take my life and all! Pardon not that!

You take my house, when you do take the prop

That doth sustain my house. You take my life

When you do take the means whereby I live. (4.1.369-372)

⁵⁰ "Redeem" means "to buy back." "redeem, v." OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 5 September 2013

The Christians' seeming hypocrisy in ignoring the purse/person equivalence in Shylock's case stays perfectly consistent with their beliefs about who belongs in the category of human kind. Shylock's life and livelihood are unimportant, unless he join the ranks of universal Christian kin to become a human. The practice of concordance – reaching for agreement or homogeneity, even if enforced, is the closest mode to tolerance that Christianity can allow, since the definition of who counts as human, and who is thus worthy of acceptance, is limited by shared belief.

The end of the trial cultivates a forced concordance which leaves troublesome questions unanswered. Chief among them is whether the Christians are concerned that divergent groups reach true consensus or that the Venetian state merely control the appearance of agreement. The Duke elicits Shylock's consent to the terms of conversion and loss of property by leaving him no option but to say "I am content" (4.1.389); he will be executed unless he agrees to the terms of Antonio's "mercy." The logic of the trial may force Shylock to a verbal acceptance, but the logic of the theater, in which each performance is a single instantiation, but no one performance epitomizes the "ur-*Merchant*," leaves the nature of his compelled assent interpretively undefined. Michael Radford's 2004 film adaptation starring Al Pacino as Shylock employs the lines to highlight the indignities of the trial scene. Pacino's Shylock crumbles under this final instance of state-sponsored discrimination. The hollowness of his constrained contentment is echoed in the final scenes of the film, added on to direct the focus away from the comedic Belmont ending of the play, and back to the travesties of anti-Semitism. The wordless scenes show the miserable Shylock shut out of both Jewish and Christian communities, looking on longingly from a distance at his former congregation, reduced to a specter that belongs nowhere in Venice. It is easy to assume that early modern audiences would have appreciated Shylock's expression of contentment as the triumph of Christians over the polluting Jew in their midst, or thought of it as

the sort of thing a vengeful, but ultimately defeated Jew would say. And yet, it is not, to my mind, unlikely that an Elizabethan audience would have appreciated the Orwellian doublespeak of the word “content” uttered under such duress; the line “I am content” would resonate troublingly with an audience that had been forced to comply with multiple official changes in religion in less than a century.

Post-trial, Jews haunt this putatively purely Christian Venice, leaving remnants of their Jewishness in the undefined and unexamined feeling that while Jewish belief can be removed with conversion, Jewish bodies still remain. Against the yearning for a total Christian universalism, Jewish characters are not definitively eliminated through death or expulsion. Adelman argues that the play grapples with Christianity’s origins in Judaism; the dream of a Christianity purified of Jewishness cannot be accomplished without destroying Christianity itself (4). In recognition of the two religions’ mutual entanglement, the play ends with Jessica, of Jewish blood but not manners, in Belmont, and Shylock, a circumcised Jewish “dog,” forced into a Christian congregation. Both figures reinforce the sense that Jewishness is a racial quality which exists in the body (despite Jessica’s protestations), a sense that is confirmed every time any character compares Jews to Gentiles instead of to Christians; both provide an unpalatable answer to the question, “what if the Jew was there, in the Christian, not through some inadmissible excess or residue but constitutively, at the heart of his Christianity?” (Adelman 12). That Shakespeare could have rid his Venice of Jews entirely but does not speak both to the recognition of Judaism as Christianity’s past, and to the primacy of commerce, which depends for its success upon the interactions of diverse peoples. Even when visually erased, Jews maintain their centrality in *Merchant* because both Christianity’s origins and Venetian economics necessitate plurality.

Me'iri-an Tolerance in Merchant

To the extent that *The Merchant of Venice* is interested in inter-religious conversation, and ultimately refuses to completely eliminate Jews for reasons of economic prosperity, the play can be read as tending toward a philosophy of tolerance derived from Jewish particularism. I define such tolerance as the recognition of multiple religious kinds without the desire to homogenize them. In placing Jews and Christians as non-negotiable pieces at the center of Venice's commercial circumstances, *The Merchant of Venice* obliquely points to the desire and need for a form of pragmatic yet ethical tolerance much like the one the Me'iri advances.

Antonio articulates the commercial utility of tolerance through his knowledge of Venetian law, and his circumvention of it. In prison, Antonio explains why the Duke cannot nullify the flesh bond:

For the commodity that strangers have
 With us in Venice, if it be denied,
 Will much impeach the justice of the state,
 Since that the trade and profit of the city
 Consisteth of all nations. (3.3.27-31)

Tolerance matters greatly because Venetian society depends upon the continual circulation of different groups of people through the city for the purpose of business. Denying these "strangers" equal commercial rights would drive away the investors and merchants which make Venice prosper.⁵¹ Antonio is, in a sense, guilty of disabling commercial equality: he "oft

⁵¹ The contrast between actual Venetian law and Shakespeare's representation of it emphasizes the play's status as an imaginative experiment on the results of treating different groups of people identically from an economic and legal standpoint. Though it is unclear how much Shakespeare actually knew about Venetian law, it is interesting that Venice's trade laws were nothing like the situation of equality among strangers that Antonio describes. External trade in Venice was limited to two segments of the upper classes: the nobles, and the *cittadini originarii*, along with certain naturalized citizens, the *cittadini de intus et de extra*, who in total constituted only about ten percent of the Venetian population. The first Jewish charter of 1589 was exceptional in that it granted trading rights to those who

delivered from [Shylock's] forfeitures / Many that have at times made moan to me" (3.3.22-23), essentially disrupting the "commodity" that Shylock, a "stranger," has to conduct his business in Venice. Through his intolerance of business practices unlike his own, Antonio "impeaches the justice of the state." While pragmatism may not be identical to principled tolerance, for Me'iri the two are inseparable, the former paving the way for the latter. A pragmatic philosophy of tolerance prevents threats to Venetian justice, and ensures a commerce contingent upon productive interactions between Jews and Christians that benefits both the Venetian state and individual residents.

The play also makes the case for the ethical side of tolerance by lingering uncomfortably on its absence. Solanio and Salerio, very noticeably, say absolutely nothing about Shylock's failed plea for tolerance, despite being his only on-stage audience. Salerio responds only to the messenger who calls from Antonio. It is as if Shylock's impassioned oratory went completely unheard and undigested: Solanio follows it up with a stock equation of Jews with the devil, "Here comes another of the tribe. A third cannot be matched, unless the devil himself turn Jew" (3.1.65-66). The empty devolution to stereotypes following Shylock's speech underscores the ethical, moral case for tolerance; as his agony over Jessica's theft of Leah's stolen ring demonstrates (3.1.100-102), Shylock is not only angry and vengeful (though he certainly is that), he is also hurt and abandoned. The relative insignificance of Salerio and Solanio among the play's characters adds even more emotional pain and moral vacuity: the very fact that it is only the two nearly interchangeable drinking buddies of Bassanio and Antonio who hear Shylock's plea undermines its impact, and signals the failure of and need for an ethically motivated tolerance.

were neither Venetian citizens nor Ottoman subjects who already had license to trade with Venice (Ravid :Introduction to Charters" 204, 210).

Shylock voices the play's most coherent expression of Me'iri's sense of tolerance as a shared social contract that nevertheless permits the co-existence of dissimilar religious beliefs. The gesture returns us to Shylock's refusal of Bassanio's dinner invitation, "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). In his allowances and limitations on Jewish-Christian interaction, Shylock reflects Me'iri's position that the division of religious kinds be maintained even as those kinds mingle and connect in business and in public social settings. Shylock divides certain communal activities from others – those that are oriented toward a commerce-based community can be shared by anyone, but those that form the basis of cultural and religious traditions cannot. Even so, his division of shared and exclusive interactions is not entirely rigid – Shylock does leave room to walk and talk with others, acts that allow for a degree of camaraderie and even friendship which a strictly business-like relationship does not require.⁵² Shylock's limited friendship ends where domestic matters begin. The similarities between Shylock's and Me'iri's practices consist primarily of this careful separation. Shylock fears intensely the incursion of Christian revelers and "shallow fopp'ry" into his "sober house" (2.5.34,35). The play offers little information about Shylock's house, but in its one instance as a setting it is a deeply private place notable primarily for containing and evoking the person and thing to which

⁵² In *Shylock*, Shakespeare envisioned a character who displays more willingness to mix Jewish and Christian kinds than was historically typical. Generally, both religions saw proximity as a threat. The Italian-Jewish banker, Yehiel Nissim Da Pisa, took a stance against loaning money to non-Jews at interest, in accordance with the Talmud but against biblical allowances, because he feared that practicing usury might lead to a blurring of distinctions between business dealings with Jews and non-Jews: "They [Jewish bankers who lend to Christians] can no longer distinguish between truth and falsehood or between the permitted and prohibited practices" (qtd. in *Merchant of Venice*, Kaplan, 217). On the Christian side, Solomon Grayzel details many policies that the Church put in place in order to separate Christians from Jews and so prevent Jewish proselytizing. Jews were restricted from employing Christian servants, holding public offices, and engaging in public or private religious debate with Christians (25-42). While both Da Pisa and Grayzel present evidence for individual desires and policies that restrict Jewish-Christian proximity, I read this evidence as indicators that such proximity must have existed (or else whence the fear of contamination, and the strenuous efforts to prevent it?). Shylock is unique not in experiencing the reality of interreligious interaction, but in codifying a means for such interaction to occur productively.

Shylock feels most connected emotionally – his daughter, Jessica, and his turquoise ring, the only remaining artifact of his wife, Leah. Standing in for his family, his co-religionists, and, crucially, for the women who pass on Jewishness to their offspring, Shylock's house puts meaningful limits on the types of contact that may occur between kinds. As Me'iri's legal treatise suggests, diverse groups can connect to mutual benefit, and yet not invalidate the desire to keep one's most cherished markers of difference separate and private.

A similar perspective on the nature of religious affiliation underlies Shylock's actions and Me'iri's legal principles, despite their complete separation in space and time. Both Shakespeare's character and the medieval rabbi view religious affiliation primarily as a set of actions and traditions, instead of as a set of non-negotiable beliefs that correlate with inherent and unchangeable qualities such as race or ethnicity (an admittedly surprising shift of emphasis for a religion that defines its members ethnically and genealogically as a group of descendants from one man). Me'iri's revision of Jewish prohibitions on interactions with non-Jews recognizes the reality that Jews and Christians live in non-homogenous environments. Me'iri favors the mode of identifying religion as a set of practices for the purposes of maintaining cultural cohesion within groups as well as positive interactions across groups. His legal analyses speak of “nations possessed of law and lawless nations, i.e. between barbarism and civilization” – behavioral distinctions instead of racial ones (qtd. in Halbertal 7). Although in many instances Shylock expresses his religion in biological terms, such as when he traces Jewish genealogy through Jacob and “Abram” (1.3.68), in others he articulates it more as a matter of practice than of bodily difference. For example, Shylock also wears a “Jewish gaberdine,” (1.3.108) on which Antonio spits. The cloak stands as a reminder of religious difference that is external, rather than

biologically internalized. As an article one puts on and takes off, the gabardine also functions as a symbol of the selected, chosen, or imposed nature of difference.

This nascent philosophy of maintaining tolerance in public matters while keeping religious belief and affiliations safe in the private sphere is one which not only Shylock tests out, but also, surprisingly, Portia. In Portia's father's casket test, the troubling potential for exotic strangers to be assimilated into the all-Christian Belmont arises. Notably, however, the casket test collapses the public and private realms into a financially-motivated competition for Portia's hand in marriage, a collapse which, in the Me'iri-an model, undoes the functionality of tolerance. Portia's suitors come to Belmont to conduct a form of business – her fortune draws them at least as much as, if not more than, her beauty. Under such conditions, the presence of racial and religious others is permitted, as this interaction between Venetians and strangers can be considered a commercial one. But Portia eventually disqualifies her suitors on the basis of their religious and racial difference, and the casket test happens to align with her wishes. She says of Morocco, “If he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me” (1.2.109-110). Because Portia's marriage is both a private and public transaction, it strives to preserve private religious differences instead of working to establish a common set of socially functional behaviors between members of different kinds. The experiment of tolerance fails for Portia's casket test because she emphasizes the racial characteristics which divide her from Morocco – “Let all of his complexion choose me so” (2.7.79) – and excludes him on that basis.

Neither Me'iri's *Beth Ha Behirah* nor *The Merchant of Venice* contemplates a form of marriage which unites divergent faiths without assimilating one into the other. Jessica's and Lorenzo's marriage, the play's only example of an interfaith union, equates marriage with

conversion and with the complete erasure of Shylock's genetic line. Such a stark division between inclusion and exclusion in public and private matters constitutes an intolerant and discriminatory mode of thinking and behaving in our contemporary context, and (I believe) is to be condemned. But Me'iri's commentary and Shakespeare's play exist in historical contexts that leave no room to imagine an interfaith marriage – the performance of such a ceremony would be rendered impossible by the restrictions of religious specificity and lack of a civic, religiously neutral form of marriage. Hence, while disavowing the ethical implications of the resistance to intermarriage in a modern context, the act of marriage functions as a test case to reveal the powers and limitations of a burgeoning form of tolerance founded in religious particularity.

