

SHYLOCK'S ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION:

THE IMAGE OF THE JEW IN ENGLISH  
LITERATURE FROM THE MIDDLE AGES  
TO  
THE MID-SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

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by

ERROL DURBACH,  
B.A. Hons. (Rhodes).  
B.A. (Cantab).

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## PREFACE

Any study centred in the exploration and analysis of the medieval and Elizabethan images of the Jew might, with some justification, seem redundant and impertinent to a modern reader; for the third quarter of this century has witnessed the almost total obviation of a great many such time-honoured images and symbols. The immemorial figure of the Wandering Jew, to cite a single instance, has, for the past two decades, attained his country and place of destination - history no longer condemning him to tarry until the Second Coming of the Messiah. Even the deicide Jew has been granted complete absolution, by an official decree from the Vatican, for his complicity in the killing of Christ. It would seem, moreover, that the atrocities perpetrated against the Jews during the course of the Second World War have resulted in an alteration of the Jewish image, radically transforming it from one of contempt into one of compassion, a living symbol of 'man's inhumanity to man'; and the modern European dramatist has revived the Jewish figure on the stage as an instance of almost personal atonement - or, alternatively, as a means of scourging the state of middle-class mind which abetted the persecution of the Nazi regime, attacking state policies of inaction, and deploring the failure of influential powers to resist the blatant inhumanity perpetrated within its boundaries. Max Frisch's Andorra and Rolf Hochhuth's The Representative embody, each in its own way, the 20th century's sense of shame and horror at those events with which the century has yet to come to terms. They are both extreme reactions against the image of the Jew which the Nazi propogandized in the 1930s. And the image which the Nazi propogandized was curiously consistent with the medieval and Elizabethan images of the Jew.

History, even literary history, has a curious way of repeating itself - and particularly that form of literature dealing with great archetypal images which are, by their very nature, insensible to change and immutable. The Jew is such an image; and despite the alteration of social attitudes, despite changes in the religious climate, the medieval and Elizabethan archetypes have never been entirely

abrogated. Judas and Shylock are inevitably latent, eternally available, so that an investigation into their origins and evolution is never wholly redundant, never wholly impertinent. Such an investigation, moreover, discloses a literary enigma which criticism has never adequately resolved - the seemingly inexplicable rise in popularity of the Jewish image from Chaucer to the Renaissance, finding its most accomplished expression in the personages of Barabas and Shylock - an enigma rendered all the more curious by the apparent absence of Jews from England for the space of this entire period. Edward I had officially expelled the Jews from his realm in 1290, and Cromwell had unofficially re-admitted them in 1656 - so that, and until historians can prove anything conclusive to the contrary, there were ostensibly no practising Jews in the country for more than three and a half centuries. And yet, paradoxically, few other periods of English literature are quite as rich or quite as prolific in Jewish images as that from the Middle Ages to the mid-seventeenth century. This is the period, and this the problem which constitutes the subject of this essay - a period and a problem all too often rationalized by criticism as literary evidence of ineradicable English anti-Semitism, and the origins of Barabas and Shylock attributed to similar instances of resurgent racial hatred. It is this rationale - at once too glib and oversimplified - against which I shall argue, attempting, through the investigation of dominant Jewish images, to arrive at conclusions more consistent with the economic, religious and social circumstances of each age.

If this essay lacks a chronological unity, it has, I hope, achieved a more logical unity by tracing the origins and significance of each major image in turn, indicating its evolution and development from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and its ultimate metamorphosis in the literature of the seventeenth century - a metamorphosis without which, it seems to me, the re-admission of the Jews to England would have been a virtual impossibility. I have tried, above all, to come to terms with that most enigmatic and ambiguous of all Jewish figures, Shylock - the product, for some critics, of anti-Semitic Christian intolerance, and, for others, of tolerant humanistic sympathy - that Jewish image which each age seems to rationalize in terms of its own

peculiar prejudices. I have attempted to present Shylock not only as the product of all preceding Jewish images and their consummation, but as that image which transcends all others in a strange ambiguous complexity, which subsumes within his literary being that duality of attitudes towards the Jew discernible even in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament.

I am greatly indebted, of course, to the many American- and Anglo-Jewish critics who have written on the subject - an indebtedness which, I hope, may be taken for granted. But if this study is not to seem redundant on other grounds, it seems equally necessary to indicate its difference from their works and the alteration of its critical vision. There have been, it seems to me, three dominant critical approaches to the subject of the Jew in English literature, each of which, despite the undoubted value of the works in question, appears to be radically deficient in certain crucial areas. And perhaps the most deficient of these approaches is the historical or sociological approach, that of a small group of gentlemen whose interest in the medieval and Elizabethan images of the Jew is governed by wholly extra-literary considerations - the concern, namely, to determine the presence or absence of Jews in England merely by reference to the literature of each age. Literature, consequently, is treated as an invaluable source of social history, and literary significance conditioned solely by the type of evidence produced. Sir Sidney Lee was the apparent initiator of this school of criticism,<sup>1</sup> ransacking the writings of the period to substantiate his theory that the actual presence of Jews in sixteenth century England must necessarily have promoted their appearance of the stage - an hypothesis evidently supported by the eminent historian, Mr. Lucien Wolf.<sup>2</sup> The basis of their argument rests largely upon the psychological veracity of Barabas and Shylock's "Jewishness". In a scholarly rejoinder, however, Dr. J.L. Cardozo refuted Lee's theory of contemporary models for the

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Sidney Lee, "Elizabethan England and the Jews," N.S.S. Transactions 1887-92, pp. 166, 149-50.

<sup>2</sup>Wolf, "Jews in Elizabethan England," Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society, XI (1926).

Jews of Marlowe and Shakespeare, basing his argument largely upon the psychological deficiencies in the "Jewishness" of Barabas and Shylock and concluding on the absence of Jews in Elizabethan England.<sup>1</sup> This is, undoubtedly, a problem of some importance, one necessarily determining the nature of Shylock's origins; but to allow it to determine the critical viewpoint is to limit and restrict the value of the study - and I have tried, in dealing with this historical quandary, to consign it to the periphery of the essay.<sup>2</sup> Far more important than any socio-historic issue, it seems to me, are the economic circumstances in which the image of the Jew evolved; and because criticism seems to have taken too little account of the formative influence on the Jewish image of crises in the economic life of medieval and Renaissance England, I have deliberately elaborated on this seemingly extra-literary matter.

More valuable than historical criticism, but none the less deficient, is the predominantly bibliographical approach of M.F. Modder<sup>3</sup> and J.M. Landa<sup>4</sup> - critics whose vast, encyclopedic, compilative studies cover so large a field of literature that they are able to do little more than merely list the works of literature in which the Jew appears - studies invaluable as sources, but unified with the minimum of critical argument and generally lacking in any significant or consistent thesis. The finest of these critical works - despite its incredible brevity, ranging, as it does, from Chaucer to Graham Greene - is Harold Fisch's Dual Image<sup>5</sup> which, at least, pursues some clearly defined critical line of inquiry. What I have attempted to do in this essay is limit the area of concern, seeking for a more intensive rather than extensive analysis and pursuing a thesis necessarily confined to

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<sup>1</sup>J.L. Cardozo, The Contemporary Jew in the Elizabethan Drama (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1924). Especially chapters 1-3.

<sup>2</sup>See pp. 57-59, and Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup>M.F. Modder, The Jew in the Literature of England (New York: Meridian Books Inc., 1960). This study first appeared in 1939. The entire scope of my thesis is compressed into the first 45 pages of Modder's book.

<sup>4</sup>M.J. Landa, The Jew in Drama (London: P.S. King and Son, 1926).

<sup>5</sup>H. Fisch, The Dual Image: A Study of the Figure of the Jew in English Literature (London: L. Colins-Prager Ltd., 1959).

that period of literary activity from Langland and Gower to Milton and the seventeenth century humanists.<sup>1</sup>

The third general category of Anglo-Jewish criticism is distinguished largely by its tone and intention - the former ranging from petulant outrage to muted sorrow, the latter invariably apologetic. This group of critics,<sup>2</sup> confined generally to the opening decades of the twentieth century, is concerned mainly with defending the Jews against Chaucerian, Marlovian or Shakespearian libel - the militant defensiveness of sensitive gentlemen intent on exposing the violation of truth in the Jewish images of English fiction. The reality and actuality of the Jewish psyche become, in their criticism, the sole criteria of judgment; and literary creations are measured against this requirement, are either rejected as errors of ignorance and the mistaken productions of misinformed writers, or else praised for the justice accorded to the Jew. Typical in tone and attitude is H. Michelson, whose Jew in Early English Literature is the only study which approximates, in its range of literary investigation, the scope of this essay. Its angle of vision, however, discernible on nearly every page, is radically different.

