

HOWARD JACOBSON'S *SHYLOCK IS MY NAME*, A POSTMODERN INTERTEXTUAL BOND WITH *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explore the complex interrelations between William Shakespeare's most controversial play, The Merchant of Venice (1623) and Howard Jacobson's postmodern reinterpretation, Shylock Is My Name (2016). The hallmark of Renaissance, intertextuality has become one of the most significant features of postmodernism, revealing that Shakespeare's works offer one version of an already existing story and not the final literary product. Jacobson's novel illustrates the reconsideration and transposition of ideas presented by the Shakespearean text into new literary forms in accordance with new literary and cultural practices. In an attempt to supply answers, the relational analysis of the texts in this study, raises even more questions and suggests further reflection and research.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Jacobson, Merchant of Venice, Shylock Is My Name, intertextuality

Introduction

The final version of the *The Merchant of Venice* was published in the First Folio in 1623 and has been regarded as one of Shakespeare's most valuable texts, a monumental discourse on the nature of emotions, racial and social encounters. Shakespeare wrote the play several years after Christopher Marlowe's well-acclaimed *Jew of Malta* (1580), which portrays a villain with utterly grotesque particularities. The Bard's depiction of the Jew has undergone different interpretations over the years, revealing either a comic, contemptible or tragic character, respectively. The audience has always been so dazzled by the colossal character of Shylock, that theatrical directors and writers all around the globe have constantly returned to Shakespeare's play to offer the most surprising stage performances and novelistic reinterpretations.

Howard Jacobson, the British dark comedy virtuoso, accepted the provocative invitation formulated by the Hogarth Press to retell the story of the most intriguing and unforgettable Jewish character in world literature. Jacobson's novel, *Shylock Is My Name*, published in 2016, enables Shakespeare's Jewish money-lender to speak for himself in the writer's distinctive style and versatility. What makes the novel credible and actual, is precisely the survival of the fervent issues in the source-text in our contemporary society. In this sense, Jacobson accomplishes a critique of present-day anti-Semitism in England and not only, delicately conveying his disbelief in the reformation of human values. The unique writing style incorporating humour, wit and satire, brought Howard Jacobson the well-deserved Jewish Quarterly Literary Prize for Fiction in 2000 and the 2010 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the literary commission taken up by Jacobson within the Hogarth Series was an immediate success. The writer offers a postmodern retelling of one of Shakespeare's problem plays that both entertains and baffles the public, enhancing the appreciation of the source-text.

Exploring intertextuality in *Shylock Is My Name* and *The Merchant of Venice*

Jacobson's narrativization is organized around twenty-three chapters and a culminating Act Five which reiterates the novel's function as a transformation of a dramatic text. The author resorts to a structural segmentation of each chapter into distinct fragments, to preserve the configuration of an Elizabethan play, traditionally divided into acts and scenes. The quotation employed by the novelist at the beginning of his revision announces the intertextual rapport with the Shakespearean hypotext and aims to provide explicit reference to Jacobson's choice of title:

“PORTIA: Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?

DUKE: Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth.

PORTIA: Is your name Shylock?

SHYLOCK: Shylock is my name.” (4.1.173-176)

While in Shakespeare's play, Antonio is the Venetian merchant of the title, more of a secondary protagonist, who serves as Shylock's commercial competitor and not only, Jacobson wishes to clear the confusion and situates Shylock unequivocally at the core of his novel. However, what Jacobson is less straightforward about, at first glance, will later exhibit a singular and unexpected assimilation of Shylock's character into his contemporary literary work.

It goes without saying that updating the Shakespearean text inevitably entails the naturalization of the setting and characters the postmodern reader can easily relate to. Jacobson has chosen present-day South Manchester as an affluent setting that could duplicate the wealthy city-state of Venice and Portia's estate in Belmont. The epicentre of Renaissance trade becomes the residential Golden Triangle, the morally degraded headquarters of footballers and pop stars. The novelist interweaves his updated and naturalized setting with occasional references to the Venice of today, which loses its significance in the hypotext. Genette illustrates the role of diegetic transposition or transdiegetization to relocate the historical-geographical setting that frames the plot in a story: “[...] an action can be transposed from one period to another, or from one location to another, or both” (1997: 296). Furthermore, the spatiotemporal transformations determine a reconfiguration of the plot and the identity and behaviour of the characters. Jacobson has imagined these components of his reinterpretation in a rapport of plausible compatibility which could address the expectations of a new audience.