Seen in the light of a particular philosophy of tolerance, then, Shylock's limitations come to seem freeing rather than restrictive, because they form a position of moderation between Portia's racism, Antonio's commercial discrimination, and Shylock's own intolerant tendency to lock up his house against revelry. What *The Merchant of Venice* poses as an intransigent epistemological and economic crisis – how should these stage Venetians distinguish between Christians and Jews, and how should they then treat different kinds? – corrects itself when addressed in conjunction with the writings of Me'iri. Jewishness, in terms of privileging conformity of practice over conformity of doctrine, undergoes a transformation into a potentially desirable quality, rather than a catch-all term for the spiritually reprobate and racially other. For *The Merchant of Venice*'s Christian characters and its English audience, Jews model a method of addressing the diversity of a society fueled by international commerce that looks increasingly useful and necessary (even if unwanted and resisted). For us, understanding *The Merchant of Venice* as a thought experiment on the conceptual and practical management of different kinds only becomes possible when viewed through the lens of medieval Jewish theories of tolerance.

Chapter Three: Jewish Renegades and Renegade Jews in *A Christian Turned Turk*

Often dismissed for its chaotic plotting and its at times stilted, at times overwrought language, Robert Daborne's 1612 play, *A Christian Turned Turk*, has recently attracted the attention of scholars interested in English attitudes toward Islam, England's tense diplomatic and commercial relations with the Ottoman Empire, the economic and cultural allure of piracy, and the religious, national, and political stakes of conversion.¹ Critics have drawn on the historical and archival studies of English-Ottoman relations and conversion practices in order to support a range of literary arguments.² For instance, Daniel Vitkus argues that Daborne's play "[sets] up a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate maritime aggression, only to collapse or destabilize that distinction" (143), whereas Gerald MacLean believes the play takes a consistent moral stand against the titular pirate, Ward, whose story ends in tragedy because he struggles to shed his identity even though "an Englishman cannot *not* be English" ("On Turning Turk" 226). Others have approached the play with an eye toward religious conversion and its role in the burgeoning international economy. Jane Degenhardt asserts that Ward's story is a conversion narrative told through the lens of sexual temptation,³ while Claire Jowitt claims that Ward's sexualized conversion bolsters a gendered critique of Elizabethan and Jacobean strategies for managing unruly citizens (7-11, 169). This admittedly brief summary of past scholarly approaches demonstrates *A Christian Turned Turk*'s well-deserved place in conversations about theatrical representations of Ottoman/English and Muslim/Christian interactions, despite its formal and stylistic weaknesses.

¹ *A Christian Turned Turk*'s bad reputation seems destined to endure. It was recently performed at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in London, as part of the Globe's "Read Not Dead" series. Audiences voted on one of four rarely performed early modern plays, as pitched by teams of scholars, and *A Christian Turned Turk* won. A recent review says that the scholarly team supporting *A Christian Turned Turk* "won, somehow, by pitching the worst play they possibly could..." (Peter Kirwan, *The Bardathon*).

² Including, but not limited to Chew, MacLean and Matar, and Matar,

³ This claim supports Degenhardt's larger argument that the collective threats of the Ottoman Empire to the English were condensed and focused onto the individual English person's body and soul (15).

In the main, these conversations focus on the play's tense pairing of English Christianity and Ottoman Islam. But the play also contains two Jewish characters, Benwash and his servant Ruben Rabshake (the former of which has converted to Islam). The dyad of English/Turkish competition is really a triad, and as such becomes that much more dynamic and unstable. Jonathan Burton does turn explicit attention toward the Jewish element of Daborne's play, arguing that the three categories "triangulate" with one another, so that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam shape the representations of the other categories with which they intersect. But in Burton's formulation, Jewishness is completely static, perpetually the target of Christian animosity so that Christians can assuage their anxiety about interacting with Muslims.⁴ Yet, as a convert to Islam, the Jewish Benwash is also a "renegado" who changes functions and status many times over the course of the play, moving from an instrumental supporter of pirate and Turkish economies, to a ridiculous old cuckold, to a dispenser of religious and sexual vengeance. Far from relegating the Jew to a static position as node around which Muslim/Christian interactions swirl, these changes indicate that Jewishness requires more parsing in *A Christian Turned Turk*, especially in its relationship to the figure of the "renegado."

The play often has trouble elucidating the differences between renegades and Jews, and then consistently adhering to the distinctions it develops. Nothing illuminates this problem quite like the pirate Dansiker's description of the merchant Benwash as the "renegado Jew," an epithet that indicates connections or categorical overlap between the states of being a renegade and being a Jew (5.37).⁵ A "renegado Jew" could mean either an individual who renounces his religion to become a Jew, or a Jew who renounces Judaism to convert to another religion. A convert to

⁴ Burton says that "the Jew is at his most static because he is essential to the moving target of Christian-Muslim relations...abusing the Jew is an essential part of displaying proper Christian opposition to the Muslims and renegades of Tunis" (*Traffic and Turning* 199).

⁵ I cite Vitkus' edition of "A Christian Turned Turk," in *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England*.

Islam, Benwash fits into the latter category, but focusing too much on how Benwash earns the term displaces attention from its strangeness. For one, Dansiker's designation runs contrary to the play's general tendency in all other cases to call Benwash a Jew only, and refuse him the title of renegade. But even more oddly, "renegado Jew" points to a need to maintain differences between Jews and renegades, over and against the hybridity that the term invites. In other words, "renegado Jew" ought in Benwash's case to be an oxymoron, because in becoming a renegade and converting, he no longer adheres to his previous religious affiliation. The term would make more sense if applied to someone who converted *to* Judaism – that person would have become a renegade *as well as* a Jew, instead of becoming a renegade who sheds his affiliation with Judaism. A similarly hybrid terminology occurs in no other case of renegadism – Ward is never called a "renegade Christian," for example – so its motivation seems derived especially from the case of the converted Jew. Dansiker's moniker for Benwash signals not only that a Jew could become a renegade, but also that he must, to some degree, according to the play, remain a Jew. "Renegado Jew" requires us to wonder if Jews, already members of a reprobate religion and unaffiliated with a particular national identity, can ever become renegades, or if Jews, for the very same reasons, are always and already renegades?

This problem of definitional inconsistency is entirely of *A Christian Turned Turk's* own making. Had Daborne wished to avoid the implication that Jews and renegades share identifying features, he could have done so; neither of his source materials (two news pamphlets published in 1609) grapples with the startling conjunctions between renegades and Jews. Anthony Nixon's, "News from Sea..." does not so much as contain the word, "Jew," and Andrew Barker's, "A true and certaine report...of Captaine Ward and Danseker," includes no named Jewish characters. The question, then, is not only why Daborne includes a Jewish character at all, but why he includes a

Jew who is also a renegade, and whose status as a Jew-renegade is central to the advancement of the plot. Barker's text provides an instructive counterpoint to Daborne's development of Benwash, the "renegado Jew," who embodies the complex intersection of renegade and Jewish identities. By briefly looking at Barker's Jews, we can better understand the purposes of Daborne's.

For Barker, Jews help to furnish evidence of Ward's ever-increasing badness. The collective and anonymous Jews are reprobate sinners recognized by the usual characteristics of greed and predation, even to the extreme extent of prostituting their own children. Describing the crew's actions upon landing in Tunis, Barker inveighs,

Unlawfully are their goods got, and more ungodly are they consumed, in that they mix themselves like brute beasts with the enemies of their Saviour: so that he that was a Christian in the morning, is bedfellow to a Jew at night...the Jewes hire out their off-spring to them as we doe horses...asking, Who gives above a Sultane shall have this...I will leave their Sodomie, and the rest of their crying sinnes (which I feare their Atheisme hath led them into) to the Judgement of the Just Revenger... (C2)

Ward's "ungodly" forms of "consumption" in Tunis – committing interreligious sodomy and pederasty – add to the moral waywardness his thefts at sea had already established. But as hateful as Ward may be, the Jews are beyond the pale. They embody a contaminating temptation to sexual sin for Christians, and they conflate human life and chattel property in the sale of their own offspring. Yet the Jews (or at least, the Jewish children) are also victims, proximally of their parents' business, but fundamentally of Ward's and his crew's demand, complicating the hierarchy of evil which designates Ward as bad, but not as bad as the Jews. Regardless of these

complications, Barker does not use this story to illustrate similarities between Ward and the Jews. Jews facilitate Ward's dissolution and help readers to understand its magnitude, but he is not one of them. What is scary is not that Ward identifies with Jewishness, but that he associates with Jews with impunity.

Daborne's theatrical account of Ward's exploits diverges from Barker's lack of interest in Jews for the sake of their Jewishness. In *A Christian Turned Turk*, the Jew Benwash functions as much more than incidental evidence of Ward's corruption. His Jewish-renegade hybridity positions him as a foil to Ward, the prototypical stage renegade who rejects his native religion and country for individual self-promotion. Benwash's character shifts between reducing and exacerbating the anxiety that renegades are attractive to English theater audiences, and may inspire imitation. Whereas Ward converts to fulfill his sexual desire for Voadra, a tempting Turkish seductress, Benwash instead converts because he fears the sexual shame of cuckolding by his Turkish wife, Agar. In that way, Benwash makes renegades look ridiculous and laughable, always operating in self-interest, but ultimately enslaved to unfulfillable desires. But, on the other hand, to avoid being cuckolded, Benwash kills Agar, Agar's lover Gallop, and his own servant Ruben Rabshake, and in the process underscores the play's unequivocal moral warning that to be a renegade is to reach "the heart itself of villainy" (Prologue 14). Benwash's compound renegade-Jew status suggests first, that a tension exists between the desire to condemn and celebrate renegades and second, that the English conceptual framework for understanding renegades was based on English notions of Jewish perfidy and untrustworthiness.

In *A Christian Turned Turk*, Jewish characters behave in dynamic ways that scholarship on Mediterranean commerce and travel plays has yet to recognize. Jewishness becomes dynamic when it encompasses that other English bogeyman of international commerce, the renegade.

Through the pirate, Dansiker's, hybrid epithet for Benwash, the "renegado Jew," Daborne's play lays bare the complex web of associations that link Jewishness to renegadism and to piracy. Borrowing heavily from a long-standing, domestic vocabulary of opprobrium directed at usurers, unscrupulous merchants, and vagabonds, *A Christian Turned Turk* applies these terms to Ward's, Dansiker's, and Benwash's shady business dealings and unstable personal allegiances. These behaviors are fostered by an environment that privileges interreligious, and intercultural mixing, and that offers conveniently to ignore difference and to absorb those who try to retain distinct identities. The commercial and tropological connections between Jews and renegades enabled by this vocabulary push against the play's competing desires to maintain strict boundaries around nationally and religiously defined identities, and to condemn renegades unequivocally for their disloyalty and untrustworthiness. Benwash, the converted Jew, Ward, the renegade English pirate, and even Dansiker, the supposedly reformed pirate, are all destructive characters – destructive both to others and to themselves. Jewish/renegade destructiveness manifests primarily through policing sex: Daborne has Benwash control the renegade threat of which he is a part by eliminating adulterous, interracial, and interreligious reproduction. The play vacillates between framing self-destructiveness as a palliative for or an exacerbation of anxieties that Jews and renegades alike are successful, adaptable, and attractive. Jewish and renegade destructiveness forms the foundation of a shared identity, an intersectional space which both Jews and non-Jews can occupy. Through Ward's, Dansiker's and Benwash's destructiveness, *A Christian Turned Turk* suggests that, transitively, to be a renegade is also to some degree, and by association, to be Jewish. Furthermore, by framing Jewishness as a principle of extreme self-interest and untrustworthiness which must either be undermined through mockery or eradicated, the play also

suggests that Jewishness is the proper lens through which to understand the allures and dangers of renegadism.

What is a renegade? And how are renegades like Jews?

On the surface, the categorical intersection of Jews and renegades is not an obvious one. For the English, Jews are the immovable adherents of a reprobate religion, stalwart in their conviction in spite of their error, whereas renegades are religious converts (on stage, most frequently from Christianity to Islam), defined by their inconstancy to their native religion. It is admittedly incongruous to align a group known for their obstinate constancy with one defined by mutability. But, in order to understand how Jewish and renegade identities intersect, it is necessary to distinguish the narrower definition of “renegade” from the broader one. Narrowly construed, a renegade is an apostate, generally a Christian who converts to Islam. But the meaning of renegade ought not to be limited to acts of religious conversion. The word’s origins from the Latin *renegare*, to deny or reject, indicate that the broader meanings of abandoning commitments and being untrustworthy are also always in play, and remain so in our modern English verb, “renege.”⁶ As Gerald MacLean has explained, “renegade” encompasses all those who “assert a dangerous degree of individual agency in defiance of one’s native country, family, and religion” (“On Turning Turk” 228). Renegades reject social responsibility, and value the interests of the individual above those of the group.