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<sup>1</sup>Mention must here be made of undoubtedly the finest modern study of the Jewish image - Edgar Rosenberg's From Shylock to Svengali (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1960). The title is, in fact, misleading; for its subject is the image of the Jew in the Victorian novel from Dickens to Du Maurier, and Rosenberg deals only superficially with all preceding images in his chapter entitled "The Rise of the Jew-Villain". It remains, however, the most critical approach to the subject for the past few decades.

<sup>2</sup>The most notable of these critics are:  
E.W. Calish, The Jew in English Literature as Author and Subject (Richmond, Va.: Bell, Book and Stationery Co., 1909).  
G. Friedlander, Shakespeare and the Jew (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1921).  
H. Michelson, The Jew in Early English Literature (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1926).  
M.J. Landa, The Jew in Drama.  
D. Philipson, The Jew in English Fiction (New York: Bloch, 1927).

Among these may, perhaps, be included Hermann Sinshelmer's Shylock: The History of a Character (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1947) - a work written in Nazi Germany, and obviously conditioned by this circumstance:

"... I found myself surrounded by Hitlerism and Teutonic extravagance, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the Jewish debacle, accompanied by unrestrained calumnies and injuries. . . . I had become but one of those European Jews now again victimized as so often before. In such a mood I approached Shakespeare and his play, The Merchant of Venice." (Preface, p. 19).

Thus Michelson on Barabas:

To make a Jew speak of Agamemnon and Iphigen, when he wants an example of paternal love is bad, to make him kneel is worse, but to make him swear Corpe di Dio! is worst of all. . . . This is the horrible crime of Marlowe and his fellow artists, that they have let loose devils, who beget devils, to the everlasting torment and shame of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

His rejection of Launcelot Gobbo's complaints against Shylock:

The Jewish laws, however, concerning the treatment of slaves reveal most humane principles and though Launcelot is not exactly a slave, there is no single reason to suppose that Jewish masters excelled in mistreating their domestic servants.<sup>2</sup>

And his justification and defence of both:

If History has recorded a Gernutus, a Shylock or even a Barabas, I should not have been surprised at all, on the contrary, it is more surprising that history has not produced such a Jew. . . . As for Christian practices or rather the practices of men who call themselves Christians, the words of Barabas and Shylock, that the Jew. . . learned all his wickedness from Christians, are perfectly true and based on history. . . . If Shylock asks a pound of flesh, he asks what a Christian has already asked before him.<sup>3</sup>

This, it seems to me, is the type of apologetic criticism which blurs the entire literary issue, a form of criticism so defensively personal as to lose all conception of the "estimate and dignity" inherent in the literary creation itself. This is the school of critics bedevilled by the racial issues of their own creating.

I am deeply grateful to a great many people without whose co-operation this study would have been impossible: to Mr. R. Musiker and the staff of the Rhodes University Library for their kindness and the endless trouble taken in securing material from as far afield, even, as Amsterdam; to the Librarian of the Durban Public Library for providing me with material from a private collection; to Mrs. Amelia Levy of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the otherwise unobtainable literature which she sent me; to the Union of Jewish Women for financing a photostatic copy of Michelson's book; to my wife, for providing me

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<sup>1</sup>H. Michelson, pp. 77; 163.

<sup>2</sup>ibid. p., 128.

<sup>3</sup>ibid. p., 159.

with the necessary incentive, for proof-reading, correcting, and compiling the bibliography; to my tutors at Rhodes, Ron Ayling and Marshall Walker, for their help and advice; to Mr. Christopher Gillie of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, for his radical criticism of Chapter III; and, above all, to the supervisor of this thesis - Professor Guy Butler - for his invaluable assistance, his guidance, his patience and his humanity.

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The Jewes branded with Iudgement, wander  
over the world, the contempt of Nations,  
the skumme of people, the hissing, derision,  
and Indignation of men, for refusing him  
whom they expect, denying him whom they  
challenge, hating him whose name is in life  
and death unto them, the sweetest tune, and  
most melodious harmony, still waiting for,  
and glorying in that Messias, whom (unknowne)  
they crucified and slew.

SAMUEL PURCHAS, Purchas his Pilgrimage (1613).

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THE DAMNED AND THE CONVERTED:  
THE IMAGE OF THE JEW IN CHRISTIAN  
THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS LITERATURE.

The phenomenon of Jewish dispersion among the Christian nations of the Middle Ages and their astonishing persistence in the face of persecution and universal derision, provided the medieval world with a type of memento perfidiae - a moral admonishment against criminal faithlessness and a living symbol of the dreadful consequences attending the rejection of the Christian Messiah. As a "whipping-boy" for Christianity the Jew was periodically punished, but as a warning presence for God-fearing people he was generally tolerated.

The perfidious Jew [wrote William of Newbury] should be allowed to live among Christians as the form of the Lord's Cross is painted in the Church of Christ . . . for the continual and most helpful remembrance by all faithful of our Lord's Passion.<sup>1</sup>

He was to be endured by Christian society as an object of execration and contempt, branded with God's judgment for his complicity in the crucifixion and stained with the blood-guilt of his own imprecation: "His blood be on us, and on our children."<sup>2</sup> It was the curse of Cain. Having rejected Christ, the Jews were in turn rejected; having killed Him, they were justly reviled; and having refused Him a resting place, they were forever doomed to wander the earth, exiles among men.

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<sup>1</sup>Historia Rerum Anglicarum (1198); quoted by E.N. Calisch, The Jew in English Literature as Author and Subject (Richmond, Va.: Bell Book and Stationery Co., 1909), p.51.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 27:25.

Jewish history was consequently read as an unremitting chronicle of Divine Retribution, and the degenerate condition of medieval Jewry was conclusive evidence of the transference of Divine Favour. No longer were the Jews the chosen race. For, at the crucial testing-time of Christ's Passion, they forfeited God's grace and were flung for their infidelity into perpetual perdition - that catastrophic Luciferian fall from favour recorded in John Gower's Confessio Amantis:

Whan Lucifer was best in hevane  
 And oghte moste have stonde in evene,  
 Towardes god he tok debat;  
 And for that he was obstinat,  
 And wolde noht to trouthe encline,  
 He fell for evere into ruine:

. . . . .  
 And riht be such a maner weie  
 The Jwes in here beste plit,  
 Whan that thei scholden most parfit  
 Have stonde upon the prophecie,  
 Tho fellen thei to most folie,  
 And him which was fro hevene come,  
 And of a Maide his fleissh hath nome,  
 And was among hem bore and fedd,  
 As men that wolden noht be spedd  
 Of Goddes Sone, with o vois  
 Thei hinge and slowne upon the crois.  
 Whereof the parfit of here lawe  
 Fro thanne forth hem was withdrawe,  
 So that thei stonde of no merit,  
 Bot in truage as folk soubgit  
 Withoute proprete of place  
 Thei liven out of goddes grace,  
 Dispers in alle londes oute.