The protagonists of the Bard's play are easily identifiable in Jacobson's hypertext due to their pattern of behaviour. While the characters of Shylock, Leah and Jessica preserve their original names, revealing in Genette's view “an almost infallible sign of diegetic faithfulness” (1997: 297), the identity of other characters is construed through various artifices. The extraneous protagonists inevitably trigger an increase in the number of episodes from the novel and the emphasis on the less dramatic aspects in the hypotext, whereas the removal of minor characters may indicate the author's subjective approach to the position of the dramatis personae in the play. The rich British Jewish art collector and philanthropist, Simon Strulovitch, takes on the role of Shylock in the hypotext, displaying a doubling of the protagonist for a more intense dramatic effect on

the audience. His daughter is the young and rebellious Beatrice, who performs the functions of both Jessica and Nerissa. Gratian Howsome, Beatrice's boyfriend, a simple-minded footballer, represents Gratiano and Lorenzo's roles in the play. Shakespeare's merchant, Antonio, has become D'Anton, a dealer and importer of art objects. Barnaby or Barney is undoubtedly Bassanio. Livia Plurabelle Cleopatra A Thing Of Beauty Is A Joy Forever Christine Shallcross, in short Plurabelle or Plury, a wealthy heiress as eccentric and ostentatious as her name, is Portia's counterpart. The novelist adds the characters of Ophelia-Jane, Strulovitch's first non-Jewish wife and Kay Kominsky, his physically incapacitated second wife, who contribute to the complex portrayal of the main protagonist.

The relocation of *The Merchant of Venice* into modern times cannot be performed without altering the plot in the hypotext. Jacobson accomplishes an elaborate pragmatic transposition, in Genette's terms, which has been the site of both praise and criticism. His revision sets Simon Strulovitch among prejudiced and snobbish Englishmen in a bountiful Cheshire neighbourhood. Defied by his young daughter Beatrice's indecent behaviour, and unable to share parental responsibilities with his wife, Kay, Strulovitch finds comfort in his new friend, Shylock's, companionship. They soon discover that their lives are similar and engage in endless conversations about stubborn daughters, absent wives, Jewish history, immutable Gentiles and, naturally, the pound of flesh. Plurabelle, the wealthy heiress and reality show hostess, meets D'Anton who becomes her indispensable steward and confessor. They encourage Beatrice, Plury's intimate friend, to develop a romantic relationship with Gratian Howsome, D'Anton's protégé, who once performed the Nazi salute on the field. Beatrice introduces her boyfriend to her father who does not find Gratian dislikeable but insists that his daughter should marry a Jew and asks Gratian to undergo circumcision. Plurabelle falls in love with Barnaby who passes her tests and proves himself a worthy suitor. D'Anton advises Barney to acquire an impressive present for Plury as a token of his love. They rush to an art gallery to buy Solomon Joseph Solomon's study "Love's First Lesson", only to learn that it has already been successfully auctioned by Strulovitch. D'Anton writes Strulovitch a touching letter, asking him to resell the painting in the name of love. Having seen Gratian with D'Anton at a restaurant, Strulovitch imagines that the painting is for Beatrice and he loathes the allusion. Beatrice and Gratian flee to Venice where the young woman gradually feels disappointed with her choice. Strulovitch agrees to offer D'Anton the study in exchange for his daughter's return. As D'Anton acts as a warrant for Gratian, he will get circumcised in the footballer's place if the lovers do not return within a fortnight. The long-awaited event is broadcast on Plury's show. D'Anton leaves for a clinic and soon the surgeon announces the participants that he could not perform the procedure as the patient had already been circumcised, like most infants living in hot countries. Strulovitch feeling defeated and ashamed, gives D'Anton the study and learns that Beatrice had returned home safe.

The unexpected twists in the plot furnish a good deal of fun and suspense, exposing the writer's fresh and hilarious style which colours his fiction. It can be argued that Jacobson's novel can be interpreted as a sequel to Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*

from two main perspectives. Firstly, the postmodern author's intention is to return to a previous successful literary work that may ensure further attention, "a desire to capitalize on a first or even a second success" (Genette, 1997: 206). Secondly, the novel takes the hypotext beyond the original ending, without necessarily bringing it to a categorical resolution, as in the case of a continuation.