Conversion is but one form of renegadism, though its primacy in the English imagination renders the two terms nearly equivalent. Conversion has the particularly important function within drama that concerns itself with the swirling, chaotic mixture of Mediterranean travel and commerce of exposing the allegiance to religion (and frequently, to country) as pragmatically

⁶ Cf. OED “Renegade, n. and adj.” as a variant spelling of renegade, and “Renege, v.” to renounce, abandon, or deny, go back on a promise or break a contract.

motivated and changeable instead of bound by sincere and lasting conviction. The origins of “renegade,” coupled with its broad sense of inconstancy indicate that the term is much more widely-applicable than Daborne’s play’s title suggests. To “Turn Turk” is an accusation of duplicitous behavior that is used synonymously with “to become a renegade,” but even in a play whose very title seems to be most concerned with the apostasy of an English Christian, turning Turk actually has “a great deal more to do with *turning* than with either Islam or Turks” (MacLean, “On Turning Turk” 228). The allure of Islam for English travelers is absolutely at issue: the emphasis on turning is not to suggest that religion is unimportant to Daborne. However, it is completely unheard of for early modern English plays to conceive of a sincere conversion to Islam.⁷ For that reason, it is valuable to view conversion within the more general and pervasive context of concern directed at the promotion of individual desire, unrestricted by group loyalty.

Taking the broad view of renegades as deceitful and untrustworthy even when not literal apostates accounts for a genealogy of the renegade concept that originates with domestically-directed anxieties about vagabonds, outlaws, and unscrupulous merchants. These earlier domestic analogues reinforce the sense that “turning,” or changeability and instability of identity, was the quintessential problem with renegades just as much if not more than religion. After all, geographical provenance and land ownership are the two main modes of legally and socially defining identity, and vagabonds disrupt the intelligibility such grounded identities produce. The wandering of vagabonds fosters a looseness and flexibility of identity that connections to land prevent. Elizabethan and Jacobean poor and vagrant legislation recognized precisely that

⁷ “...whereas ...Muslims...may be brought to Christianity in sincere acts of conversion, no representation of a Christian man’s or woman’s whole-hearted conversion to Islam exists in the early modern canon” (46-47). Burton argues that plays represent Christian conversion to Islam as either feigned (Mercadorus in Robert Wilson’s *The Three Ladies of London* (1584), Paulina in Massinger’s *The Renegado* (1630)), or as comic relief (Clem in Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West* (1631)) (“English Anxiety” 35-67).

unmoored individualism and social and geographic mobility made behavior more difficult to police and opened up the ability for vagabonds, or “rogues” (and renegades after them) to work outside of and even take advantage of established social structures, benefitting from them without contributing.⁸ A 1598 statute calls for any “Rogues, Vagabonds, and sturdy beggers” to be publicly whipped, then,

forthwith sent from Parish to Parish, by the Officers of every the same, the next straight way to the Parish where hee was borne, if the same may be knowne by the parties confession or otherwise. And if the same be not knowne, then to the Parish where he or she last dwelt before the same punishment by the space of one whole yere, there to put him, or her selfe to labour as a true Subject ought to doe...⁹

Individuals who move freely, especially those who do not engage in productive work “as a true Subject ought to do,” displace the cost of their maintenance unfairly onto communities to which they do not belong and do not help to sustain. Worse, without communal attachments, vagabonds can easily deceive, because it is difficult or impossible to know who they really are. The statute defines “rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars” with a litany of examples that stress how deceptive such unmoored individuals can be in pursuit of selfish gain: “Seafaring men pretending losses of their ships or goods... All idle persons...using any subtile craft, or unlawfull game...All such persons...wandering in the habite, forme, or attire of counterfeite Egyptians.” The language of the statute unrealistically implies that all such poor and displaced persons are natural

⁸ In *Masterless Men*, A. L. Beier outlines the five main characteristics of vagrancy, one of which is that they are “able-bodied – ‘sturdy,’ ‘valiant,’ and fit to work” (4). The charge against vagrants was not solely about poverty, but about the perceived exploitation of social support systems by those who could work but choose not to (9).

⁹ “An acte for punishment of rogues, vagabonds and sturdie beggers” (1598)

counterfeiters, revealing an unfounded fear that the lack of ties promotes deceit.¹⁰ In many ways, vagabonds and rogues have much in common with the figure of the self-fashioning gentleman that has become a commonplace of Greenblattian historicist scholarship of the early modern period; both constitute "...a cultural trope for mobility, change, and social adaptation" (Dionne and Mentz 1). The main difference is that the former also provoke more fear for being poorer and more difficult to keep track of.

Uncertainty, instability, and unknowability were not at issue only in cases of the fraudulent, predatory business schemes of vagabonds and rogues; the development in the mid-sixteenth century of what Douglas Bruster has called "institutionalized capitalism" also offered a multiplicity of venues for self-enrichment and fulfillment of individual desires at the expense of the group (4). Though the expanding markets of chattel goods and stocks do not directly overlap with the problems of vagabonds, rogues, or renegades, they do shed light on how the renegade's existence, both as an actual category of person, and as a troubling concept in the social collective conscience, is really attributable in the first place to economic conditions before it is to religious profession. Critics and historians have described a market that, as participation in it expanded and the range of goods and their origins grew increasingly diverse, inculcated in its participants a sense of alienation and distance from others. Particularly with the advent of wholly abstract commodities such as shares in joint-stock companies, and with the reality of dealing with strangers scattered across great distances, Appleby has argued that, "...the economy became generally incomprehensible" – a perfect breeding ground for the untrustworthy and changeable

¹⁰ Beier argues that although poverty and vagrancy increased rapidly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, reports of the criminality of vagrants were greatly exaggerated because they were based primarily on popular rogue literature. Beier instead uses civic and legal records counting recidivists and examination by judges to assert that the criminal activity of vagabonds, though slightly higher than that of stationary people, was still quite low – "[comprising] at most a third of vagrants" (124).

renegade (25-26).¹¹ More recently, Ceri Sullivan has contested the wholly alienating representation of early modern commerce by thoroughly documenting ways in which merchant handbooks, account books, and sermons, among many other texts, emphasize the importance of ethical business practices, and represented the merchant as a moral, Christian paragon of honesty.¹² For Sullivan, the market creates social bonds, not alienation, but Sullivan can be correct and still not negate the dangers that a renegade or rogue figure poses. The insistence in merchant texts on social enforcement of ethical principles only highlights the reality of the widespread damage that could be inflicted by anyone who declines to abide by them. Muldrew has described in great detail the threat to business, family, and individual integrity posed by a highly interconnected credit system that required high levels of (often unearned, but absolutely necessary) trust.¹³ In many cases, the excerpts Sullivan quotes from her large compilation of mercantile texts give off the sense of protesting too much – merchants would not go to the trouble to hammer home the moral lessons of commerce if those who agreed with Robert Greene that “He who cannot dissemble cannot live,” posed no danger (Greene, “Defense,” A4v).

Renegades project these domestic concerns about the flexible identities of vagabonds, and the market’s opportunities for fraud, outward, onto an international playing field. International travel renders all participants vagabonds; distance weakens the importance of and in some cases even severs connections to the identifiers of family name and land ownership. Such categories lose meaning and efficacy in a milieu that privileges the flexibility needed to interact with diverse representatives of other religions, nations, languages, and cultures. In such

¹¹ In addition to Bruster and Appleby, see Agnew as another critic who advances the argument that early modern capitalism had an alienating effect on its participants.

¹² “In short this was a high-risk, low-information market structure, where trust and reputation were put before economic individualism; there was an ethical market that used credit as one of its regulatory procedures” (Sullivan 19). For economic evidence that supports Sullivan’s claims about mercantile rhetoric, see Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation*.

¹³ Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation* 173. See also Muldrew’s article, “Interpreting the Market.”

cases, renegade-like tendencies of adventurousness, independence, and self-authorization come to seem as admirable as they seem dangerous. For instance, English policies on piracy and privateering demonstrate the tension between the benefits and drawbacks, the fear and admiration, of renegade-like behavior. Though officially, England condemned piracy in order to trade peacefully with other nations, the English tacitly embraced piracy by endorsing privateers as a means to gain wealth and power before they had the strength to become conquerors and colonizers (Vitkus 21).

Though the similarities between England's seafaring tactics and those of pirates and other renegade figures had to go unrecognized politically, drama does acknowledge the continuity. Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West* (1631) makes it abundantly clear that the maritime economy of England's port cities is a renegade economy just like the ones found in the Mediterranean and in Muslim Ottoman territories – it consists of travelling the seas for pillage. The play's heroine, a barmaid, turns to privateering upon learning about the (supposed) death of her fiancé. Her adventures glorify the independence, initiative, and individual strength it takes to set out on one's own by representing such conviction and economic self-sufficiency in the form of a virtuous and chaste woman named, not coincidentally, Bess. Heywood's valorization of a kind of renegadism (admittedly a carefully controlled, "virtuous" one) evinces nostalgia for the reign of Elizabeth, who much more openly supported privateering than did her successor, King James. James repeatedly issued proclamations against piracy throughout his reign.¹⁴ It is possible to read Jacobean pirate plays such as *The Fair Maid of the West* and *A Christian Turned Turk* as veiled criticisms of James's pacifist policies for failing to make full use of his adventurous and restless male citizens (Jowitt 141-143).

¹⁴ For instance, "By the King. A proclamation against pirats" (1609)

At the same time that the theater can appropriate the characteristics of the renegade to advance a patriotic and Christian English agenda as in *The Fair Maid of the West*, it can also employ them to remind audiences that their understandings of Englishness are far less stable and safe than they might assume them to be. To be a renegade, to turn, is often figured as a loss – a conversion from a stable, known identity, to an unstable, unreliable, and disloyal one, as with Ward, Daborne’s titular pirate. In short, to be a renegade is to have sold one’s self for material gains of little moral and spiritual value. But, as MacLean has pointed out, *Othello*, too, is the story of a renegade, one which often goes unrecognized as such because he is a convert to Christianity instead of a defector from it (“On Turning Turk” 229). Othello’s participation in Venetian society (a proxy for the English) is contingent upon an original turn. Contemporary English audiences would likely see Othello’s conversion as a kind of gain – of civilization, and of the proper religion. But Othello’s gains do not change the fact that an act of inconstancy is what makes him acceptable to the Venetians. Turning permits infiltration as well as attrition, a frightening situation because the insertion of categorical others into the English Christian fold renders stark divisions between renegades and non-renegades a sham. The expansion of Christian-ness to include a black, formerly non-Christian Moor explains Othello’s complicated simultaneous identification with and rejection of Venetian-ness at the moment of his suicide: “in Aleppo once, / Where a malignant and a turban’d Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduced the state, / I took by the throat the circumcised dog, / And smote him, thus” (5.2.361-365).¹⁵ Othello is at once the instrument of Venetian revenge, and the “circumcised dog” that must be eliminated. The play registers cultural discomfort with the intrinsic hybridity of the renegade by having Othello self-eliminate, and yet having him do it in a manner that leaves ambiguous the status of his membership in the Venetian (read: English) Christian community.

¹⁵ I cite *Othello* from *The Norton Shakespeare*.

Economics, international travel, and the theater conspire to reveal the fundamentally hybrid and fluid nature of the renegade. *Othello* shows us a Christian Moorish Turkish renegade whose acts of attempted integration into the Venetian community inspire exclusion and destruction. Conversely, *The Fair Maid of the West* makes the renegade a faithful and chaste English woman, a celebration of the enterprising commercial spirit. The expansive vocabulary of renegadism threatens to encompass, or to welcome, depending on one's perspective, all individuals and all kinds of turnings. It is a byword for the flexibility, independence, and self-focused actualization encouraged both at home and abroad by the conditions of early modern commerce and travel. Whether positively or negatively construed, the consequence of the renegade's rise to prominence in the English cultural imagination is that traditional frameworks for defining human relationships, and moral and ethical principles, become inaccurate, or even, at times, unintelligible.

A Christian Turned Turk recognizes the instability of the renegade's presence, and goes to great lengths to militate against it. The play works against the hybridity, flexibility, and inconstancy of the renegade by attempting to fix clearly-delineated identities of pirate, renegade, and Jew, and in the process reveals its own hypocrisy and internal contradictions. Daborne furnishes an unequivocal condemnation of renegades by killing off the pirate/renegeades Ward and Dansiker in defiance of reality: both men were still alive and successful at the time the play was written. Their fictional suicides reveal how strongly the play wishes to maintain a binary distinction between the moral uprightness of Christian citizens who respect their communal obligations, and the irredeemability of the renegade pirate who rejects connections with his nation and his religion. Even Ward, in the moment before his death, sees his own life as an object lesson on the permanent consequences of selfish behavior: "All you that live by theft and

piracies, / That sell your lives and souls to purchase graves,.../Let dying Ward tell you that heaven is just, / And that despair attends on blood and lust” (16.317-318, 320-321). His warning to “all you” implicates audiences as well as those on stage even though its purpose is to differentiate him and exclude him from being counted among those of his country because of his “thefts and piracies,” and “blood and lust.”