And thus the feith is come aboute,  
 That whilom in the Jewes stod,  
 Which is not noht parfihliche good,  
 To speke as it is nou befallie,  
 Ther is a feith aboven alle,  
 In which the trouthe is comprehended,  
 Wherof that we ben alle amended.<sup>1</sup>

This consciousness of superiority to the fallen people, of the Christian succession to God's grace by the Jews' failure in faith seems to have been a dominant theological attitude towards Jewry prevailing from the medieval to Renaissance pulpits - an attitude which also acknowledged a certain indebtedness to the Jews for gratifying Christianity by their defection. Thus an Elizabethan divine, the Reverend Samuel Purchas:

Yea he writes It was necessarie that the word of God  
 should first be spoken unto them, which they by incredulitie

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<sup>1</sup>From "Belief of the Jews", Confessio Amantis, Liber Quintus, 1700-1706; 1712-1736; The Complete Works of John Gower, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: O.U.P., 1901), I, 448-49.

put from themselves and gave place to the Gentiles.  
The fall of them became the riches of the world, and the  
diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

It was an attitude formulated and universalized by Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans - that locus classicus in the New Testament which conditioned the theological image of the Jew for all succeeding ages. But despite the Pauline recognition of Christian salvation consequent upon the Jewish fall from grace,<sup>2</sup> there is a constant warning against presumption and pride in their new election - the fate of the Jews operating, once more, as a moral exemplum to society. This was the lesson which the Middle Ages stood to learn from those Jews in their midst; and even after their expulsion from England at the end of the 13th Century, even in the Renaissance, they provided the pulpit orator with a suitable text on perfidia or with the grounds for exhorting his congregation to trust in Christ. "Consider this people, and learn what it is to build yourselves in Faith," says Hooker in his sermon upon "Part of St. Jude's Epistle" which concludes with the customary warning against Jewish faithlessness:

And sithence the hour that the measure of their infidelity was first made up, they have been spoiled with wars, eaten up with plagues, spent with hunger and famine; they wander from place to place, and are become the most base and contemptible people that are under the sun. . . . And who doth not see, that infidelity doth threaten Lo-annai unto the Gentiles, as it hath brought Lo-ruchama unto the Jews? It may be that these words seem dark unto you: but the words of the Apostle, in the eleventh to the Romans, are plain enough; "If God hath not spared the natural branches, take heed, take heed, lest he spare not thee:" build thyself in Faith.<sup>3</sup>

As a prerequisite for salvation, Faith in Christ was the Christian antithesis to the Jews' unwavering adherence to the tenets of Mosaic Law; and in this opposition between Faith and Law, Gospel and Torah, lay the crux of the conflict between Judaism and Christianity - an opposition which predisposed the Christian against a nation doubly accursed by

<sup>1</sup>Purchas his Pilgrimage (London: Wm. Stansby, 1613), Book II, Part II, p.88.

<sup>2</sup>Romans 11: 11-12

<sup>3</sup>The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker, ed. W.S. Dobson (London: G. Cowie, 1823), II, 615-616.

decide and by their obstinate reliance on the Law. Once again, the central text derives from Paul:

For as many as are of the works of the law [reads the letter to the Galatians] are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith.<sup>1</sup>

The Jews, living under the Law, were consequently subjected to the vituperative execrations and accumulative curses heaped upon them by the divines of the 11th and 12th Centuries - by Chrysostom, for instance, or Agobard in his unrelenting condemnation of the people of the Torah:

All who are under the Law are under a curse, and are clothed with the curse as with a garment. It has entered, like water, inside them, and like oil into their bones. They are, moreover, cursed in the city, and cursed in the field; cursed in coming in, and cursed in going out; cursed in the fruits of the womb, the land and the flock; cursed are their cellars, their barns, their medicines, their food, and the crumbs that drop from it, and none of them can escape from this appalling, this ghastly curse of the Law, except by Him who was made a curse for us.<sup>2</sup>

There is even a sense in which Shylock, the Jew of the Renaissance, adamantly insisting upon his legal rights and standing for the Law, falls under Paul's censure and the indictment of the medieval Churchmen; for he, too, is made to realize the impossibility of an unwavering execution of the Law and the detrimental consequences of its strict enforcement. He too is cursed by the Law to which he fanatically adheres and is able to escape it only by conversion. The Jew seems, indeed, to function consistently as a symbol of the Law - the Scribe, the Pharisee - in the literature of England from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, a theological image perpetuated by St. Paul's epistles and strengthened by the maledictions of the preachers and divines.

But if the more philosophical image of the Jew in Christian theology originated from the Letters, those eloquent New Testament sermons which seem to have conditioned the tone and attitude of all subsequent sermons on the subject of the Jews, it was in the Gospels - at once more dramatic and narrative in conception - that this abstract attitude

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<sup>1</sup>Galatians 3: 10-11.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by James Parkes, The Jew in the Medieval Community (London: Soncino Press, 1938), p.30.

derived its substance and its literary form. For the Jews of the Gospels have specific identities and highly individualized personalities where the shadowy Jews of the Epistles do not; and the social image of the Jew in the medieval imagination clearly derived from the colourful Jewish prototypes in the scriptural narratives - particularly those villainous Jews implicated in the event of the crucifixion: Judas Iscariot, the archetypal betrayer, whose very name identifies him with the archetypal Jew; Annas and Caiaphas with their congregation of stiff-necked Pharisees; and the Jewish mob - that ubiquitous group of malefactors providing the choral background to each successive stage of Christ's arraignment and crucifixion. This was the image, embellished by the vivid and often grotesque imagination of the medieval dramatist, balladeer and lyricist - one which assumed mythical proportions at a time when the literature of England derived almost entirely from scriptural sources and martyrologies, from the ritualistic Mystery Cycles celebrating Christ's birth, crucifixion and resurrection, to the devotional verse which sang of the pathos of His Passion. It was a persistent literary tradition in which the figure of the deicide Jew featured prominently as a stock-role stereotype, garbed by the dramatic conventions of the Middle Ages in red matted wig, false nose and Jewish gaberdine - an image calculated to elicit the expected response from an audience unacquainted with the Jews ever since their banishment in 1290, known to them only as the murderers of Christ or the descendents of murderers and, as such, collectively responsible and collectively damned.

This collective responsibility derives, of course, from the passage in Matthew where the howling Jewish mob, confronted with the choice of saving either the insurrectionist or the Messiah, yell with one voice for the release of Barabbas - the cry that draws upon them the curse of blood:

But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just

person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us and on our children.<sup>1</sup>

This was the cry that served to taint each successive generation of Jews with the wrathful curse reserved by God for the Man of Blood and by Christ for his successors:

For thou to day hast done soe [says God to Cain],  
thy seede for the shall suffer woe,  
and, whilst thou on the earth may goe,  
of vengeance have thy dole.<sup>2</sup>

And in the same cycle of Mystery plays Christ utters a grim prophecy to the women of Jerusalem, warning them of the vengeance to be wreaked upon their progeny, telling them to save their tears for their children:

ye women of Ierusalem,  
weep not for me, nor make no swom,  
but for your own Barabene  
you may wepe tenderlye.

ffor tyme shall come, without weer,  
ye shall blesse Belye that never Child beare,  
and papps that never milk came neare,  
so much is your anoy.<sup>3</sup>

The justification of this prophecy of punitive vengeance in the Chester Cycle derives in large measure from the grotesque, obscene behaviour of the Jews towards Jesus - that tone of contemptuous mockery which echoes in the Gospels, combined with the violence and depravity generally attributed to the soldiery of Pilate. Enraged by Christ's claim to be their Messiah, the malevolent "Bishoppes" of the Jews - Annas and Caiaphas - are the first to incite their Jewish congregants to persecute Jesus with blows and derogatory insults:

Cayphas: Destroy shall he not yt!  
You, wretches without witt,  
found this freak a fytt  
and gurd him in the face!

Annas: Despuse him! spurne and spitt!  
let se, or you sytt,  
who hath happ to hitt  
that us thus harmed hase!<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Matthew 27: 20-25

<sup>2</sup>"The Creation", The Chester Plays, re-edited from the MSS by H. Deimling (London: Early English Text Society, 1892; reprinted by O.U.P., 1926), p.46.

<sup>3</sup>"Christ's Passion", The Chester Plays, p.299.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., p.282.