Shakespeare has conferred his Shylock a greater complexity than Marlowe, whose Barabbas is an unequivocal villain driven by brutal anger and unable to inspire any sympathy: "Shylock is a very different figure from Barabas, who degenerates into a grotesque Machiavellian monster" (Tanner, 2010: 117). Stage productions during the Elizabethan Age portrayed Shylock as a less likable character than modern performances. The public's attitude towards Shakespeare's Jew has been constantly revised, amended and refined in four hundred years of controversial debate. The comic Elizabethan Jew in an England that had banished all Jews during the reign of Edward I, three centuries before, is visibly different from the post-Holocaust Jew and the tragic contemporary figure. Jacobson has preserved the ambivalence and ambiguity which stem from the reading of Shakespeare's play, inviting his audience to reflect upon long-standing social and religious issues. Given the original protagonist's elaborateness, the postmodern novelist has re-represented Shylock in two directions: as the sixteenth-century Shylock and the present-day Simon Strulovitch, openly announcing the intertextual bond with the play. With so many stories unfolded simultaneously in the novel, Shylock emerges as a secondary character with a pivotal role in the plot.

In the hypotext Shylock stands for all the negative traits of a typical usurer, conforming to a medieval Jewish stereotype. His greed and cruelty oppose the virtuous Christian merchant, whose activities are regarded as noble and courteous. Garber observes that Shylock's villainy is deeply rooted in his choices and preferences which reveal a rejection of a worldly life infused with music, dance and joy: "Shylock prefers a house shut off against the world of comedy and love, a house of repression and the narrowest kind of law" (2005: 410). Jacobson reiterates the protagonist's bitterness and reluctance to participate actively in the Venetian world and creates two characters that seem to share common beliefs. Both Shylock and Strulovitch are overprotective fathers who cannot be supported by their wives in their endeavour to raise their daughters. Both have been betrayed by their daughters: Jessica has run away with a Christian and bought a monkey to spite her father and Beatrice started dating a footballer who gave a Nazi salute in front of his fans. We learn that Strulovitch has been tailing his daughter since she was thirteen, dragging her out of parties and even hurting her male companions: "One night he followed her to Levenshulme – a suburb no daughter of his should have been seen dead in – kicked down the door of a council flat and began throttling the first person he encountered inside" (2016: 83). Although Shakespeare guided his audience towards feeling sympathy for Antonio, the respected Christian merchant, Jacobson redirects his readers' compassion towards Shylock and Simon Strulovitch, accomplishing a revaluation of the protagonist in the source text. Shakespeare's Shylock possesses comic traits: he is old, rich and avaricious, a character prone to ridicule and insults. Moreover, his profession brings forth one of the worst

reputations. Shylocks loathes Christians and shows no reserve about expressing his aversions. During the play, Shylock repeatedly complains and curses, revealing the long grudges he bears against Christians.

Jacobson seeks to highlight the moral parameters which make Shylock appear likable and humane. The character's loyalty to the memory of his wife, Leah, is evidenced by Shylock's daily visits to her grave, where he has his coffee and breakfast, reads to her and shares the news. The only secret Shylock keeps from Leah is Jessica's departure. Strulovitch reveals the same touching devotion to his wife, Kay, who has been confined to bed for many years. Throughout the hypotext, Shylock remains true to his religion and culture, displaying firmness and dignity at all times. Jacobson takes the Shakespearean protagonist into the present day and devises captivating conversations with Strulovitch who is intrigued to learn about Shylock's version of the story. The fascinating dialogues which ponder the Gentiles' attitude towards Jewish people lie at the heart of the novel.