Strangely, though, *A Christian Turned Turk* cuts against the grain of its presumably sincere moral message. The play envisions a world in which nearly every character displays renegade tendencies and qualities, and in which hardly any successful non-renegades exist. Many plot elements furnish evidence for the benefits, and even necessity, of renegade ways of thinking and behaving. Indeed, the final line of the play defies its own moralistic terms entirely: the renegade Governor of Tunis, (a former Christian), sums up Ward’s trajectory: “Ward sold his country, turned Turk, and died a Slave” (16.326), as if this lesson could come across as anything but hollow from the mouth of one who sold his country, turned Turk, and prospered for it.

The Governor’s incongruous line provides the final moment in a trend of mixing of renegade and non-renegade identities that pushes constantly against the goal of stating an unequivocal moral message. The play consistently destabilizes the distinction between renegade and non-renegade that the final line would uphold. Along with the Governor, the play positions Dansiker against the irredeemable Ward as the oxymoronic “good pirate” who provides a legitimate defense of piracy, who attempts his own recovery, and who fails only because of the unintelligible machinations of the maniacal Jewish renegade, Benwash. Dansiker frames his former criminal exploits as the unfortunate but necessary straying of a good man under pressure, rather than as the unrepentant activity of an inveterate criminal. He argues that, “Want of employment, not of virtue, forced / Our former act of spoil and rapine” (5.15-18). In other

words, he holds economic conditions, and not individuals, responsible (5.17-18). The King of France appears to agree with Dansiker that pirates and renegades can be reformed – his promised pardon (5.2-3) acknowledges that the boundaries between renegades and non-renegades are not neat, and can be crossed in both directions. Unlike Ward's death, which confirms his irrecoverable badness, Dansiker revises piracy into an identity that one can inhabit temporarily.

The strategy of Dansiker's attempted recovery emphasizes the fungible identity of renegades. In order to shed the title of pirate, Dansiker ironically commits one last act of piracy: "to ruin all the pirates / Lie in the harbor here" by "[setting] afire / Some house i'th'town" (5.26-27, 31-21). By setting up a redemption plot that requires he commit the very crime he eschews, Dansiker inhabits the roles of pirate and non-pirate simultaneously, hybridizing his identity even further. And yet, Dansiker's plot also appears to confirm the play's preference for binary and permanent distinctions between renegades and non-renegades because it ties him to piracy despite his best efforts. This firm distinction would remain upheld were it not for Benwash, the target of his plot. Benwash is not an arbitrary target: Dansiker chooses to set fire to the home of the "renegado Jew" (5.37), because he "Gives free and open entertain / To all of our profession" (5.38-39). A central node in the trade operations of Tunis, Benwash's house facilitates a heterogeneous and unstable mixing of people from various cultures, religions, and nations. To obtain his pardon, Dansiker must eradicate this renegade economy. Through Dansiker, the play tries to get rid of an unstable Jewish renegade identity that fits no particular category, but eliminating it first requires acknowledging the economic utility of such an unstable figure. The sense of order and structure in which Jews, renegades, pirates, Turks, and Christians constitute separate, inviolable types is ultimately a sham.

Dansiker's description of Benwash as the "renegado Jew" highlights the play's current of instability. The compound epithet functions as a key to understanding the convergences of Jewish and renegade identities in *A Christian Turned Turk*. "Renegado Jew" reminds audiences that renegade is a capacious category: insofar as it is a catch-all term for the exertion of individual agency, rejection of social connections, deceit, unreliability, and religious conversion, anyone can be a renegade. If both the Jews and the English can inhabit this category, and if becoming a renegade exerts a strong appeal, then English individuals, now sharing an identity category with Jews, can be seen as Jewish via this connection. The play thematizes this overlap between Jews and English Christians in the meeting space of the renegade by drawing on a conceptual framework of Jewish stereotypes. Sexual deviance, sexual shame and impotence, a cavalier attitude toward cultural and religious affiliations, the violent and devilish pursuit of personal goals and desires, and diseased or mutant bodies, in turn all characterize Ward and Benwash (and sometimes their minor counterparts, Dansiker and Rabshake).

In addition to drawing on a whole host of Jewish stereotypes to inform renegade ones, the play also toys with the idea that Jews could represent the renegade, but perfected. Ideally, the renegade spirit could be harnessed to the benefit of one's nation and religion, as in the examples of the English privateers, or Bess in *The Fair Maid of the West*. The ideal renegade would exploit the advantages of renegadism in the competitive Mediterranean economy, while avoiding conversion, or other turns away from a native identity. To the extent that the play always calls Benwash a Jew, it recognizes that Jews somehow manage to maintain the integrity of their identity while engaging in international, cross-cultural and religious interactions. The play's awareness of this fact, even if figured as an insult to Benwash, reflects the historical reality that "Jews integrated with Islamic culture without losing their religion" (MacLean and Matar 176). In

contrast, the English experience of Mediterranean hybridity made them feel their own otherness: “In one sense, this cultural difference, based on blending and variety of peoples, stood apart in contrast to Englishness, but in another sense it insistently offered to accommodate and absorb English subjects, by making them participants in the Mediterranean marketplace” (Vitkus 16). Jewishness offers a model for adopting the best renegade qualities while eschewing the worst, while of course also running up against the problem of admiring or desiring a “Jewish” quality. *A Christian Turned Turk* tries to have it both ways: it reveals the behaviors to emulate while also strategically eliminating all Jews and bad renegades.

Jews, Renegades, and Conversion: Incentives, Superficiality, and Failure

The titular English renegade pirate Ward exemplifies many of the qualities that define Jewishness in the play, despite never identifying or being identified as Jewish. As a non-Jewish exponent of Jewishness, Ward thus provides the best entry point to understand how renegadism and Jewishness are implicated in one another. The features that are supposed to separate categories of Jew and renegade actually unite them in a single hybrid Jew/renegade category. The play attributes the two men’s alignment to external, environmental pressures, and not innate qualities, thereby reinforcing the sense that any Mediterranean traveler can become “Jewish.” Three circumstances make Ward and Benwash more alike than different: the superficiality of their conversions, the strong force of incentives toward conversion, and the failure of conversion to deliver upon its promised benefits.

A Christian Turned Turk cultivates a sense of superficiality about conversion, despite also destroying Ward, Dansiker, and Benwash for their failures to reign in their wayward energies, uncontained by devotion to religion, nation, and ethnic affiliations. Conversion in the play is oddly insignificant yet weighty simultaneously. The sentiment that conversion is artificial

becomes the incongruous worldview of the characters who argue in favor of it. The Governor, Crosman, and Benwash attempt to overcome Ward's resistance to converting to Islam by touting the essential meaninglessness of conversion even before its personal benefits and lack of arduousness. Benwash assumes Ward is like him in his understanding that "Christian or Turk, you are more wise, I know, / Than with religion to confine your hopes" (7.25-26), conspiratorially including Ward in a perceptive coterie that recognizes the emptiness of religion. To Benwash, it is advisable to belong to a religion without sincerely believing in it. His stance designates the religious beliefs of converts, (and thus, religious belief generally), as meaningless. Ward confirms his likeness to Benwash when he swears he is a Christian "only to feed discourse / And fill up argument" (7.123-124). The Governor's lived experience proves the wisdom of Benwash's advice: "What difference in me as I am a Turk, / and was a Christian? Life, liberty, / Wealth, honor – they are common unto all!" (7.29-31). Ignoring the major differences in faith, the Governor limits the terms of his persuasion to the worldly benefits one can accrue through conversion. By discussing the potentially universal accessibility of temporal benefits, the Governor reveals a broken connection between religion and merited reward. One reason for conversion's meaninglessness is that religious profession does not correlate with success: anyone, Jew Christian, or Muslim, can prosper. In other words, the very feature of conversion the Governor, Crosman, and Benwash tout is the same one that renders conversion unnecessary. What is more, the hard sell originates with exactly those characters who hold irreverent attitudes about religion. Why Ward's conversion from one meaningless religion to another should matter to them remains unexplained as a function of the plot. Instead, Ward's conversion epitomizes his irredeemability. His collaboration with the Jews, Turks, and renegades of Tunis confirms the justice of his eventual punishment.

The superficial conversion trope also works against the play's tendency to condemn renegades and to distinguish them unambiguously from faithful, trustworthy Christians. Burton reminds us that, in Ward's case, the distinction is not so clear. Voada's sexual allure seduces him, and he declares, "Here is an orator can turn me easily. / Where beauty pleads, there needs no sophistry" (7.164-165). Ward may be a poor Christian, but neither is he a Muslim. He is taken in by sex, not Islam, and no one – not Crosman, the Governor, nor Benwash – employs religious arguments to persuade him (Burton "English Anxiety" 48). Because Ward's conversion is obviously fake, the play could reduce conversion's threat – not the state of affairs the play evidently desires. The absence of sincere conversion and the play's punitive ending, in which renegade and reprobate characters all kill each other or themselves, are irreconcilable. The need to punish and eliminate renegades is far from clear or justified if in fact they are not true renegades. The play's darkly punitive strain generates a generic conversion from comedy to tragedy which conversion's meaninglessness cannot account for.

Instead, the seventeenth century's socio-political pressures on the theater produce the paradox whereby conversion must be condemned and yet represented as meaningless at the same time. It was in the professional best interest of actors and playwrights to show that conversion was a performance because anti-theatrical attacks conflated performance and reality in order to accuse actors of apostasy. Not only do actors dangerously represent alluring renegades on stage, the accusations went, they become renegades by playing them. Anti-theatrical tracts do not take the artifice of the stage for granted.¹⁶ The generic constraints placed on theater by contemporary political necessity diverge greatly from the prose conversion narratives that often furnished

¹⁶ In *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582) Stephen Gosson says, "Playes are the inuentions of the deuill, the offrings of Idolatrie, the pompe of worldlinges, the blossomes of vanitie, the roote of Apostacy, the foode of iniquitie, ryot, and adulterie" (G8^v). See also Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* (1579), and William Prynne's *Histriomastix The players scourge, or, actors tragaedie* (1633).

source material for plays. Burton has shown that prose conversion stories frequently craft counter-factual but recuperative providential narratives to minimize the impact of conversion (“English Anxiety” 46). Providential narratives do not work for the theater because they presuppose a real, not a false, transgression from which the transgressor must be recovered. The theater’s need to render conversion false clashes with *A Christian Turned Turk*’s need to condemn Ward and the others for their piracy and corruption. This contradiction accounts for the play’s tragicomic tone. Amid the exaggerated manipulation of religious and national affiliation, the prisoner Alizia’s call to Ward’s conscience, “It’s the denial / Of your redeemer, religion, country / Of him that gave your being” rings overly earnest (7.198-200). Her exhortation also contravenes the motivating evidence for Dansiker’s justification of piracy – with no prospects of employment, security, and well-being granted by their countries and religions, the conversion of loyalties makes practical sense. Ward’s attractive anti-hero status also has the effect of undermining the current of moral opprobrium. Because the pirates engage in daring and exciting capers, they provide as much a sense of voyeuristic identification for the audience as they do a frisson of fear and self-righteous disapproval directed at their preference for self-fulfillment as the highest good. Surrounded by the bawdy humor, and the attractive spectacle of self-promotion, Alizia’s pleas, redoubled by the captured Ferdinand, Albert, and Raymond, sound dour and humorless in contrast.

Though I agree with Gerald MacLean that *A Christian Turned Turk* does “set out to impose an explicit moral order upon the story of a notorious English pirate” (226), a thorough reading of the play requires that argument to be qualified. The play fails to impose such order completely, largely because of its tragicomic hybridity. The commonality of renegades makes them seem less deviant, and makes the “explicit moral order” impossible to maintain. The play’s

final scene underscores the failure of a moral binary because those who mete out judgment are also the irreligious Machiavels, the renegades, and the reprobate Turks. The Governor speaks as though the moral order can be maintained by ridding the environment of renegade bodies: he orders Dansiker's "hateful body" (16.237), and Benwash's "loathed carcass" (16.215) to be cast away unburied, and he even orders his soldiers to "Tear the wretch piecemeal! Throw his accursed limbs / into the raging bowels of the sea!" (16.323-324) after Ward has already committed suicide, as if the problem with renegades inheres in their bodies, and not in their ideology. But the governor's own renegade body remains, breaking the promise that renegades will be justly punished, and making criticisms of renegades and Jews seem just as hollow as the play's indictment of conversion.

Exposing conversion as superficial has two purposes: to allay fears about renegades, and to counter accusations against the theater as a hotbed of apostasy. Counterintuitively, both of these purposes also encourage and incentivize renegadism. If conversion is meaningless, an empty show, then it follows that conversion need not be feared as a sincere change in religious conviction. The incentives arise directly from conversion's artificiality, which the multiple layers of artifice in Ward's conversion intensify. The false conversion takes place within a setting that is already twice fictionalized, once simply by virtue of being a play – an acknowledged representation of reality – and again by being a play that unabashedly revises contemporary facts.¹⁷ Within this twice-artificial setting, Crosman assures Ward that the conversion process consists merely of "Some trivial ceremonies" of brief duration (7.251), thereby making it understood that even the man who orchestrates Ward's conversion does not take conversion seriously. Crosman's lines also perpetuate a sense that Islam is not a real religion with real

¹⁷ As I previously mentioned, Ward was living successfully in Tunis when Daborne wrote the play.

substance – there is nothing of note for Ward to convert to because its ceremonies demonstrating loyalty are “trivial.”