Whereupon a chorus of four Jews - chanting insulting, excremental jingles - threaten Christ with torture and bodily assault:

Primus Jew: ffye on thee, fresa!  
carpe now and breake!  
thy breans will I breake;  
am I ready bowne.

though he him beshitt,  
a Buffet shall bytt!  
may no man me witt,  
though I doe him woo.<sup>1</sup>

The Annas, of the Chester Cycle, moreover, is directly instrumental in influencing the wavering decision of the Roman Governor, informing him of Jesus's political plot against the authority of Caesar; and when Pontius Pilate takes Jesus into custody, the ritualistic outrage inflicted upon Him by the Roman soldiers is promptly ascribed to the Jewish mob - a gratuitous transference of Evil to the already detestable Jews. It is they who strip him naked, whip him - bound to a column, garb him in purple, crown him with thorns, bestow a reed-sceptre upon him, kneel before him in a display of ludicrous mockery, and void their rheum upon his brow and face. It is they who fall to haggling over Christ's clothes, and play at dice for his seamless robe. And it is they who nail Christ to the cross with hammers and ropes and spikes in a hideously protracted crucifixion scene, sadistically revelling in the process of death and chanting their manic, dimiterlined stanzas. Each detail of the Jews' brutality - the roping, hammering and nailing - seems evidently embellished with the graphic and professional realism of the medieval guilds which undertook the scene, the accumulated violence occasionally finding temporary relief in a comic intermezzo of Jews performing a grotesque danse macabre about the cross upon which Jesus sweats and dies.<sup>2</sup>

Nor did the medieval lyricist forget the desecration of those "foule iewes 3olowe & blake"<sup>3</sup> who struck and whipped and spat upon the Saviour on the cross; and in liturgical poems of compassion for the

<sup>1</sup>"Christ's Passion", The Chester Plays, pp.283-84.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. N.J. Landa, The Jew in Drama (London: P.S. King & Son, 1926), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>"The Knight of Christ", line 47; Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century, ed. Brown and Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) p. 224.

Crucified, the poets of the Middle Ages perpetuated the image of the violent, blaspheming Jew among their congregants and readers:

IEsus, pat wald efter mid-night  
 Pi suete face, pat was sa bright,  
     With Iuus spitting fire;  
 And suffer siben, for vr sin,  
 Doffetes on pi soft chin,  
     In pat ilk quile;  
 . . . . .  
 Suet iesu, at vndran time,  
 For vr sin and nocht for pin,  
     Sufferd a-bute pi hert  
 O Iuus pat war fell and strong,  
 With knotted skurges hard and lang,  
     Dintes sare and smert.<sup>1</sup>

And Jewish treachery appears all the more evil-hearted in the pathos and maternal tenderness of The Blessed Virgin's Appeal to the Jews with its emotive plea for compassion and Mary's prayer to be nailed to the cross alongside Her Son:

Wy haue 3e no reuthe on my child?  
 Haue reuthe on me ful of murning,  
 Taket down on rode my derworpi child,  
 Or prek me on rode with my derling.<sup>2</sup>

Inextricably associated with the circumstances of the crucifixion, the Jew embodied, in the imagination of medieval society, the very spirit of the Antichrist - evil inhabiting the world through his agency from the scourging of the Black Death to the failure of crops. For once guilty of the most heinous crime in the history of civilization the Jew could be guilty of anything.

The arch-villain of the Mystery Cycles, however, distinguishes himself by sheer malevolence from the comparatively lesser villainies of the rooting Jewish mob - Judas Iscariot, traitor and hypocrite, the mercenary betrayer of Christ whose kisses are deadly and whose motives are succinctly stated in his memorable question to the Priests: "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" For apart from his role as arch-betrayer, Judas - "the apostle of the cash nexus"<sup>3</sup> - functions also as the prototype of the commercial Jewish moneyman with a keen eye for bargains and a propensity towards embezzlement.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"The Matins of the Cross", lines 1-6 and 52-57; ibid., pp. 39, 41.

<sup>2</sup>"The Blessed Virgin's Appeal to the Jews", lines 1-4; ibid., p.81.

<sup>3</sup>Edgar Rosenberg, From Shylock to Svengali (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966), p.97.

<sup>4</sup>See Chapter III, p. 66

It is an image which clearly derives from the Gospel narratives in which Judas supplies the office of Christ's Treasurer - a position which he covertly abuses to his own advantage, as St. John insinuates in his account of the incident in Lazarus's house involving costly ointment:

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.<sup>1</sup>

This suggestion was sufficient to fire the imagination of the medieval dramatist who seized upon the salient details of Judas's disagreement and from the underlying hints concocted an ingenious motive for this purse-bearer's betrayal of his Lord. The Judas of the York Cycle, it appears, had intended to bargain away for at least 300 silver pieces this same costly ointment so negligently wasted by Jesus and consequently considers himself cheated of the customary 10% invariably appropriated to his own account; so, to make up his loss of 30 silver pence, he petulantly determines to sell his master to the high priests of the Jews. The "haggling" scene which follows shows the Jewish bargainer, demanding his commission in advance, as an obvious progenitor of the scheming Elizabethan usurer:

Let me see, what you will do  
 [he says to Annas and Caiaphas],  
 and lay downe silver here;  
 for, the Devil Swapp of my Swyre,  
 If I do it without hyre,  
 other for Soverayne or Syre!  
 It is not my maner.

.....  
 As ever mott I thryva or thee,  
 and I shew my subtilty,  
 Thirty pennyes you shall geue me,  
 and not a farthinge lasse.<sup>2</sup>

The other parties to the contract are by no means averse to a bit of bargaining - they too are Jews - and "knit a knot" for the required amount, considering Jesus's betrayal cheap at the price.

The ultimate source of Judas's motivation, however, is Satan himself - archetypal Evil inspiring archetypal Treachery against their

<sup>1</sup>John 12: 3-6.

<sup>2</sup>"Christ's Visit to Simon the Lepor", The Chester Plays, pp.263-64.

antithesis; and the familiar correlation in literature between the Devil and the Jew is similarly traceable to the Gospel narratives:

Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray [Jesus] unto them.<sup>1</sup>

Judas, in his role as Devil's henchman, consequently becomes a familiar figure in the literature and poetry of the Middle Ages -

What Judas pe traytor can pe mote -  
Pat traitour was ful of pe foende -<sup>2</sup>

sealing the association between quintessential Jew and Satan securely enough to initiate a literary convention; for in the later Morality drama the Jewish-Judas role apparently devolved upon a Satan dressed in the traditional stage-trappings and gaberdines of the Semitic Mystery Cycle figures; and even in Elizabethan drama the Devil appears on-stage in the familiar likeness of a Jew - fitted with a huge hooknose, fiery wig and beard, and gesticulating wildly.

The weird costume and traditionally exaggerated histrionics of the medieval Judas served also as a form of farcical-melodramatic diversion for the audience - an integral part of that broad comic element in medieval drama to which belong the disputations of the Noah family and the parody of the nativity in The Second Shepherd's Play.

Judas's pantomimic gesturing derived, of course, from the wrathful, comic Herod of the Mystery play - the Edomite whom force of association depicted as a Jew and whose misdeeds are classified in the catalogue of Jewish crimes. To Chaucer, for instance, the Jews were still regarded as the "cursed fol of Herodes al newe"<sup>3</sup> - a transference of wickedness indicative of that tendency to ascribe all the evils in the Gospel narratives to a single source. But despite the criminality of Herod, it is as a raging blusterer, with the concomitant

<sup>1</sup>Luke 22: 3-4.

<sup>2</sup>"Ihesu that hast me dere I-bought", lines 11-12; Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century, p. 115. See also Trachtenberg, The Devil and the Jews (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943) for the pervasive associations of Devil and Jews.

<sup>3</sup>"The Prioress's Tale", line 574; The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F.N. Robinson (2d ed.; London: O.U.P., 1957), p. 162.

suggestions of the grotesque and the absurd, that he appears upon the medieval stage. A passing allusion in Matthew to Herod's "exceeding wrath" at being duped by the wise men was sufficient for the medieval dramatist to portray the King of Jewry as the embodiment of passion and ferocity, incensed and raving at the prophetic mention of a Messiah -

Kyng! in pe deuyl way, dogges, Fy!<sup>1</sup> -

accompanying his rage by brandishing his sword about and slashing wildly at an imaginary Christ:

I shall hawe that yonge harlot with my bright brand so kene,  
into peeces small.<sup>2</sup>

This excitability remained an essential feature of the Jewish stereotype, the Herod-out-Heroding whose frenzy obviously anticipates the frantic and exaggerated gestures of Macklin's Shylock or the furious comic rhetoric of Thomas Nashe's Jew:

So swelled Zadoch, and was readie to burst out of his skin and shoote his bowels like chaine-shot full at Zacharies face for bringing him such balefull tidings; his eyes glared & burnt blew like brimstone and agua vitae set on fire in an egshell, his verie nose lightened glow-wormes, his teeth crasht and grated together, like the loynts of a high building cracking. . . . He swore, he curst, and saide, these be they that worship that crucifide god of Mazaroth, heres the fruits of their new found Gospell; sulphur and gunpowder carry them al quick to Gehenna. I would spend my soule willingly, to haue that triple headed Pope with all his sin-absolued whores and oilgreased priests borne with a blacke sant on the diuells backes in procession to the pit of perdition.<sup>3</sup>

And so on.