Simon Strulovitch's drama is fuelled by a tormenting over-analysis which may indicate that the character is suffering from the persecution complex: "the real madman was the person who believed himself to be hated" (2016: 119). He has destroyed his marriage to Kay due to his "inflamed Jewishness" (2016: 139) or "Judaelunacy" (2016: 140), as she liked to call it. His first wife, Ophelia-Jane, a Christian rejected by Strulovitch's father, possessed completely different views from her husband, particularly concerning circumcision. Simon remembers children making fun of his name at school, "Strudelbum." The author does not fail to address Shakespeare's inference that Shylock's position in society is construed by his antagonists: "After so many years of being told what Gentiles see when they look at us it's hardly a surprise that we end up seeing something similar. That's how vilification works. The victim ingests the views of his tormentor. *If that's how I look, that's what I must be*" (2016: 68). Even Beatrice accuses her father of wishing a Jewish man for her and Strulovitch has no alternative but to admit it to himself, despite acknowledging the cordial relations he has with many non-Jew acquaintances. One cannot deny the evident Oedipal complex which surfaces from the father-daughter bond. More significantly, Strulovitch is tortured by the same dilemma, whether Shylock would have taken the pound of flesh from Antonio or not. At the opposite end, Shylock wishes they hadn't stopped him so that he might have found out if he could have taken Antonio's heart: "But I can tell you how it is to be brought to the threshold of murder and to wish, with every part of oneself that ministers to resolution, to cross over" (2016: 182).

In Jacobson's novel, D'Anton lacks the complexity of his Shakespearean counterpart, which makes him a less convincing antagonist. The playwright clearly defines Antonio as a noble and virtuous Christian merchant, a model of friendship and loyalty, in short, the antithesis of Shylock, the usurer. Although the play highlights the distinction between merchant and usurer, Antonio and Shylock are representatives of the same economic phenomenon, more alike than the reader would care to imagine. Portia alludes to this similarity in the trial scene, at the end of the play, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.173), indicating that Antonio's hatred might be triggered by a hidden fear regarding his identity and profession, as Rosenshield

observes: “an overreaction betraying Antonio’s subconscious, or more probably unconscious, fears about himself and his profession, about who he is and what he is” (2008: 232). Indeed, D’Anton and Simon Strulovitch’s occupational activities revolve around objects of art, but only the former enjoys the benefits of economic enterprise. Strulovitch detaches from his counterpart’s capitalist and competitive demeanour, embodying a benefactor who has renounced the pursuit of worldly wealth.

In the opening scenes of *The Merchant of Venice*, we find the unhappy and melancholic Antonio, “very Hamlet-ish” (Tanner, 2010: 118), unable to ascertain the cause of his sadness: “In sooth, I know not why I am so sad” (1.1.1). He is rich and revered by all his Christian acquaintances, and yet his life is empty and he suffers from melancholy until the end of the play. D’Anton is also introduced by Jacobson as an unhappy and melancholic man who attends sadness classes in Wilmslow, where Plury notices him “sitting somewhere apart and starring ahead of him as though the sorrows of ordinary mortals were not to be compared to his” (2016: 25). While Antonio’s melancholy might have originated in a passion for Bassanio, Jacobson does not neglect the implicit homoerotic relationship in the play and performs a similar artifice, hinting at D’Anton’s uncertain heterosexuality: “and close up seemed to her to be sad because he was homosexual (or at least not definitely heterosexual)” (2016: 25).

The source text unveils an utterly hostile Christian merchant who has repeatedly humiliated Shylock by basting him, spitting in his face and on his clothes and kicking him. Although the postmodern merchant is depicted by Jacobson as less physically and verbally violent, Strulovitch has personal reasons for his adversity towards D’Anton. The philanthropist’s project of turning his late parents’ Jacobean house into a gallery of British Jewish art in North Cheshire has been vehemently opposed by D’Anton, a member of the city council. Jacobson skilfully reinterpreted Shylock’s humiliation as an unpardonable offence to the name of Strulovitch’s parents, performing a transmotivation which is more plausible in the contemporary setting. Genette argues that transmotivation occurs when the motivation in the hypotext is substituted by a new, more emotional or intrinsic motivation, very often revealing a hidden piece on the chess board: “the removal of one piece opens the field for another piece hitherto concealed” (1997: 330). An esteemed university lecturer who interacts with art connoisseurs from all over the world, a passionate advocate of American Indians and Aborigines, D’Anton hides strong anti-Semitic views in his closet.

It appears at first that the young Portia, like many female protagonists in Shakespeare’s plays, is unable to manipulate the events around her as she must follow her dead father’s wish. Still, Portia is portrayed in the position of a ruler over Belmont, a possible allusion to the figure of Queen Elizabeth (Garber, 2005: 395), whose long line of suitors came from all four corners of the world. But there is more to Portia than meets the eye, her virtues, eloquence and wit constitute her real riches. Portia is presented as a melancholic figure at the beginning of the play, her sadness deriving from her self-sufficient persona who has yet to get acquainted with human relationships and leave her own casket: “I am lock’d in one of them” (3.2.40).