On top of the doubly artificial setting, Daborne chooses to stage Ward’s conversion as a dumb show, a formal break from the rest of the play that draws attention to its own fictiveness, especially when bookended by the chorus’ grave narration. The chorus laments that Ward, “with a blushless front... dares to do / What we are dumb to think, much more to show” (8.7-8). The line puns on the theatrical form of the “dumb show,” revealing the chorus’ meta-awareness of its role in crafting artifice. The chorus declares itself unable to contemplate Ward’s conversion (“dumb” meaning deficient as well as mute), an inability belied by the subsequent dumb show. The pun is weighted with irony: of course the play contemplates Ward’s conversion: that is the job declared in its very title. The line also lends the dumb show a degree of gravitas that it does not earn, especially considering that the very same line also reminds the audience how fake the conversion process, and the play’s representation of it, is. The stage directions depict an inherently theatrical, performative, and artificial conversion scene, calling for several “half-moons,” or crescents, and a “Mahomet’s head” – a common stage property of an angry-looking, turbaned head. The dumb show seems designed to show off the theater’s collection of Islam-related stage properties, underscoring the degree to which the conversion is only a matter of appearances. Ward changes from his “Christian habit” to a “turban and robe,” and spurns a Christian’s offer of a cup of wine. Each of these steps constitutes a visible ritual rejection of one identity, and the adoption of another. Ultimately, Ward must “[Enroll] his name into their pagan tribes” (8.17), his signature a physical sign of his belonging to the lists of officially subscribed Muslims. At no point does the conversion ceremony entail a discussion of theological tenets; the superficial show does not and cannot indicate an inner conviction for Islam.

In the immediate aftermath of Ward's conversion, the pirate Sares' report to Dansiker about the process he witnessed undermines the Chorus' grave description of Ward's conversion. Sares says, "I saw him Turk to the circumcision. / Marry, therein I heard he played the Jew with 'em, / Made 'em come to the cutting of an ape's tail" (9.2-4). Sares' explanation adds yet another layer of artifice to the conversion on top of all the others, because we learn that Ward did not actually complete the conversion process.¹⁸ He faked a staged, performative conversion that had previously been established as inherently meaningless. The unsuspected substitution of an ape's tail for Ward's penis requires an almost impossible suspension of disbelief for the audience. It again heightens the artificial nature of conversion because it makes conscious the invisible contract between theaters and audiences to believe the fictions of the stage. The "cutting of an ape's tail" also adds to the motif of the monstrous body strongly aligned throughout the play with Jews and renegades via Benwash. It seems no accident that the grotesque act of substituting an animal body part for a human one qualifies as the moment in which Ward "played the Jew with 'em," or engaged in the deceit proverbially characteristic of Jews.

Focusing on the way Ward momentarily gets slotted into the category of Jew can offer a corrective to one common misinterpretation of the false conversion trope. Burton asserts that "By playing the part of the Jew - the deceiver and false convert - Ward actually preserves both his foreskin and his faith" ("English Anxiety" 48). In other words, false conversion only works to alleviate fears of conversion's efficacy. Missing from Burton's argument is the realization that false conversion, additionally, points out the total absence of faith. Indisputably, Ward does not convert, and yet he can hardly be said to have preserved his faith either. Ward cannot preserve a faith he never had; his only declaration of faith prior to his conversion is to "That god on earth,"

¹⁸ I see no reason not to believe Sares' narration - his only meaningful function in the play is to report Ward's conversion, and nothing else in the play should lead readers to expect unreliable narrators.

or gold (7.187). But, more significantly, the pretense of conversion confirms Ward in a paradoxical allegiance to deception and oath-breaking that is generalizable to most characters in a play chock-full of renegades and pirates. The Chorus narrates the dumb-show as if the conversion is a turning-point in Ward's trajectory, but what it really does is visibly signal Ward's characteristic lack of loyalty to any institution over and above himself. The conversion scene is neither a conversion to Islam nor a preservation of Christianity. The Chorus reports that upon "converting," Ward "wears the habit of a free-born Turk / His sword excepted," which, because of their untrustworthiness, "is denied / Unto all runagates" (8.18-21). The fundamental problem with conversion is that converts are automatically suspicious. The sincerity of those who are willing to rescind their native affiliations must always be questioned. Thus, no conversion can ever be fully complete.

Because the loyalties of the convert are inherently unstable, the convert cannot reap the benefits of conversion. As evidence, Voada insists that Mohammed would curse Ward for the very fact of his conversion: "We know you are a bloody murderer and are repaid / By our just Prophet that hates false runagates" (13.26-27). The repetitive nomination of Ward as a "runagate" instead of a Turk (He gets called a "Turk" exactly once) shows why Burton's claim that Ward preserves his faith is inaccurate: The play represents him as a convert not to Islam, but to a state of "renegadism."¹⁹ The distinction is more than a matter of semantics; "renegade" ought to describe one who is in the process of transitioning from one religion to another, but instead, "renegade" becomes the target affiliation of the convert, rather than Christian, Muslim, or Jew. "Apostate" might be preferable to "convert" to describe Ward, for while he renounced one religion, he does not adopt another. The convert gets stuck in an interstitial state where only

¹⁹ Here and elsewhere I use the term 'renegadism' as a one-word short hand for "the state of being a renegade." It is comparable to my use of the word, "Jewishness." In no way do I mean to suggest a coherent philosophy of the renegade, as the "-ism" might imply, and which to my knowledge does not exist.

the transitional term applies. Standing in for religious faith is an internally contradictory allegiance to deception, unreliability, and faithlessness, all in the name of self-interest.

As renegade becomes less of a transitional state and more of an affiliation of its own, it opens up a space for superficially dissimilar characters to relate and overlap in their renegadism. “Renegade” encompasses Benwash and Ward both. For each of them, conversion is superficial and useless. Conversion’s uselessness is incredibly clear for Benwash, who frets constantly about Agar’s infidelity – the very thing his conversion was intended to prevent. Not only is conversion an ineffective aid to Benwash’s sexual integrity, it also (perhaps more significantly) does nothing to alter his identity in his own and in others’ opinions. Agar contrives her first tryst with Gallop by pretending to collude with Benwash to capture him, telling Benwash that she will have Gallop climb a rope ladder to her room, “When, as it seems, he learnt you were enforced / To be in the synagogue” (6.372-373). Agar gets Benwash to believe and participate in her ruse by envisioning a typically Jewish occupation for him. Benwash participates in his own relegation to Jewishness. Twice in the scene of his murderous rampage, he contrasts his dual identities of Turk and Jew, always landing on Jew as the one he inhabits currently. When Agar tries to stave off her murder by calling upon the oaths Benwash has sworn as her husband, he replies, “I swear as I was a Turk, and I will cut your throat as I am a Jew” (16.75). Likewise, in his last line before death, Benwash declares, “Bear witness, though I lived a Turk, I die a Jew” (16.213). At every opportunity, Benwash is seen as a Jew in the eyes of others, and he rhetorically constructs himself as a Jew, even though his duplicity makes him a renegade.

The play’s insistence of the failure of Benwash’s and Ward’s (false) conversions unites them. Ward’s suicide is precipitated by the failure of his conversion to grant him the same legal recourse owed a Turk. Voada falsely accuses him of gravely injuring her, and he exclaims “I am

a Turk, and I do crave the law!” (16.241). But Voada’s dissembling prevents him from receiving justice; the Turkish onlookers instantly believe her and rush to punish Ward, labeling him an “Inhuman dog!” (16.290) – an animal outcast, and not a Turk, not a member of the in group. In both cases, Ward and Benwash may be designated either as their prior identity (pirate/Jew) or as an interstitial, indeterminate apostate/renegade, but never fully as the target religion to which they converted. Far from separating the two men, this marginality unites them; they come to inhabit the intersectional category of renegade. The epithets and names assigned to them show that no one wants them to remain in this marginal and absorptive space of renegade; the play wants to make sure that Jews stay Jews, pirates remain pirates, and that both are eliminated decisively. This action is a disciplining one: it reminds them forcibly of their roots, and punishes them for non-conformity. Benwash’s and Ward’s crossover is anxiety-provoking because English and Jew alike refuse to follow this pattern, and intersect while in this shared hybrid space.

Sex and Commerce

A Christian Turned Turk cuts against the grain of Jewish specificity in many ways, but it does so most clearly in the dangerous mixture of sex and business. Reuben Rabshake, Benwash’s servant, applies the cuckolding that results from this mixture to all men, and especially to English Christians. Responding to Voada’s taunting that “Setting aside your nose, you should turn Christian” (6.14), Rabshake declines, explaining that Christians do not need him, because “They have Jew enough already amongst’em” (6.16-17).²⁰ Voada defines Jewishness as an indelible biological quality that would limit Rabshake’s hypothetical conversion: we could paraphrase her line, “If it were not for your nose, you could become a Christian.” Yet paradoxically, by pointing out his nose she also invokes the removable false nose of the stage

²⁰ Here Rabshake recycles a common method Christians used to insult one another – call them Jews.

Jew. The nose's removability makes it possible for there to be "Jew enough" among Christians already. In other words, if Jewishness is not biologically fixed (as evidenced by large noses), then an unknown number of Christians could be invisible Jews. But instead of criticizing the hidden Jewishness of Christians, Rabshake does the reverse: he criticizes Christian faults that would make a Jew reluctant to convert. Among the faults that deter Rabshake from converting to Christianity is that "First, they [Christian men] suffer their wives to be their masters" (6.20). Rabshake's complaint makes English Christians seem just like Benwash – failed exploiters and managers of sexual desire. In the process of showing off her sexual appeal, Benwash inadvertently submits to his wife. Although he intends to use Agar for his own profit, by exposing her for "sale" he tacitly acknowledges her power, and he cedes control of her body the moment he lets her roam free. Agar's mastery of Benwash shows clearly in the fawning and anxious language he uses to placate her anger. He stammers, "Forgiveness, honest wife – my chaste, chaste, wife" when he knows she is nothing of the sort (6.365). It is obvious that Agar's supposed plan to trick Gallop is in fact a way for her to arrange a sexual encounter with him; she uses her false outrage about being "exposed / Unto all undergoers" to facilitate it (6.363-364). Rabshake uses female mastery as a reason against converting to Christianity, but it turns out that Jewish and Christian men are already alike in that regard.

Uncontrolled and uncontrollable sexual license forms the foundation of the play's overlapping Jewish and renegade identities. Dansiker describes the "free and open entertain" (5.38) with which Benwash treats his pirate-customers, but Benwash complicates Dansiker's terms. In the scene immediately following Dansiker's lines about Benwash's "free and open" house, "renegado" sheds its connotation of radical self-fashioning, "entertain," vacillates uncomfortably between economic and sexual meanings, and "free," alternately means "freedom

from” and “freedom to.” The way these terms play out in the plot demonstrates how widespread “Jewishness” is despite the play’s efforts to contain it.

Anxious about maintaining a balance between promoting his business prospects and shielding his wife from sexual exposure, Benwash reminds Rabshake of the sexual motives that made him a renegade:

Thou hast forgot how dear
 I bought my liberty, renounced my law
 (The law of Moses), turned Turk – all to keep
 My bed free from these Mahometan dogs.
 I would not be a monster, Rabshake – a man-beast,
 A cuckold” (6.73-78)

Benwash’s speech complicates the meaning of a Jewish renegade in several ways. As he explains why he became a renegade, Benwash increasingly distances himself from traditional renegade status, and expands the meaning of the term. Renegades disavow religious and national connections in favor of total autonomy because they reject the value and meaning of such connections in the first place. As we’ve already seen, the persuasive tactic Crossman and the Governor employ on Ward is to insist that religion contains no authentic markers of identity, and so there is nothing significant to be lost from abandoning it. Benwash’s careless attitude toward religion in the scene of Ward’s conversion is belied by his reminder to Rabshake that his liberty was bought “dear” (6.73), the exorbitant price his renunciation of “my law / (The law of Moses)” (6.74-75). Calling Judaism “my law” suggests that Benwash to some degree still identifies as a Jew, a suggestion intensified by the words “these Mahometan dogs” (6.76), an epithet that estranges Benwash from, rather than affiliates him with, the religion to which he has converted.

In addition to lacking the irreligiousness usually associated with renegades, Benwash's renegadism also comes into question because of his motivations, especially when juxtaposed against its inefficacy, and against Ward's renegadism. Unwilling to imagine a case of sincere conversion from Christianity to Islam, *A Christian Turned Turk* instead figures conversion as a means to sate sexually deviant desires. Ward converts in capitulation to his lust for the beautiful Voada. Hitherto resistant to persuasions based on power and wealth, the sight of Voada pushes Ward over the edge. Voada's heathen female body is the only successful "argument" for conversion (7.90). Ward's motivation privileges male desire, but it also reveals male weakness by making him so easily subject to seductive and exotic women. Although Benwash's conversion also centers on a seductive Turkish woman, he inverts the typical structure of the sexually-charged motivation for "turning Turk," parodying Ward. Instead of becoming a renegade to fulfil his sexual desire, Benwash converts to avoid becoming a "monster" (6.77) - being cuckolded. In other words, Benwash transforms the objective of renegadism from privileging the free and open indulgence of male desires to prohibiting the free exercise of the female desires.