The Judas figure, however, combined not only the raging comicality of Herod with the terror of the medieval Satan, but also the suicidal depression of the Man of Guilt - a role in which his portrayal is humanized, even sympathetic in its dejection and soul-rending remorse; and the composite portrait of Judas ultimately testifies to that ambiguous depiction of the Jew as both man and monster, pathetic creature and crude caricature, an ambiguity integral

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<sup>1</sup>The York Mystery Plays, ed. L. Toulmin Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>"Adoration of the Magi", stanza 44; The Chester Plays, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup>"The Unfortunate Traveller", The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. McKerrow-Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), II, 310-11.

to Marlowe and Shakespeare's dramatization of this ancient stereotype. In the York Cycle he staggers onstage tormented with the memory of his treachery and the betrayal of his Master:

Of me he tryste no man mare,  
And I be-trayed hym traytourly  
With a false trayne,  
Sakles I solde his blessid body  
Vnto Jwas to be slayne.<sup>1</sup>

Horrified at his complicity in Christ's arrest Judas rushes back to the Jews, begs them to let Jesus go, tries to unknit the knot by returning the 30 silver pennies, even bargains himself away to become Pilate's slave if he releases Jesus; but the Roman Governor is chary of accepting the services of so notorious a traitor, and flings his offence back at him:

Thi seruice [he tells him] will we nocht for-thy  
Pou art unknowen  
Fals tiraunte, for pi traitoury  
Pu art worpi to be hanged & drawn.<sup>2</sup>

Smarting under the taunts and jeers of the high priests, Judas flings the blood-money away and rushes off to follow Pilate's advice:

To spille my selffe nowe wille I spede,  
For sadly haue I seruyd per-till;  
So wala way!<sup>3</sup>

And in despair, he damns himself forever on the Eider tree - the "reward of his covetousness" and common fate of the commercial blackguards in Renaissance drama whose double-dealing and speculation he anticipates.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The York Mystery Plays, p.311.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Celeste Wright, "Some Conventions regarding the Usurer in Elizabethan Literature," Studies in Philology, XXXI (1934). Miss Wright mentions at least 15 plays in which the usurer is condemned to death, and four in which the hanging actually takes place. "Hanging, then [she concludes], is the commonest death of a usurer. In view of the close connection between Avarice and Usury, the idea may reasonably be traced to the story of Judas. Wilson's Ockerfoe reminds us: "Judas had the reward of his covetousness, for he hanging himself did brast in the middes!" (p.196.)

The Judas myth in all its various manifestations over centuries of dramatic evolution - the red-wigged bogey of the Mystery Cycles engendering the Semitic Satan of the Moralities then clearly metamorphosing into the Elizabethan usurer<sup>1</sup> - represents a tenaciously persistent literary tradition from which all the major Jews of English fiction seem ultimately to derive, from Barabbas and Shylock in the 16th Century to Fagin with his red matted hair and greasy flannel gown in the Victorian novel, and beyond. A myth so powerful, so deeply ingrained in the social imagination of England might seem to admit of no alternative to its image of the Jew; and yet the Middle Ages provided for a countermyth - not nearly as vigorous, perhaps, nor quite as popular in the history of drama as the Judas myth, but equally enduring. It was the image of the Old Testament Jew - patriarch and warrior, prophet, poet, tragic sufferer and king; Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, Job, Gideon and Samson; for if there was a Judas Iscariot there was also a Judas Maccabeus - as quintessentially Jewish as the other - and this was the countermyth preserved as a type of dramatic antidote by the playwrights of the Old Testament episodes in the Cycles.

There is nothing perjoratively "Jewish" about the protagonists of these early Mystery plays; they exhibit none of the characteristics of their anti-type; they are neither villainous, usurious, nor Satanic. And Dr. Calisch is partly correct in pointing to a broad line of cleavage which religious prejudice has drawn between the Jews of the Old and New Testament episodes in the Mystery Cycles:

The Jewish characters of the Old Testament he writes are pictured as normal human beings. There is no word of condemnation for them, qua Jews. The buffoonery, that was intended as the comic relief to the strain of the tragic portions. . . is not at their expense. There are clever touches that appeal distinctly to rustic human nature. But with the representations of the New Testament the whole atmosphere is changed. The Jews are no longer normal human beings. They are the accursed despisers, tormentors, and crucifiers of the Saviour.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter III, pp. 66-69.

<sup>2</sup>Calisch, 54-55.

The cleavage and disparity which Dr. Calisch notes is not, however, quite as marked as he suggests. The point is that although they are undoubted Jews, the Old Testament protagonists are identified not with Judas or the howling Jewish mob of the later plays, but with Jesus Himself - foreshadowings, as it were, of His coming and conclusive pre-Christian testimony to His Messianic authority. Indeed, the Jewish heroes of the opening plays are frequently the prototypes of Christ, prefiguring his tragic suffering, and prophesying his crucifixion - an obvious example being the Cain and Abel episode: archetypal fratricide reinterpreted as archetypal deicide. And Cain's anguished lament in the Chester play is the prototypical utterance of the remorseful Judas:

Out! out! alas! alas!  
I am damned without grace,  
therefor I will from place to place,  
and loke where is the best.

Well I wot and witterlye,  
into what place that come I,  
eache man will loth my company;  
so shall I never have rest.

Fowle happ is me befall:  
whether I be in house or hall,  
cursed Cayne men will me call,  
from sorrow may non me save.<sup>1</sup>

The cries of Cain, moreover, anticipate not only the sorrows of the penitential Judas but also prefigure the anguish of Cartaphilus, the Wandering Jew of Christian legend, allied with Judas in his crime against the Christ - the crime of inhumanity which dooms him to eternal exile upon earth: the image of displaced and scattered Jewry, cursed by Jesus and capable of salvation only by conversion, a witness to the crucifixion and condemned to live as witness to the Second Coming.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"The Creation", stanzas 84-85, Chester Plays, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>First mention of this legendary wanderer is recorded in the early 13th Century by Matthew Paris:  
" . . . he had been Pontius Pilate's porter, by name Cartaphilus; who, when they were dragging Jesus out of the door of the Judgment-hall, struck him with his fist on the back saying, 'Go faster, Jesus, go faster: why dost thou linger?' Upon which Jesus looked at him with a frown and said, 'I indeed am going, but thou shalt tarry till I come.' Soon after he was converted and baptised by the name of Joseph. He lives for ever." Quoted by Percy, Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, ed. H.D. Wheatley (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1910), II, 291. He also appears as Ahasuerus, the barefoot shoemaker of the German version, and, of course, in Percy's famous ballads of The Wandering Jew.

Typological similarities are made explicit at several points throughout the Mystery plays, a special "Expositor" appearing in the Chester Cycle to indicate the less obvious correspondences between the Old Law and the New and to interpret the incidents of the Old Testament drama as paradigms of Christ's sacrifice and Passion. At the end of the Sacrifice of Isaac play, for instance, the Expositor explains the Christian symbolism of the piece in a direct address to his audience:

This deed you se done in this place [he tells them],  
 In example of Ihesu done yt was,  
 that for to wyn mankinde grace  
 was sacrificid on the rode.

By Abraham I may vnderstand  
 the father of heauen that can fand  
 with his sonnes blood to break that band  
 the Devil had brought vs too.

By Isaac vnderstand I may  
 Ihesu that was obedyent aye,  
 his fathers will to worke alway,  
 his death to vnderfonge.<sup>1</sup>

To make this correspondence even more exact, the Isaac figure of the Cycles is usually presented as a man of 30; and in keeping with the traditional Christian symbolism, a lamb is sacrificed on Abraham's altar instead of the more conventional ram.