In Jacobson's hypertext, the character of Portia undergoes a severe devaluation action, almost burlesque, unveiling the writer's attempt to offer his reader a convincing 21st century anti-heroine. Plurabelle Shallcross, one of the wealthiest residents in the Golden Triangle, does what every rich and independent young woman would do nowadays in a decadent society: she has massive cosmetic surgery, travels, meditates and explores her sexuality and tries her hand at various occupations. Eventually, Plury opens a restaurant, Utopia, where she displays her guests' disputes on the table during her successful TV series, "The Kitchen Counsellor." Jacobson's depiction of Plurabelle is merciless and farcical, deriding the contemporary distasteful standards of female beauty: "highly photogenic in the gamin style, with a retroussé nose, a Daisy Duck mouth, golden tresses, a throaty voice that brought to mind a bee buzzing in a window pane in late summer, and a Scandinavian weather girl's figure" (2016: 23). She clearly lacks the wit, eloquence and grace which ennobled the character of Portia in the hypotext. Furthermore, the novelist exaggerates Portia's sense of melodrama. Not surprisingly, Plury seems to have inherited "the sadness gene" (2016: 21) from her father, along with a personal fortune of twenty million pounds, a well-grounded reason to enrol to sadness classes for rich people. As Anténe indicates, the revaluation of Shylock's character requires a less sympathetic portrayal of his antagonists, which is accomplished by the writer's creative use of satire: "Jacobson opts out for satire, limiting the non-Jewish characters' complexity and highlighting their faults such as shallowness and vanity" (2018: 19).

The concept of Otherness in Shakespeare's play encompasses more than the visible dichotomy between Christian and Jew, as exemplified by Portia's prejudiced attitude towards her non-English suitors. The Prince of Morocco, a Moor and a Muslim, makes an unworthy suitor even before he chooses the golden casket: "if he have the condition/ of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had/ rather he should shrive me than wive me" (1.2.42-44). Not even the Prince of Aragon, Portia's second suitor, is regarded as an eligible husband for the simple reason that he is Spanish and Catholic. This takes the notion of Otherness on a dangerous path, revealing a more subtle crisis of dissimilarity than the national stereotypes represented by the pinching Scottish dandies or the intoxicated Germans. In Jacobson's text, Plurabelle does not hesitate to express a mix of superiority and compassion with regard to the victimization of tribespeople and Aborigines who appear sad and hardly modern on the Discovery Channel. Plury's superficial assessment is further augmented by her stereotypical pun, which clearly situates Jewish people as the Other in relation to Christians: "'So they don't count, is that what you're saying?' [...] 'Oh yes they do,' she laughed. 'That's *all* they do. They just sit and count... and count... and count...'" (2016: 28). But D'Anton highlights a major disparity between the tribesmen's sadness which results from their exploitation by white people and the Jews' self-inflicted sadness derived from a long tradition of extreme anguish: "I think of it as a political sadness. The glue of self-pity is very strong. As is emotional blackmail." (2016: 28) Consequently, D'Anton's anti-Semitic stand may well equal his Shakespearean counterpart's aggressive tirade, which definitely labels D'Anton as Strulovitch's main antagonist.

Bassanio's role in *The Merchant of Venice* is revised by Jacobson who offers a vague sketch of his character, Barnaby, merely to carry out the twists in the plot. He clearly lacks Bassanio's motivation in the hypotext, which alludes to Jason's heroic quest of the golden fleece. Unlike Plury's suitors, Barnaby accidentally enters the young heiress' game and makes the right choice. Shakespeare's memorable scene of the three caskets has been radically reinterpreted by the postmodern author to reflect a compelling contemporary game of choice. Jacobson simplifies the plot, imagining that Plurabelle ignores her late father's test and devises her own trials. At a swingers' party, Plury makes her entrance in a Formula One driver's suit and throws the keys of her three cars into an ice bucket. As expected, men fight over the keys of the Porsche Carrera and the BMW but no one is interested in the less ostentatious Volkswagen Beetle. This rather burlesque rendering of a significant scene in the play, points to Jacobson's critique of the materialistic culture of today's world.