Benwash's conversion also undercuts the justification for becoming a renegade: the virtual guarantee of fulfilling desires, be they for wealth, power, or sex. His conversion does absolutely nothing to assuage the fear of cuckolding that led him to "turn Turk" in the first place. Benwash "renounces his law" for a benefit he doesn't actually receive. The play takes great pains to emphasize this failure of Benwash's renegadism, at least from the standpoint of controlling his wife's sexual disposition: cuckolding constitutes either the topic or subtext of nearly every conversation in which Benwash participates. Though Benwash asserts in his first of many speeches to focus on his cuckolding fears that "[he] would not be a monster, Rabshake, - a

man-beast” (6.77), he is instead doubly monstrous for willingly hybridizing his identity and for subjecting himself to potential infidelity. Fascinatingly, but puzzlingly, the play never explains how Benwash’s conversion would protect him from cuckolding. I surmise that conversion to Islam earns Benwash freedom from having his wife treated as fair game by the other Turks of Tunis – a privilege that might not be afforded to a Jew – but my conjecture remains only that, and it cannot account for the predations of non-Turkish men such as the pirate Gallop, or Agar’s own sexual proclivities.

Benwash’s incessant worry about Agar’s sexual fidelity also suggests that if his conversion is ineffective at preventing his wife’s adultery, it is to some degree his own fault. The fault comes from the way Benwash conflates the rhetorics of sex and business. When Dansiker speaks of the “free and open entertain” that Benwash’s home offers, he means that as a middleman and merchant, Benwash does business with people of all origins, including pirates, not restricting his trade to particular religious, national, or ethnic groups. The very openness of his house to pirates provides Dansiker’s rationale for burning it down: as the representative locale of the renegade economy, its destruction will signal Dansiker’s repudiation of the renegade ethos. But the usage of the words “free and open entertain” gets away from Benwash’s control. Seemingly apropos of nothing, he remarks to his new pirate customers, Gallop, Sares, Gismund, etc., “You see, gallants, we are not Italianate to lock our women up: we set ’em free, give open entertainment” (6.61-62). He cannot work within an open renegade economy without also unleashing an open sexual economy. To “set ’em free” is equivalent to giving open entertainment to his male customers. The two kinds of entertainment depend upon each other: consideration for business purposes becomes coterminous with sexual diversion.

For Benwash, the two senses of “entertainment” are nearly synonymous. Moreover, the senses converge as the meanings of “free” divide. When Benwash first says he sets his women free, he means it in a positive sense – the inclusiveness of his house, and the lack of limits placed on his wife indicate a “freedom to” - pirates are free to conduct business, and Agar is free to move around the house and among the guests. But avoidance is the kind of freedom Benwash seeks when he wishes “to keep / [his] bed free from these Mahometan dogs” (6.75-76). These two kinds of freedom are antithetical; the more freedom Benwash gives Agar to interact with his customers, the less likely he is to remain free from cuckolding.

Yet, the convergence of economic and sexual forms of entertainment forces into proximity the two opposing freedoms. Rabshake uses a telling commercial metaphor to ask Benwash why he would risk exposing his wife to his clients if he is so worried about her sexual fidelity: “But seeing you fear your vessel hath a leak, wherefore do you put her to sea, man her thus?” (6.81-82). The metaphor’s vehicle of a leaky ship relates the risk of cuckolding to the necessary risks of international trade. The metaphor invites a serious answer, as well as the criticism Rabshake implies. The risks of both trade and cuckolding are high, but there are no rewards without them. Agar is the vehicle of Benwash’s profit as the vessel is the vehicle of the metaphor. She might be as sexually loose as the ship is leaky, but risking her sexual fidelity, or the ship’s integrity, for the possibility of profit is better than a guarantee of no profit if the woman/ship never sets out. Rabshake’s question actually highlights the necessity of “[putting] her to sea” to cuckold Benwash – she’ll be “manned thus” with men other than Benwash – a virtual guarantee of commercial profit from allowing other men to “sail” her.

Benwash’s answer to Rabshake strips away the metaphor, and makes plain his awareness of the necessity of sexual exploitation: “For commodity: thou seest rich shopkeepers set their

wives at sale to draw in custom, utter their wares, yet keep that gem untouched – all for profit, man” (6.83-85). Unfortunately, Benwash’s lines also reveal his impossible desire to reap the profits of sexual appeal while preventing actual sex acts. By calling Agar a “gem,” Benwash makes his wife a kind of ware. Though the gem of female sexual fidelity and the shop’s wares are not synonymous, by describing Agar with commodifying language, Benwash places Agar in a context where circulation is expected. Rich shopkeepers do not keep their wares untouched – they are rich precisely because they sell them. Even if Agar were to remain untouched (though she clearly has no intention to refrain) customers will undoubtedly attempt to touch her. Benwash’s ambiguous language enables him to deny this reality – “set their wives at sale” may suggest that the wives help to sell the goods, and also that the wives are the goods for sale. Similarly, the wives both “utter” the shop’s wares, and “their wares” are their bodies, which are uttered by being displayed. Clearly, Benwash wishes only the former meanings to be in play, but the linguistic ambiguities escape him, making the penultimate clause of the sentence, “yet keep that gem untouched,” problematic. One cannot both sell wares and keep them untouched. If the commodity for sale is at once the shopkeeper’s goods and the wife’s sexual appeal, both will be purchased and consumed.

Women as Renegades, Renegade-makers, and Renegade-undoers

Benwash’s sex and commerce problem is also a problem of female renegadism: how women inhabit the role of renegade, and how they facilitate and/or undermine male renegades. Women’s relationship to renegades matters because renegadism is in part defined by a gendered power structure – its characteristic self-assertion and individuality freed from its obligations typically reads as male. The women of *A Christian Turned Turk* cannot help but become renegades, and make men into renegades too. Their sexual allure accomplishes both

transformations. Ward resists converting for the riches and status Crosman, the Governor, and Benwash can offer, but he changes his mind at the mere sight of Voada, Crosman's sister (7.90-176). Voada, in one sense, turns Ward into a renegade because her sexual appeal pushes him over the edge and into a conversion he would otherwise eschew. Though Ward was already very much a renegade before converting by virtue of being a pirate, his conversion seals the deal, and places him irrevocably in the realm of the unrepentant renegade.

At the same time that she effects Ward's full conversion into renegade status, Voada can also be read as a renegade herself, despite never having converted from Islam or otherwise having betrayed her loyalties. Voada inverts the traditional hierarchy of male dominance and control over women by exploiting her sexual beauty (though it must be acknowledged that resorting to female sexual exploitation also very much confirms this hierarchy). Voada makes Ward subordinate his desires to her demands. When she first instructs him to "Turn Turk" (7.127), Ward resists, asking, "Should I forever sell my liberty?" (7.135). It is telling that Ward first views conversion as another form of confinement and restriction, not unlike the burdensome claims of Christianity and English nationality that prompted his piracy. Ward's loss of liberty becomes even more apparent in the language he uses to describe his conversion – not so much a choice as a capitulation. He tells Voada, "Thou hast o'ercome me," (7.166) and swears that he will "take the orders instantly" (7.170). Following orders, being overcome, and selling liberty – these are not the actions of a man who acts with radical autonomy and who exerts full control over his desires and choices. Voada, in a sense, masters Ward, and in so doing, becomes a renegade as well. In an aside after securing Ward's promise to convert, Voada explains, "I have my ends. / Howe'er thou sink, thy wealth shall bear me high" (7.175-176). These lines clarify that Voada acts of her own volition, and not as a pawn in Crosman's or the other men's political

dealings. She is a woman who does not subject herself to male authority, but instead seeks to shape and control it to further her own mercenary goal (a goal she shares with male renegades).

The proliferation of renegades to include women might so far seem unproblematic; after all, Daborne's play is in part about how the economic conditions of the early seventeenth century Mediterranean facilitate and encourage renegadism in just about everyone. If Voada is a renegade like Ward, then she is all the more evidence for the near-universal reach of renegade thought and behavior. But women cannot be renegades without complicating and challenging the status of male renegades, knocking them down from their positions of power (as we have already seen with Ward) and redefining the term. Having defined renegade as one who willfully eschews social norms and laws, and who relentlessly pursues individual desires and goals outside of the framework of personal and communal obligations, it follows that a successful renegade must exert great power – individual power, decoupled from state or religious apparatuses. This prospect is a frightening one – that the renegade deliberately and with forethought rejects and works outside of social ties. But the addition of female renegades unleashes another, far scarier possibility – that a (male) renegade is not one who is in charge of his disposition and behaviors, but rather one who has lost control completely, one who is subject to the tyrannies of his desires, especially the desire for exotic, alluring, heathen, untrustworthy women. If the latter option is indeed the case, then renegadism is a condition that might threaten to engulf men involuntarily, despite the best efforts even of those who have no intention of breaking social, legal, and religious boundaries.

Voada's interactions with Ward reveal him to be weak, not strong and autonomous. When the disguised Alizia almost convinces Ward not to convert, Voada's ire quickly changes his mind: "Forgiveness, Voada! Turn back thy comet-eyes! / Plagues, devils, poverty – may all

ills fall / Man e'er was subject to, I will enjoy thee. / Force hence, I say, this boy (7.245-248).

Ward first responds out of fear: Voada seems like a powerful and evil sorceress, with her “comet eyes.” But then he counters his initial fear with an act of self-assertion, in order to frame his decision to convert as a deliberate choice that permits him to “enjoy” Voada. Yet, however much Ward may view his choice as a free one made with the purpose to fulfill his desires, the play figures it instead as a loss of self-control. Later on, when Voada rejects Ward after his conversion, he still fights pointlessly against those who insult her: “My soul for her I lost, and now my blood” (13.39). It may have been necessary for Ward to convert in order to claim Voada, but in the end, it is insufficient. In Ward’s and Voada’s relationship, the desires and goals of the female renegade compete with, rather than complement, those of the male renegade. Having passed well beyond the point of rejecting social conventions for the sake of personal gain, the renegade Ward is subject to, instead of in control of, the whims of his lust and his highly variable temperament. Female renegades flip the conventional script on renegadism: instead of an attractive (though alarming), and even heroic promotion of male individual success, renegadism comes to look weak – a pathetic enslavement to base desires, with no lower limit in sight.

This undermining effect of female renegades on male renegades paradoxically aligns women with the play’s most orthodox strains. In making male renegades out to be weak, female renegades lessen renegadism’s seductive pull. They create an unexpected alignment between the renegade, the Jew, and the ridiculous, comical, cuckolded old man. Benwash’s renegadism, unlike Ward’s, is laughable from the start precisely because of its female origins. He converts to Islam to prevent the unpreventable – Agar’s infidelity. Benwash connects cuckolding to Jewishness (as I will show), just as he had already connected Jewishness and renegadism. Benwash can hardly be said to exert power, control, or masculine desire at the expense of his

community's rules and expectations; instead, his conversion functions as an admission of just how much control he lacks. In lacking control over Agar's sexual dispensation, Benwash embodies the stock character of the old, impotent man in Italian *commedia dell'arte* theater who, trying desperately to avoid being cuckolded, ends up unknowingly facilitating his wife's adultery.²¹ The allure of renegades is lessened considerably when its main exponents are Ward, a man who fawns after the woman who rejects him, and Benwash, a cuckolded old Jew. At the same time, the redefinition of renegade from an autonomous, powerful man to a man who succumbs to female temptation also heightens the fearful possibility that renegadism could spread easily. Through the attractions of the female renegade, male renegades in a sense re-enact Adam's original fall at the hands of a desirable, persuasive woman. While rendering renegadism laughable, Benwash and Ward also indicate that renegadism may be a latent state within masculinity. All men could become unwitting renegades, if becoming one is as simple as ceding control to powerful women.

Women, too, can be subject to renegade desires, in addition to engendering them in men. The category of the female renegade is an unstable one because it offers a degree of control and authority normally forbidden to women. But the ways women lose control, and become subject to desire, are also culturally out of bounds. Voada injects an element of queer desire into the category of renegade through her lust for Alizia, disguised as the boy Fidelio. Upon her first sight of Alizia, Voada exclaims "It is a lovely boy, rare featured!...I have not seen so much of beauty in a man" (6. 93, 96). The lines clearly play on the disconnect between audience knowledge of Alizia's cross-dressing, and the suspension of disbelief necessary to accept that to Voada, Alizia presents as male. How Voada articulates her attraction highlights its queerness (here meant in the sense of unusual or uncommon): she hasn't seen such beauty in a man before precisely because

²¹ A famous example of such a figure is Nicia in Niccolò Machiavelli's *La Mandragola* (1524).

Fidelio's beauty is atypical of men. Voadia is a renegade not only for clearly articulating female sexual desires and preferences, but for turning those preferences in the "wrong" direction.