It would seem, then, that the sympathetic, humanized portrayal of the patriarchal Jew in medieval drama is directly attributable to the literary interpretation of Old Testament personages as explicit prototypes of Christ and that, as such, these Jews were quite distinct and separate from the contemporary Jew of Anno Domini who invariably assumed the villainous propensities of the hook-nosed Judas. It was a countermuth perpetuated in Renaissance drama - but without the pointed theological emphasis of the Mystery play; for although the Elizabethans were nourished on the Old and New Testaments alike, their interest in the patriarchal Jewish figures and the exotic Kings and Queens of Israel was far less ecclesiastical than purely narrative. As drama became gradually more secular, so the dramatic fascination of the Old Testament as a source of Messianic prophecy simultaneously gave way to an interest

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<sup>1</sup>"Sacrifice of Isaac", stanzas 60-61, Chester Plays, p. 83.

in the Bible as a source-book of innumerable romances, inter-familial conflicts and magnificently actable plots of passion and intrigue - a sensuous, exciting literature infrequently discernible in the more formally theological writings of the New Testament. For the Hebrew scriptures, as Prof. Fisch points out,<sup>1</sup> are religious without being ecclesiastical and comparatively unconcerned about the world to come; and it was to "this old shameless literature of the Old Testament"<sup>2</sup> in preference to the Gospels that the Elizabethan playwrights were drawn when they chose to dramatize the scriptures.

Dramatic history by no means abounds in Old Testament plays of the post-Miracle-and-Morality period; but it seems important to remember, if only for the sake of balance and perspective, that even when the snarling Jewish usurer and villain was making his appearance on the Elizabethan boards there was still the alternative dramatic image of the Jew - in the exotic oriental interlude of Godly Queene Hester (1525-29); or in the slight domestic comedy of Nicholas Udell's Jacob and Esau (1557); or in Peele's blank-verse romance of David and Bethsabe (1599) which must have appeared concurrently with Shakespeare's Merchant. So despite the obvious predominance of the Judas type of Jew in the popular Renaissance usurer-play, his Old Testament counter-myth nevertheless existed, however unobtrusively, in the dramatic consciousness of the English poet, growing gradually in prominence as the attitude towards the Jews ameliorated and ultimately finding consummate expression in the Hebraic temper of the Commonwealth, most perfectly perhaps in Milton's Samson Agonistes. This is the duality of myth and countermyth, stereotype and anti-type, which Prof. Fisch suggests is integral to the image of the Jew in English literature:

He excites horror, fear and hatred [writes Fisch]; but he also excites wonder, awe, and love. The literature about the Jew is a literature which attempts either to abolish one or other of these images, or somehow to bring the two into a common focus.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. Fisch, The Dual Image - A Study of the Figure of the Jew in English Literature (London: Lincolns-Prager Ltd., 1959), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>J.C. Powys, quoted by Fisch, ibid.

<sup>3</sup>ibid., p. 11.

If there is a duality of Jewish images, however, there is also a theological duality of attitude towards the deicide race conditioning and sanctioning the more positive image of the Jew. For although St. Paul, in a damning generalization, had accused the unbelievers of

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful -<sup>1</sup>

his dialectical bent of mind obliged him to regard the Jew within a double perspective; and, despite this vituperative condemnation, he nevertheless preached the theological necessity for a more liberal attitude towards a people not wholly damned by God but still capable of redemption through faith in Christ. For the Jews - like Cain and like Cartaphilus the Wanderer - had not been condemned to eternal perdition for crucifying Christ. God, in his mercy, had given them until the Second Coming to repent of their crime by conversion to Christianity - a philosophy basic to the legends and ballads of the Wandering Jew with their recurrent motif of sin, repentance and redemption, in which the conversion and baptism of the Jew in confirmation of the Christian faith constitute an essential element of the narrative. It is the dual attitude of St. Paul, the scriptural source for the image of the Jew converted.

Brethren [he writes to the Romans], my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.<sup>2</sup>

Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I am also an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.<sup>3</sup>

I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Romans 1: 29-31.

<sup>2</sup>Romans 10: 1.

<sup>3</sup>Romans 11: 1-2.

<sup>4</sup>Romans 11: 11.

St. Paul's desire for the conversion of the Jews, however, was more than mere ecclesiastical philanthropy. He saw their rejection not as the complete and irrevocable downfall of a nation, but as the redistribution of God's favour, envisaging a consummation of the Christian faith by their re-acceptance - by that ultimate reconciliation of Judaism and Christianity which he recognized as a prerequisite for the Day of Resurrection:

Through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?<sup>1</sup>

For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?<sup>2</sup>

The Pauline doctrine of conversion, with its desire for the regeneration of humanity through the regeneration of the Jews, is given poetic expression in Paul's well-known image of the olive tree - an image which envisages a grafting of the two religious scions into one organic unity. The Jews, in terms of the dominating metaphor, are seen as the cultivated tree, the natural olive whose branches have been lopped away for lack of faith - and the Gentiles, the wild olive grafted upon the original Judaic stock and nourished and sustained by it. It is a reminder as well that Christianity is fundamentally an off-shoot of Judaism and that the Christian ought therefore not to boast of his religious superiority to the cast off nation, but assist in the re-grafting of the Jews onto a common stock, to extend to them the mercy of their own redemption:

For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Romans 11: 11-12.

<sup>2</sup>Romans 11: 15.

<sup>3</sup>Romans 11:16-18.

For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.<sup>1</sup>

This was the doctrine which persisted even in the face of persecution, which served to protect the Jew from total extermination among the hostile communities of the Middle Ages, which gave rise to special laws for his toleration and existence.<sup>2</sup> For it was the contemporary Jew within the Christian community upon whom the ultimate salvation of humanity depended, who must tarry among the nations of the world until the Second Coming. And hence derives that curiously ambivalent attitude towards the Jew which seems to pervade the literature of England, the Pauline dialectic which informs all sermons on the Jews in the religious writings of the Renaissance. Samuel Purchas's ambivalence in his discussion of the religion of the Jews seems fairly typical of the Elizabethan preacher and divine's; for his contemptuous opinion of "the skumme of people" finds its corollary in his plea for Christianity to co-operate in their conversion:

To me, and all Christians, let the Jewes be both reall and verball teachers of the Truth [he writes], which they let fall, and we take up; the One in their Oracles of sacred writte, the other in their exemplary judgment. And to them, . . . let all Christians be that which Moses prophecied, a prouocation to emulation, not of enuy and hatred, which hitherto hath beene in these, amongst all the Christian enemies, the most implacable and despitefull, but of imitation that as their casting away hath been the reconciling of the world, their receiving may be life from the dead, which Paul seemeth plainly to fore-signifie.<sup>3</sup>

It was an attitude to which that most eminent of Renaissance churchmen, Richard Hooker, similarly subscribed in his letters and sermons<sup>4</sup>, an attitude fostered by a return to the Hebraic spirit of the Old Testament and the rise of Puritanism in the late 16th and 17th Centuries, and one in which that most ambiguous of Jewish figures in English fiction may

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<sup>1</sup>Romans 11:29-31.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Fisch, 11-12.

<sup>3</sup>Purchas, p.89.

<sup>4</sup>See Chapter V, pp. 140-141.

most successfully be read. For I shall argue, in its proper place, that the conversion of Shylock in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice is perfectly consistent with the theological conception of the Jew as both condemned and converted - an image which seems to me to look forward to the religious humanism of the 17th Century, to the devotional verse of Herbert and Vaughan with their Pauline images of the olive-tree and the regeneration of the Jews, to the Millennial Philosophers of the Commonwealth and their fervent dedication to the re-admission and conversion of the Jews in the New Jerusalem of England's green and pleasant land, to that favourable climate of opinion which - if only for a short period of literary history - brought the dual image of the Jew into a common focus, which recognized (as Prof. Fisch has it) that -

The Jews were a deicide nation but they were also a nation which is redeemed, and on whose redemption the fate of mankind hangs.<sup>1</sup>

It is from the conflict between these two opposed conceptions of the Jew - the hated alien despised by the social community, and the infidel tolerated by society for the sake of its own salvation; the image of the villainous, usurious Jew, and the image of the Jew converted - that the most complex and fascinating Jewish figures of medieval and Renaissance literature seem to derive.