While Barnaby's portrayal is briefly contoured by the novelist, Gratan Howsome may have functioned as Strulovitch's main antagonist, had his anti-Semitic views been more compelling. D'Anton's protégé and Beatrice's boyfriend, Gratan fulfils both Gratiano and Lorenzo's role in the hypotext. His lack of refinement and abruptness associates him with Gratiano's bawdiness of language, whereas the mockery of the Jewish characters in the play and the secret escape to Venice with Beatrice indicates a reminiscence of Lorenzo. The "play's chief bawdy quibbler," as Garber labels him (2005: 421), Gratiano is reinterpreted by Jacobson to suggest raw sexuality but without the arresting forcefulness of speech that could satisfy Beatrice's expectations: "he appears on television quizzes in the company of comedians, laughs like a ninny at their jokes, makes none of his own, and advertises underwear and trainers" (2016: 109). Also, the fact that Gratiano doesn't read much, makes him a less hostile opponent due to his presumed theological illiteracy.

A mediocre footballer who unwittingly performed a Nazi gesture on the field and an admirer of Jewish women, Gratan becomes the perfect instrument of Strulovitch's revenge. If we consider Gratiano's suggestion that Jessica should convert to Christianity, we observe Jacobson's original reversal of roles which places Gratan under similar circumstances. As Bovilsky notes, "Amid the play's conflicts and contests between religions, ethnicities, and genders, Gratiano seems to support a pragmatically expansive and flexible model of self-fashioning through conversion" (2010: 48). The tables have now turned: Gratan must undergo circumcision and convert to Judaism if he wishes to marry Beatrice, as Strulovitch has reclaimed the pound of flesh. The "Gentile" is to become a Jew and embrace the stigma represented by his new identity. Thus, Jacobson brings to light the veiled presence of circumcision and its implications in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Strulovitch feels that the Gentiles' prejudiced attitude towards Jews can be traced back to circumcision, a practice that has been feeding the Christians' sexual imagination for centuries: "It's a mix of ignorance and dread that goes back to circumcision. If we would do that to ourselves, what might we not do to them?" (2016: 69). And it is circumcision that becomes the condition of the postmodern contract between

Strulovitch and D'Anton, in a quite unusual twist, allowing for a literal intertextual relationship with the hypotext: "*Let my person stand as surety for Gratian's return within a fortnight.' [...] 'If he is not back to face his punishment by then, take from me what you would take from him.'*" (2016: 225). D'Anton's humiliation would certainly quench Strulovitch's thirst for revenge. Despite the readers' anticipations, who might favour a reversal of the denouement, the Jew is deceived again, with his own means. There is no monumental trial scene, ingenious arbitration of the case or dramatic turns. Jacobson has simplified the plot, excising probably one of the most memorable scenes in English literature.

The British novelist employs several quotations from the play to introduce Strulovitch's demands: "what news on the Rialto?" (3.1.1); "I am right loath to go" (2.5.16); "You call'd me dog ..." (1.3.129); "I am as like to call thee so again..." (1.3.131); "But since I am a dog, beware my fangs" (3.3.7); "I neither lend nor borrow/By taking nor by giving of excess" (1.3.62-63); "O father Abram, what these Christians are" (1.3.161). Genette argues that the most obvious stance of intertextuality is the practice of quoting which attests the presence of the hypotext within the hypertext: "intertextuality [...] [i]n its most explicit form, it is the traditional practice of *quoting* (with quotation marks, or without specific references)" (1997: 2). The entire novel is replete with paraphrases and textual references from *The Merchant of Venice* which serve as an inextricable liaison with the original text. The explicit intertextual conversation between the novel and the play reveals Jacobson's own interpretation of the Bard's text.

Shylock's exclusion from the circle of social interaction at the end of the play, calls upon the audience's sympathy as the entire world seems to have turned against him. Until this day, it is not certain whether Shakespeare intended to dispraise the Jew, like most characters in his play, or to bring the European Jew's plight into the spotlight and reprehend his contemporaries' scorn and prejudice. The underlying elements of anti-Semitism and the unconventional denouement allow for the Bard's comedy to emerge as a "problem play." Modern stage productions portray Shylock as a tragic hero, and the merchant Antonio as its vile antagonist. Readers, directors and viewers are free to infer their own judgement of the play, demonstrating once again that Shakespeare's work endorses multiple interpretations.