Even though she is a non-renegade Christian character, perhaps the most wholesome and uncorrupted in the play, Alizia's function in the plot is likewise non-normative. She participates in the queering of Voadia's and Ward's sexual desire and she helps to maintain renegade identities. Alizia implores Ward not to convert (7.196-241), but by dressing as a boy, she reduces the effectiveness of her case. Voadia and Agar have already helped to redefine renegadism as the pursuit of fulfilling male sexual desire. Alizia, however, takes herself out of the competition for Ward's sexual energies. He recognizes her not as an alternative sexual choice to Voadia, but as a mouthpiece for the pieties that would hold him back from sating his lust for Voadia. Ward cannot choose Alizia over Voadia without (to his knowledge) choosing a religiously "straight" but sexually queer path (Jowitt 169). Despite speaking in favor of religious commitment and morality, Alizia on the surface presents Ward with a choice as equally renegade as that of Voadia. At the very moment the play would rescue Ward through the saving graces of a moral woman, it instead suggests that he cannot fail to make a renegade choice.

The play's women foster not only sexual renegadism, but religious renegadism as well. In Agar, Benwash's Turkish wife, the religious and sexual facets of the renegade are mutually constitutive. Agar epitomizes the sexual components of the female renegade when she exerts her considerable will to have sex with the English pirate, Gallop. She defies two male authorities (Benwash, and his servant Rabshake, assigned to look after her in scene six) to arrange her adultery. Her sexual desire for Gallop crosses national and ethnic lines, threatening miscegenation. But beyond her function in Daborne's plot, Agar evokes a biblical tale of renegadism, one that is foundational for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim identities alike. Her

namesake, Hagar, can be read as a divinely ordained renegade – a woman designated by God to mother Ishmael, a “wilde man,” whose “hand shall be against every man” (Gen. 16:12). Hagar is a renegade twice over, first for having out-of-wedlock sex with Abraham, and again for giving birth to the original renegade man of the Judeo-Christian tradition. As with other female renegades, Hagar disdains the accepted restrictions of her position. When she conceives and Sarah remains barren, “her dame was despised in her eyes” (Gen 16:4). For Hagar to lord her pregnancy over Sarah inverts the hierarchical relationship of slave to master.

Even more importantly, Agar is the mother of an entire renegade nation. God promises Agar that “I will make of him a great people” (Gen. 21:17); Muslims trace their origins to the Ishmaelites. On one hand, God’s promise creates an eternal competition between the non-renegade descendants of Isaac – the Israelites, heirs to Abraham’s covenant, and later figured in the New Testament as Christians – and the descendants of Ishmael – the Muslims, or to Christians, the Jews, who have been cast off in the process of Christian supersession. But on the other hand, it is difficult to understand how the renegade nation of the Ishmaelites can be renegades at all, when they were ordained to be such by the ultimate authority. In Genesis, God promises to “make a nation” for Ishmael as well as for Isaac, in recognition that casting Hagar and Ishmael out in favor of Isaac was a “grievous” task for Abraham (Gen. 21:9-13). If it were up to Abraham alone, Hagar and Ishmael would have remained within the Israelite community. Genesis appears to redefine the renegade streak begun with Hagar not as a fall away from authority and right, but as a necessary creation of that very authority. The God of the Hebrew Bible built into the Israelite’s covenant a class of human renegades for the chosen to define themselves against. Hagar’s story makes a woman the point of origin for humanity’s renegade

tendencies, and defines those tendencies as natural, rather than a turn away from the natural order.

Like her biblical namesake, the play's Agar tries to begin a renegade nation with Gallop – their potential offspring would be the products of an adulterous, hybrid Muslim-Christian union. Because they are respective descendants of the Israelites and the Ishmaelites, Gallop and Agar's union could be seen as an attempt to obscure the boundaries between the two branches of Abraham's lineage, returning to the original cohesion Abraham would have preferred until God made him cast out Hagar and Ishmael. In this way, the Agar and Gallop sub-plot highlights how sexual forms of renegadism shade off into religious ones. It comments obliquely on the impact sex can have on religious legitimacy, especially in the highly fraught Christian claim to the Jewish covenant. New Testament retellings of the Hagar story must both support orderly patriarchal inheritance and also explain how non-Jews can supersede Jews and still conform to a linear inheritance structure. In Galatians, Paul asks, "But what sayth the Scripture? Put out the seruant and her sonne: for the sonne of the seruant shall not be heire with the sonne of the free woman" (Galatians 4:30). Paul appears to conform exactly to the story as told in Genesis – a bastard child cannot be heir when a legitimate one exists. But the problem with the Hagar story is that it designates non-Jews as the bastards, and Paul must explain how Christians can take over the promised covenant and not be renegades against their parent religion. Paul overcomes this difficulty by making Hagar and Sarah stand in for the flesh and the spirit, the most common binary of Christian hermeneutics. He explains that "wee are after the maner of Isaac, children of the promes," while Jews, who read incorrectly and are overly concerned with literal, worldly things, are children of the flesh (Galatians 4:23, 4:28). Agar and Gallop's story responds to its biblical undercurrents in a few ways. By making Benwash a cuckolded, non-reproductive Jew,

the sub-plot helps to reinforce the narrative of Christian supersession: there will be no more Jews or Jewish offspring to worry about claiming the Abrahamic covenant for themselves. But the story also stages the backsliding of one of the “children of the promise,” toward a “child of the flesh,” as Gallop gives into Agar’s corrupting influence.²²

Sexual Shame and Re-making the Jew

One effect of pairing Benwash’s business concerns with his wife’s sexual commodification is that the combination further destabilizes his hybrid Jew-renegade identity. Though Benwash “turns Turk” in order to protect against his wife’s sexual licentiousness, in showing her off, the play represents him as solely Jewish again. Though he converted to prevent cuckolding, the specter of cuckolding effectively undoes his conversion, turning him from a foolishly ineffective hybrid Jew-Turk back to a Jew only. The play makes Benwash a Jewish cuckold by mining the overlapping visual typology of cuckolds and Jews, which falls into two categories: horns and disease.

The horn image puts Benwash in the positions of cuckold and demonic Jew at the same time. Benwash rebukes Rabshake for suggesting that the financial profits are worth the risk to his wife and reputation, saying that the “first fury of my horns should light on thee: look to’t – thou are no longer living than my wife is honest” (6.89-90). The horns make Benwash a foolish, impotent cuckold. It is as if the horns have a self-confirming purpose, such that the only way to relieve Benwash’s anxiety is to realize his worst fears. Benwash takes a perverse pride in making himself the monster he fears becoming. When he obtains Gallop’s trousers as evidence of Agar’s adultery, he exonerates Rabshake of responsibility and lays the blame on himself for being

²² It may be only coincidence, but in the Geneva Bible’s Galatians, Hagar is spelled Agar, just like Daborne’s character. Whether Daborne had the biblical Hagar in mind is pure conjecture, but the identical spelling does draw strong links between Benwash’s wife and the biblical bondswoman.

cuckolded, saying “I made myself one, pandered my own horns” (12.6). He even turns the horns into a heraldic badge: “The crest is mine own. I paid well for’t” (12.13).

But because Benwash pairs his horns with the threat of violence, they also activate the darker, more dangerous register of a horned devil. Rabshake laments that he is “like to go post to the Devil for this” when he notices that Agar is already flirting with the pirates (6.146-147). Rabshake’s fear places Benwash squarely in the camp of the “Jew-devil,” a term that Matthew Biberman has coined in order to define a “demonized form of hypermasculinity” that originates with an ancient strain of anti-Semitism, in contrast to the later development of the “Jew-sissy,” more widely recognized by critics today.²³ Horn imagery repeats throughout the scenes that address Benwash’s sexual anxieties and his attempts to prove Agar’s infidelity, taking fuel from a visual record of prints that confirms Jewish monstrosity, frequently with images of horns (Luborsky 449-453). The play transforms what could have been merely a set of stock cuckolding jokes into Jewish devil jokes. The horn symbol both reinforces and nullifies the frightening representation of the Jew-as-Devil that Rabshake invoked when he realized that Benwash would hold him accountable for Agar’s infidelity with his life. Cuckolding undoes the “hypermasculine” portion of the Jew-devil association. In this way, cuckolding becomes more than an embarrassing and emasculating event which any old, powerless, or unaware man can experience; it becomes a strategy for undercutting the Jewish threat.

Rightly nervous to reunite with Agar, given his previous experience of being doubly threatened with death from the fire and from Benwash, and then escaping through the sewer,

²³ Biberman argues that the Jew-devil stereotype dates to Roman times, and was used as a “ceiling for men” that stigmatized hyper-masculine and violent behavior by calling it Jewish (3). Such a ceiling was necessary when the most common values of masculinity were chivalric warrior ones – a mechanism was needed to regulate its potentially violent excesses. The transition from the Jew-Devil to the Jew-Sissy in the cultural imagination parallels the shift in the primary model of masculinity from a chivalric warrior ethos to a merchant ethos – suddenly, Jewishness becomes a “floor” for masculinity, instead of its ceiling. Biberman’s argument expands upon prior scholarly works by Daniel Boyarin and Leslie Fiedler that align Jewishness with effeminacy “simply because both [women and Jews] are powerless outsiders” (52).

Gallop explains to Agar, “What with the fire above, and the ram-headed devil your husband below, I imagined damnation could not be far off” (16.33-34). For having sex with the Muslim wife of the Jewish renegade, Gallop finds himself in a hell-scape overseen by a Jewish devil. The ram-headed Benwash is not only the cuckolded victim of Gallop and Agar’s adulterous sex, but also the authority that meets out punishment to them. Cuckolding converges with demonic Jewishness because Gallop’s epithet for Benwash – “ram-headed devil” – evokes the stereotype that Jews have literal horns, perpetuated by a widespread and longstanding error in biblical translation.²⁴ Under Gallop’s nickname, Benwash becomes the horned Moses, who, as the primary representative of the law of a reprobate religion, gives horns to the Jewish people at large. Benwash, the renegade who is never really allowed to complete his conversion and shed his Jewishness, gains horns that not only represent his cuckolding but also his Jewish reprobation, passed down from Moses.

Gallop continues to develop the association between Jews and horns while also switching to the tactic of minimizing the Jewish threat. Whereas before Benwash was the “ram-headed Devil,” now he is the “golden calf of Horeb” (16.37-38). Though the horns transfer over from one metaphor to the next, Gallop switches Benwash from a Jewish Devil to a false Jewish idol. Instead of calling upon Moses as the originator of the horned Jew myth, Benwash inverts the focus to the target of Moses’ rage, and symbol of the Jewish people’s lack of faith. Though the two horned figures are conceptually opposed in Jewish biblical history, compounded, they add up layers of reprobation which emphasize Benwash’s Jewishness. The combination also forces

²⁴ The Vulgate reports that Moses returned from receiving the ten commandments on Mount Sinai, “*cornuta esset facies,*” with horns on his face (Exodus 34.29 see also 34.35). The Vulgate is based on a mistranslation of the Hebrew in the earlier Greek bible. The Geneva Bible – the Protestant, English bible contemporary with *A Christian Turned Turk*, translates the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew, rendering the verse “the skinne of [Moses’] face shone bright, after that God had talked with him.” Although the translation fixes the textual error, Moses had long been endowed with horns in the popular imagination – for a famous example, see Michelangelo’s famous sculpture, c. 1513-1515.

his Jewishness into uncomfortable proximity with his renegadism. The golden calf, which symbolizes a lack of faith in Jewish law, makes Benwash a renegade within Judaism, undermining the always unstable binary the play tries to maintain between renegades and Jews by wanting Benwash to always be one or the other, but not both at the same time. The golden calf also eases the threat of the Jewish Devil by making the horns belong to a young farm animal instead of a mature ram.²⁵

The golden calf and ram-headed devil work together with Benwash's own description of his cuckolding to make cuckolding seem like a specifically Jewish experience. The horns pick up on established stereotypes and images of Jewishness. But the horns also help to limit the phenomenon of cuckolding strictly to Jews through a vocabulary of disease. Any man can figuratively grow horns as a result of his wife's adultery, but the rhetoric of disease limits the spread of horn-growing when figured as heritable or as non-contagious bodily abnormalities. *A Christian Turned Turk* naturalizes the phenomenon of cuckolding, so that it is not just a state a man acquires because of the actions of his wife, but an inner state of illness that the surrounding situation responds to by matching it. The horns make Benwash's body a hybrid, mutant thing, just as he chose to become an ideological mutant by converting to Islam. In fact, the horns make him more of a hybrid than his conversion does, because the play goes to great lengths to ignore his conversion and therefore his ideological hybridity. Instead, it displaces that same hybridity onto his body. Benwash himself sees his cuckolding as an illness: he tells Rabshake, "Should I suspect myself to have that disease, I would run mad..." (6.88). But Benwash says the mere suspicion of the disease would make him insane, so it is unclear if he sees cuckolding as a mental or physical illness (or both). His words beg the question of whether the disease is the

²⁵ "Calf" was also slang for a foolish person. OED, "calf n¹, 1C"

state of having been cuckolded, or the mentally crazed state produced by suspicion and anticipation of being cuckolded.