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<sup>1</sup>Fisch, p.12

Mayer had a peculiar habit. From cinemas, from factories, or from the market he used to lure young non-Jewish girls into his flat. His purpose in so doing was discovered in the year 1926. Mayer had in his flat a wooden cross eight feet high. He made the girls thoroughly drunk, then stripped them and bound them to the cross with ropes. With a razor he cut the stigmata of Christ into their chest, hands and feet. When they were in this condition Otto Mayer defiled the girls.

Der Sturmer.

II

CHRIST-KILLER AND BOGEY:  
THE IMAGE OF THE JEW IN  
MEDIEVAL POPULAR LITERATURE.

Jean-Paul Sartre's celebrated theory on the nature of anti-Semitism seems particularly applicable to the image of the Jew which evolved in the literature of England over a period of nearly four centuries - the period from 1290 to 1656, from expulsion to re-admission, during which the Jew existed only as a preconception in the prejudiced imagination of the English poet, an image of the killer of the God whom he adored:

Far from experience giving rise to the concept of the Jew [writes Sartre], it is this concept which is used to interpret experience; if the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him.<sup>1</sup>

And even when the Jew no longer existed in England, the poet persevered in his invention of the concept of the Christ-killer and the nightmare image of some mythical anti-Christian bogey.

The hostility of the medieval poet found expression, as I have tried to indicate, in the great religious drama of the period - and most particularly in the Mystery Cycle episodes of the crucifixion; but even when the Jewish role became extricable from the immediate circumstances of the crucifixion, his crime against the Christ was not forgotten, and despite the secularization of literature in the later Middle Ages the image of the Jew retained the overtones of its original religious odium. The Miracle plays gave way to the Moralities, the

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Portrait of the anti-Semite, trans. E. de Mauny (London: Secker & Warburg, 1948), p. 10.

Moralities to the folk-play - but the Jewish deicide still gripped the sacrificial carving-knife as he turned from the killing of Christ to the kidnapping and mutilation of little Christian choir-boys or the desecration of the sacramental wafer. This is the stock figure of the villainous Jew in medieval literature and the stock-situation in which he is depicted - a genre within which the Jewish criminal invariably conforms to certain patterns of predictable behaviour, whetting the blade of his carving-knife - like Shylock - on his shoe in readiness to slice the Saviour's stigmata upon the flesh of his sacrificial victim. Such symbolic Christ killings manifest themselves in countless variations on a single theme, but the stereotypical antithesis remains constant: anti-Christ and Christ; Jewish mutilator and Christian martyr; the former grotesque, sinister and old - the latter essentially innocent, virginal and young; the Jew, swarthy-faced and foreign - the Christian, unmistakably Aryan.

An image such as this - which, by violating so heinously the religious sensibility of Western Christendom, is bound to arouse bitter prejudice against the Jew - lends itself admirably to the services of the anti-Semitic propagandist, enabling him to rationalize the persecution of European Jewry for a host of otherwise irrational reasons. The propagandist of the early Middle Ages, for instance, clearly utilized the image of the ritual-murder to justify his hatred and persecution of the Jewish usurer; and the Nazi propagandist of the 1930's sought, as one of the many means of rationalizing the otherwise indefensible extermination of an entire race, a revival of the Christ-killer image in all its anti-Semitic horror. In May 1934 Streicher's newspaper, Der Stürmer, printed a special "ritual murder" edition for the edification of Germany's youth, alleging 131 variations of the Christ-killing indictment against the Jews. On the front page of this edition appears a grotesque caricature of two bearded Jews, one clasping a cleaver dripping with blood and the other catching in a bowl the blood spurting from a heap of slaughtered Christian children; and beneath the bleeding heap are three crosses smeared in blood.<sup>1</sup> This anti-Jewish caricature was,

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<sup>1</sup> Widie The Yellow Spot: The extermination of the Jews in Germany (London: Gollancz, 1936), pp.72-97.

of course, merely the modernization of an ancient medieval image which has remained current in propogandist literature for more than eight centuries, an image impervious to changes in social sensibility and potentially capable of revival at any given moment of history - as the events of our enlightened century so clearly testify. For anti-Semitic literature, it seems to me, invariably reverts to the imagery of the Middle Ages for its material, irrespective of historical evidence in contradiction of this stereotype. It is the Sartrean paradox of the concept interpreting the experience.

Before the importation of Jewish moneylenders into England after the Norman Conquest, comparatively little was known of the delcide race apart from the information provided by the Gospels. The Jew, as Rosenberg has it,

preserved something of the one-dimensional purity that is naturally conferred on one about whom nothing is known except that the devil had commissioned him to kill God.<sup>1</sup>

And the imagination of a people ignorant of any actual contact with the Jews inevitably conjured up a demonic Jewish Antichrist complete with horns, tails and cloven hooves who could, moreover, be identified conveniently and infallibly by the offensive stench which he emitted as punishment for his crime against Christ.<sup>2</sup> It was a superstitious belief which survived the waning of the Middle Ages, persisting as a "vulgar error" in the credulous imagination of the English until the middle of the 17th Century when Sir Thomas Browne, with a type of pseudo-scientific reasoning, scotched a superstition which had the sanction of several centuries of unquestioning acceptance.<sup>3</sup> This was the bogey fear of the unknown which prevailed when William the Conqueror imported a settlement of Jews from Rouen to remedy England's economic ills; and not even the physical presence of the Jew in England managed to belie the myth which mysteriously surrounded him. He remained the Devil in the likeness of a Jew.

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<sup>1</sup>Rosenberg, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Trachtenberg discusses these numerous superstitions in Part One of his study, The Devil and the Jews: "The Demonic" Jew. See esp. Chap. III: "With Horns and Tail."

<sup>3</sup>See Chapter VI, pp. 152-154.

The first few decades after the admission of the Jews were characterized by a spirit of almost fanatical religious fervour which ultimately crystallized in the First Crusade of 1069; and the hatred which had been engendered against the Mohammedan was turned with equal vigour against the Jew. Knights of Christ, the Crusaders were determined to avenge His holy blood by purging their own country of the crucifying Jews before campaigning against His Eastern enemies; and because the Jews were rich and they were poor, the Crusaders derived no little profit from their persecutions.<sup>1</sup> Even after the Crusades, however, religion was manipulated to mulct the Jews of large sums of money, and charges of kidnapping and the crucifixion of little Christian children - which had been profitably propagated by the marauding Crusaders - were revived at frequent intervals throughout the 12th and 13th Centuries. The first account of this ritual-murder accusation occurs in the Saxon Chronicle for 1137, establishing the ritualistic pattern which was repeated with almost monotonous regularity in the numerous mutilation charges levelled against medieval Jewry:

Nu we will saegen sundel waet belaemp on Stephenes Kinges time. On this time the Judeus of Noruic bohton an cristen cild before Estren pineden him alle the ilche pining that ure Drihten was pined on lang fridaei him on rode hengen for ure Drihtines lufe sythen byrieden him.<sup>2</sup>

This account of William of Norwich's martyrdom provides the paradigm for all subsequent Christ-killings: the crime is invariably perpetrated over Passion week; the victim is always an innocent young Christian child; and the Jews are always motivated by an obsessional desire to mock the Christian faith. Such was evidently the fate of Harold of Gloucester in 1168 and Robert of Bury St. Edmunds in 1181; but by far the most notorious of all the alleged crucifixions was the martyrdom of

yonge Hugh of Lincoln, slayn also  
With cursed Jewes, as it is notable,<sup>3</sup>

- an incident which survived in the medieval folk-mind as a typical

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<sup>1</sup>See Parkes, The Jew in the Medieval Community, Chap. III: "The First Crusade", esp. pp. 65-66.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Rosenberg, From Shylock to Svengali, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup>Chaucer, "The Prioress's Tale", lines 684-85, p. 164.

example of Jewish depravity, and one to which Chaucer's Prioress refers as having occurred "but a litel while ago." It was a tale kept perennially alive and recorded for perpetuity in the Historia Major of Matthew Paris, the famous monastic historian, its sensationalism remaining the staple fare of popular balladry and poetry not only in England but on the continent as well.