The Christian merchant is idealized, and his aggressive behaviour and hatred directed towards Shylock do not surprise the audience, although they precede the rising action of the plot. It appears that Antonio unconsciously defines himself as the antipode of the usurer so that he may reassert his status of a true Christian who refuses to engage in immoral acts of commerce. While to his fellow Christians, Antonio is a model of self-sacrifice and friendship, to Shylock, he is the very symbol of Christian hatred: "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" (3.1.56-60). According to Kambasković, although Shylock repeatedly protests and curses throughout the play, "much like Caliban's ranting in *The Tempest*", the audience may begin to acknowledge the Jewish

character's entitled rage: "Shylock's rage is a thing of darkness we acknowledge to be ours" (2014: 197).

Jacobson's attempt to re-represent the Jew's plight is conducted with precision, irony and humour, evidencing again the novelist's vast experience of interrogation the issue of Jewishness. We find Simon Strulovitch, "the rich, furious, easily hurt philanthropist" (2016: 1) engaging in polemical and insightful debates with Shylock, transposed into the present-day, "also an infuriated and tempestuous Jew" (2016: 3), opening the path for the author to explore many questions left unanswered in the hypotext. From the very beginning it is clear that the two protagonists acknowledge their "Otherness" and marginalization but what makes them truly admirable is their inner strength to laugh about it: "they can't see a Jew without thinking they have to tell him a joke. Do they sing Suwanee every time they meet a black man?" (2016: 63). Moreover, they situate themselves in a lower racial category than black people. Christians label them as "the diaspora" and men without a Homeland, wandering like tramps and sneaking into the breaches of a community. Strulovitch wishes he had more Jewish friends to share bleak thoughts and sneer at their cultural loneliness. Although Strulovitch claims not to care about Jews, he has repeatedly thrown *The Guardian* in the bin, accusing it of hating Israel and taking Jews on the brink of annihilation in the ovens. He occasionally reads the most suggestive fragments of the Talmud which allows him to manifest his "bolshie" (2016: 5) contrarianism and get into fiery imaginary arguments with the demised authors. Shylock has more than once experienced the Gentiles' acts of kindness when confronted person to person with the individual Jew: marriage proposals from Christians, embellished portraits, apologies from German people, all trying to make up for the Gentiles' past mistakes. Christians regard the individual Jew as an exponent of its collectivity, long perceived as otherworldly: "The individual Jew brings the collective Jew with him into any room. [...] And collectively, we still connect to the uncanny" (2016: 67).

Shakespeare's bawdy language has found an illustrative equivalent in Jacobson's postmodern novel. Both Shylock and Strulovitch are fond of dirty, explicit jokes, innuendoes and exaggerations at the expense of the Jew. The inability to grasp Jewish humour unveils a manifest gap between two irreconcilable cultures. Strulovitch's first wife, Ophelia-Jane, was utterly appalled by her husband's sexual anecdotes: "She stared at him in disbelieving horror. [...] Anyone would think, he thought, looking deep into them, that I have just told her someone close to us has died" (2016: 11). History repeats itself and we later learn that Beatrice feels the same amount of disappointment as her father when Gratan does not react to her jokes and cultural hints. She remembers her father warning her against marrying a Christian: "They won't get the cultural allusions. Just remember – your intelligence is five thousand years old, they were born yesterday" (2016: 206). Surprisingly, Strulovitch does not impart Jewishness-related anguish with his daughter but tries to instill in her the self-confidence and sense of superiority he has long lost. After an objective over-analysis, Beatrice arrives at the unfortunate conclusion that her future husband is far from being a "mensch" (2016: 208) and her father was right.

Conclusions

This paper has addressed the possibilities of intertextual rapports between the Shakespearean play and its novelistic adaptation, in an attempt to contribute to a more comprehensive and exhaustive investigation. Howard Jacobson has accomplished a convincing reinterpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*, transposing the ingredients of the source-text into 21st century Britain. The postmodern novelist has performed a considerable number of transformations of the hypotext, once again taking the contemporary reader by surprise with his unique writing style. The spatio-temporal relocation of the story, the reconfiguration of the plot and characters, the use of allusions and quotations, the reiteration of the original themes and motifs, and the correspondent bawdy language, reveal both Jacobson's remarkable familiarity with the Shakespearean text and his notable literary dexterity.

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