Rabshake adopts the same language of disease later on, once he and Benwash have discovered evidence of Agar's tryst with Gallop, saying "Methinks she hath done you a great pleasure, rid you of your disease, jealousy. Now you need fear no more: you are in possession on't; your doubts are at an end" (12.22-24). Rabshake changes the disease from the bodily one of a cuckold's horns to the mental one of jealous insanity. So the play develops not just one, but three representations of the link between cuckolding and Jewishness: 1) Jewish devils have horns, making cuckolds Jewish via the physical similarity; 2) Benwash conflates the mental and physical definitions of cuckolding, making it a disease of the mind and body both; and 3) Rabshake insists jealousy, and not the cuckold's horns, is the disease. Each articulation shifts the alignment between Jewishness and cuckolding. If the first interpretation is correct, then cuckolding is the inevitable experience that goes along with a Jewish physical mutation. Devil/cuckold horns single out Jews. However, if Benwash is correct, then cuckolding and Jewishness are open to all, as they are states of mind just as much as they are states of the Jewish body. And finally, if Rabshake is correct, then the feeling of jealousy is the true "Jewish" disease, and not the physical state of having horns. If Agar rids Benwash of his jealousy by providing conclusive evidence of her infidelity, then using Rabshake's logic, Benwash is no longer Jewish. On the other hand, with the bodily metaphor still in play, then upon cuckolding, Benwash becomes more, not less, Jewish, having fulfilled the promise of his Jewish horns. The latter two options reconfigure the disease as a communicable one, something that can render all who catch it Jewish.

Jewishness and Policing Renegade Sex

The “Jewishness” of cuckolding elucidates *A Christian Turned Turk*’s multifaceted use of Benwash as an uncomfortably hybrid Jew-renegade and as a tool to punish renegades, especially for sexual transgressions. Benwash facilitates what I term “renegade sexualities,” although he also fights against his own participation in them. Renegade sexuality means that certain sexual behaviors can have renegade-like qualities. Renegade sexualities are ones that disavow the importance of limiting sexual interaction within marriages, religions, and ethnic groups, in the same way that a renegade rejects the constraints of religious and national allegiances. In response to Benwash proudly showing off Agar to give his clients “free and open entertainment,” Gallop muses, “it seems this Jew keeps a bawdy house” (6.63), reaffirming that using Agar’s beauty to attract business is tantamount to prostitution – an illicit, and therefore renegade, form of sex. Benwash is aware that his renegade business allows renegade sex to flourish, and that he is powerless to stop it. He opines that Rabshake, the appointed guardian of Agar’s chastity, “would have me a cuckold by law forsooth, by statute law,” meaning that Rabshake will only intervene once he has the legally-mandated visual proof necessary to prosecute adultery in the courts, which in turn means that the adultery must happen, not be prevented (6.380). In order to fight against the renegade sexual desires of his wife, Benwash must first allow them to occur unimpeded. Agar’s and Gallop’s sexual union is an interreligious, international, inter-ethnic, and interracial one. Furthermore, Gallop is a pirate, a renegade man having sex with a renegade woman (renegade because she controls her own sexual choices). Indirectly, Benwash also facilitates Ward’s renegade sexual passion for Voada by offering his house as the location of Ward’s seduction, and colluding with Crosman and the Governor to deploy Voada as a strategy to convince Ward to convert. Ward’s lust for Voada is the most

literal renegade sexuality of all the potential and actual couplings in the play; his desire is the ultimate cause of his choice to “turn Turk.”

But even as Benwash facilitates renegade sex against his will, he also halts reproduction, both renegade and Jewish. The distinction between sex and actual reproduction is a crucial one, for while *A Christian Turned Turk* flirts with renegade sexualities and even allows their expression, it stops short of allowing them to make a lasting impact. Though a renegade himself, Benwash functions as a tool of the anti-renegade thrust of the play. He figures his revenge on Agar and Gallop in terms of terminating reproduction: “I will make them abortives, man, smother them in the womb” (16.13). He envisions himself as a cutter-off of adulterous reproduction who makes certain that no miscegenation, or interracial and interreligious reproduction, can occur. Benwash far exceeds his supposed focus on preventing his wife’s potential miscegenated reproduction; his language in fact implicates all of humanity in a fallen state of renegade sexuality and miscegenation. He asks Rabshake, “Is this child of Adam coming yet? He that will eat of the forbidden fruit though he lose Paradise for it?” (16.3-4). Admittedly, Benwash means Gallop, who reaches for “forbidden fruit” in trying to have sex with a married woman. However, he also rewrites the story of the fall, replacing the original sin of disobedience with adultery. By calling Gallop a “child of Adam,” Benwash rewinds biblical history back to the common ancestors of all humanity, before Christians, Jews, and Muslims existed and therefore before racial and religious divisions existed to make renegade sexuality possible. Benwash recalls a time that predates all institutions that regulate marriage; his reference to Adam makes all sex acts renegade ones because they are uncategorized.

Rabshake tries to limit the reach of Benwash’s murderous rage for “abortives.” He tentatively ventures in response, “Though you lop the branches, you will preserve the tree to bear

more fruit, I hope – your wife sir” (16.14-15). Rabshake hopes that the abortives extend only to Agar’s imagined offspring, the branches, but that by sparing her life the possibility of future children remain. Framing his concern for Agar’s life with the image of a tree and its cut off branches, Rabshake’s language invokes another tree concerned with inheritance and reproduction: the Pauline tree with the newly engrafted wild branches that represents the supersessionary relationship of Christianity to Judaism. Although Rabshake’s plea to Benwash is not a theological one, it connects to Paul’s supersessionist theology by bringing up the problem of Jewish inheritance, an inheritance which Benwash works violently to eliminate. Rabshake’s connection to the Pauline tree is an oblique one, but it reveals the degree to which the cultural anxieties about renegades and Jews are really anxieties about inheritance, identities, and who gets to claim lineages.

The strong value placed on familial or genetic inheritance causes problems for Christianity, a religion that justifies its existence through God’s unmerited election. Paul explains, through the metaphor of the olive tree, the gentiles’ claim to the lineage of Abraham:

For if the first fruite bee holy, the lumpe is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches bee broken off, and thou being a wilde oliue tree wert graffed in amongst them...Boast not against the branches: but if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might bee graffed in. Well: because of vnbeliefe they were broken off, and thou standest by fayth. Be not high minded, but feare. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heede least hee also spare not thee...And they also, if they bide not still in vnbeliefe, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graffe them in againe. For if thou wert cut out of the Oliue tree which is

wilde by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good Oliue tree: how much more shall these which be the naturall branches, bee graffed into their owne Oliue tree? (Romans 11.16-24)

According to Paul, Christian gentiles are remote from the source of the Abrahamic covenant: not only are they the branches, or extremities of the tree, they are the branches that are “wilde by nature,” and “grafted in” as a replacement for the broken original branches – the Jews. The engrafting of the wild branches uses horticultural hybridization as a metaphor to justify Christianity’s tenuous claim to be the true successors to Judaism. Because grafting is done to produce better fruit, Christians could easily be tempted to see their supersession as a matter of deserts – they are the better branches. But Paul warns against such prideful faith in Christian superiority when he orders his Roman listeners to “Boast not against the branches” because God could choose at any moment to “graffe them [the “natural branches,” or Jews] in againe.” Paul reminds his listeners that they are elected by God’s choice, and not their own merit. In so doing, Paul places Christians in a tenuous position – their belief in God’s grace prohibits believing in merit, but because they are not a part of the original “good Olive tree,” it can only be by merit, or by God’s inscrutable will, that they can possibly claim to take over Abraham’s inheritance. Paul establishes that the Jews’ relationship to the covenant is genetic, and in so doing excludes gentiles from it. His remedy requires Christians to be seen in a fundamentally hybrid light – they become intrinsic renegades. Christianity willfully rejects the genetic restrictions of Judaism; by overturning the genetic covenant, Christianity is by definition a renegade religion. From a certain angle, the Christian narrative of unmerited, non-genetic inheritance can make God himself appear to have renegade qualities, because his selection of the gentiles over the Jews is totally capricious.

For Rabshake, the tree metaphor is not necessarily concerned with theological inheritance, but it does reflect on biological inheritance, which has a lot to do with controlling and categorizing approved and renegade sexualities. “Lopping the branches” means killing Agar’s and Gallop’s potential offspring, whom Benwash intends to “smother in the womb.” Any such children would be the miscegenated offspring of renegades – a hybrid combination of Turk and (nominal) Christian. Paul warns Christians that God could cut off the new branches that were “grafted contrary to nature;” likewise, Benwash becomes a preserver of Jewish heritage by eliminating unnatural hybrid reproduction that threatens to take over the Jewish line. But when Rabshake asks if Benwash will “preserve the tree [Agar] to produce more fruit,” Benwash replies, “She shall down too” (16.16). With the decision to murder Agar, Benwash changes instantly from a preserver of a pure and unhybridized Jewish heritage to a destroyer of Jewishness, killing his own wife who could bear him children. He eliminates all possibility of Jewish reproduction in the play.²⁶

Though Benwash comes across as cruel and excessive, it turns out that murdering Agar is also necessary. In Rabshake’s appropriation of Paul’s tree metaphor, the tree is no longer the pure stock of Abraham; rather, it is a non-Jewish woman. There is no originary Judaism at the root of Rabshake’s tree, as there is for Paul. On the one hand, this absence of founding Judaism eliminates the anxiety about Christian legitimacy that Paul faces, but on the other hand, the entire tree must be uprooted, and not just a few branches lopped off, because the descendants of a non-Jewish woman can never be Jewish, and the children of her union with a Jewish (and renegade) man would also be products of hybridized, miscegenated, renegade sex. Rabshake’s

²⁶ It should be said that the potential for Jewish reproduction never exists in *A Christian Turned Turk* in the first place, because Agar is Muslim, and Jewishness is traced through the mother. However, English awareness of matrilineal descent is unclear at best: remember that in *The Merchant of Venice*, Launcelot Gobbo does away with Jessica’s Jewishness by hoping that her mother, Leah, cuckolded Shylock. Implicitly, Launcelot must believe Jessica to get her Jewishness from her Shylock, if Leah’s infidelity is all it would take to undo it.

plea to spare the tree instead makes Benwash and audiences aware that there is nothing Jewish about the tree, and so there is nothing for Benwash to do but uproot it and kill Agar. No original and untainted Jewishness exists to be uncovered under the layers of renegadism. Instead, there is nothing but renegadism, no departure point against which non-renegades define themselves. Like the turtles in the cosmological infinite regress joke, it is just renegades all the way down.

Rabshake reframes Paul's tree grafting metaphor to imply that Christians are renegades by being "wild branches" that are interlopers among the true original branches, even though the "true" branches are themselves suspect. So, though the renegade Jewish Benwash starts his career as a murderous principle of destruction who conveniently helps to rid *A Christian Turned Turk* of hereditary lines that Christian English audiences dislike (Jews, and miscegenated racial hybrids), he ends it by inadvertently implicating Christians in exactly such mutant, renegade hybridity. The play may not allow the possibility of a generative future for Jews or renegades, but it includes Christians among those for whom the future looks empty. Total self-focus and self-interest, of Christians, Jews, and renegades alike, leads to total self-annihilation. By so intently trying to force Benwash to maintain elements of his Jewishness over and against his claims of conversion to a renegade state, *A Christian Turned Turk* attempts to differentiate strongly between Jewishness and renegade identities. The final scene, however, reunites the two, conjoining Jewishness and renegadism under a principle of self-promotion that solipsistically leads to destruction.

Conclusion

I'd like to conclude by briefly describing why this project is important to me, in ways that include, but also reach beyond, the scholarly ones. Ultimately, and perhaps despite its commercial focus, my project has an ethical dimension that contributes to the relevance of the humanities in and beyond the academy. I say "despite" in recognition of the fact that our current cultural climate so unquestioningly separates out commercial, economic, and financial activities from the people who produce them, benefit from them, or suffer from them. In a world where politicians frequently state that the purpose of education is job training rather than developing habits of critical thought, the idea that ethical, moral, and human interests could be intimately bound up with commercial ones does not go without saying.

Assessing the intellectual and affective impact of early modern English ideas about Jews on English literary production necessitates evaluating the ethics of capitalism and definitions of who counts as insiders and outsiders, self and other. It may also provide a way of understanding the social and psychological sources of animus and discrimination. By narrowing my study of representations of marginalized peoples to early modern Jews, I underscore the culturally and historically contingent (and often erroneous) nature of what dominant groups assume to be knowledge of minority groups, and the self-confirming purposes such knowledge serves them. Today, in most places in the United States, Jews are generally no longer the target of such animus, and have not been for some time. But the contrast between past and current experiences of Jews is exactly the point: the contrast enables us to see the contextually-dependent nature of minority stigmatization, and how it is wholly unmerited by its victims. I take a stand against the all-too-common easy condescension toward history that allows us to see stereotyping and discrimination as phenomena we have transcended. Such views estrange audiences from the

atrocities of the past and absolve them of the ethical responsibility to question their own modes of thought and behavior in the present.

The past year alone has attested all too vividly and horribly to the violence, both literal and figurative, done to racial, religious, and sexual minorities at the hands of dominant groups. I will not even pretend to believe that this dissertation is significant enough to have some impact in remedying such injustices in the world. But I hope it can at least stand as a useful inquiry into the ways literature can both record such injustices, and encode resistance to them.

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