It appears that in the year 1255 the Jews of Lincoln kidnapped a little Christian boy, incarcerated him secretly and, according to Paris, summoned all the Jews of England

to be present at a sacrifice to take place at Lincoln, in contumely and insult to Jesus Christ. For, as they said, they had a boy concealed for the purpose of being crucified; so a great number of them assembled at Lincoln, and then they appointed a Jew of Lincoln judge, to take the place of Pilate, by whose sentence, and with the concurrence of all, the boy was subjected to various tortures. They scourged him till the blood flowed, they crowned him with thorns, mocked him, and spat upon him; each of them also pierced him with a knife, and they made him drink gall, and scoffed at him with blasphemous insults, and kept gnashing their teeth and calling him Jesus, the false prophet. And after tormenting him in divers ways they crucified him, and pierced him to the heart with a spear. When the boy was dead, they took the body down from the cross, and for some reason disembowelled it; it is said for the purpose of their magic arts.<sup>1</sup>

The sorrowing mother is directed to the Jews' house and discovers her child's body in a well, whereupon the bailiffs are summoned and the Jews forced to confess how they killed the child, how the earth refused to conceal the corpse or the water hide, but cast it up again.

I will tell the truth to you all, [says the Jew]. Nearly all the Jews in England agreed to the death of this boy, and from nearly every English city where Jews live some were chosen to be present at this sacrifice as a Paschal offering.<sup>2</sup>

The Jew was then tied to a horse's tail and dragged to the gallows, while the other Jews who shared his guilt - 91 in all - were imprisoned in the Tower of London.

The mention in Paris's account of a "Paschal offering" is significant in illuminating the apparent source of the Christ-killing accusations. Since Easter - the traditional time for the ritual-

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Joseph Jacobs, Jewish Ideals and Other Essays (London: David Nutt, 1896), Chap: "Little St. Hugh of Lincoln", pp.193-94. The passages from Paris are taken from the Luard edition.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p.195.

murders - invariably coincides with the Passover, it would appear that the charge against the Jews derived largely from a circumstantial interlinking of religious ritual and the symbolic interpretation of elements common to both Judaism and Christianity. The symbol of the Lamb, of course, is the most apparent of these common elements in that both Passover and Easter commemorate its sacrificial slaughter - the killing of the Pascha symbolizing the salvation of the Jews from the Angel of Death and the tenth Egyptian plague, God's protection of His people; but also symbolizing, in Christian iconography, the Agnus Dei whose sacrifice on Calvary saved Christianity from eternal damnation. By a conflation of images Christ consequently seems to have subsumed both identities of Paschal Lamb and Agnus Dei; and Christianity continued to interpret the traditional Jewish sacrifice as a symbolic slaughtering of their Saviour. This identification of common symbolism, moreover, persisted even in the theological writings of the Renaissance, Samuel Purchas in his Pilgrimage still explicitly associating the victims of the Jewish ritual-offerings:

Their Passequer, called of them Paesach, so called of the Angels passingover the Israelites in the common destruction of the Aegyptian first-born. For Paesach, the Grecians use Pascha, . . . to suffer, fitly in regard of that shadow CHRIST himselfe, who was our Paschall Lambe, in his suffering sacrificed for vs.

Before the going downe of the sun, the Paschal Lambe was slaine, about which time (the ninth houre) Christ, the true Pascha, yielded up the ghost.<sup>1</sup>

The Passover traditions of medieval Jewry, interpreted as a blasphemous mockery of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion, may account in part for the Easter-time indictment against the Jews; but there is the equal possibility that these accusations were deliberately manipulated as propoganda against the Jewish moneylender - for the persecution which followed in their wake was invariably financially rewarding to their persecutors. It is recorded, for instance, that in 1244 a sum of at least 60,000 marks (roughly equivalent to £40,000) was derived from a colony of London Jews held responsible for the murder of a little Christian boy; and other instances are extant of fines and tallages

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<sup>1</sup>Purchas, 105.

imposed upon the Jews for similar offences.<sup>1</sup>

The Passover associations of the Christ-killing gave rise in turn to several subsidiary superstitions: that the Jews required Christian blood for baking their unleavened bread; that they blended their Passover wines with the blood of Christian children; that they celebrated a form of Passover communion with the heart of a slaughtered boy. And Matthew Paris's suggestion of evisceration in the Hugh of Lincoln case is yet another corollary to the Passover theme, for besides the magical properties supposedly inherent in Christian intestines, it was also rumoured that the Jews -

compounded out of the heads and entrails of murdered Christian children a salve or food called 'aharace', which they eat every Passover in place of a sacrifice; they prepare this food at least every sixth year because they believe they are saved thereby.<sup>2</sup>

In time this Passover myth gave way to a generalized accusation against the Jews which claimed that they required fresh Christian blood for a wide variety of purposes: for the concoction of medicines and charms, the brewing of poison, blackmagic, sorcery, divination and witchcraft. In medieval Germany it was alleged that the Jewish mutilators dried the blood of their martyred victims, ground it to a powder, and scattered it over the lands - then, in a few weeks, a plague would strike, destroying people, crops and cattle in the blood-contaminated areas, while the Jews remained safely indoors.<sup>3</sup> And since the image of

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<sup>1</sup>Vide Jacobs, Jewish Ideals, . . . , Chap: "The London Jewry", p. 182.

<sup>2</sup>Trachtenberg, p.135. This is part of a confession induced from a Jew of Savoy under torture in 1329.

<sup>3</sup>See Trachtenberg, Chap. X: "The Blood Accusation". These and similar charges against European Jews persisted into the 17th Century, Samuel Purchas recording an accusation against the Jews of Poland which was obviously an instrument of propoganda used to exploit the Jewish moneylenders: "'Maister Berkeley a Merchant of London, who hath spent many yeeres in Liuania, Polonia and other of those colde countries, tolde me, That the Iewes farme the Custome of the Kings . . . [and] in regard of the peoples hatred, prouision is made, vnder great penalties, for their securitie; and yet many Iewes were there executed by occasion of a murren, procured (as was suspected) by Jewish exorcismes intending a plague to the men, and not a murren to the beasts, if their working had sorted: but the Iewes said it was but a pretence to depriue them of their riches.'" (Purchas, p. 137.)

the Jew as harbinger of plague was closely allied to that of the poisoner, the Black Death that ravaged Europe in the 14th Century was similarly attributed to the contamination of wells and streams by treacherous Jewish poisoners. A handful of Jews, moreover, practised the art of medicine and, as James Parkes indicates -

If a king had a Jewish physician, and did not actually perish on the battlefield, cloven in two by the battle-axe of the enemy, there is nothing surprising in his unfortunate doctor being accused of poisoning him.<sup>1</sup>

This image of the noxious Jew and the poisoning physician persisted in the folk-mind of the Middle Ages, lingered on into the Renaissance and lent no little credence to the accusation levelled against Lopez, Elizabeth's Jewish doctor, who was arraigned and convicted of having plotted to poison her in 1594.<sup>2</sup> It was the same image which Marlowe had utilized five years previously in his horrification of Barabas, the Jew of Malta, who brags in hyperbolic vein of his malicious poisoning of wells and his murderous medical exploits in Italy, who simulates death with poppy and cold mandrake juice, who poisons Ithamore and his cronies with a poisoned posy of flowers, and who eliminates an entire nunnery and his daughter besides with a pot of poisoned rice, brewing it with an incantatory curse:

The juice of Hebon, and Cocytus' breath,  
And all the poisons of the Stygian pool  
Break from the fiery kingdom; and in this  
Vomit your venom, and invenom her  
That like a fiend hath left her father thus.<sup>3</sup>

In the very year of Lopez's execution, moreover, Thomas Nashe recorded in the rumbustious picaresque adventures of Jack Wilton his unfortunate hero's encounter with a Jewish quack-physician called Zacharie, private doctor to the Pope and lecturer in anatomy at the local College, and his co-religionary henchman, Zadoch. These Renaissance monsters rank with Barabas as perhaps the most grotesque compendia of all the medieval superstitions clinging to the Jew as doctor, poisoner and harbinger of plague, and sharing with the Jew of Malta a similar hyperbolically exaggerated rhetoric.

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<sup>1</sup>James Parkes, The Jew in the Medieval Community, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix: "The Image of the Jew as Poisoner".

<sup>3</sup>"The Jew of Malta", III, iv; Christopher Marlowe, ed. Havelock Ellis (Mermaid Series; London: T. Fisher Unwin, n.d.), p. 281.

Jack Milton, in the course of his travels, falls into the clutches of Zadoch who in turn sells him for a sum of 500 crowns to Dr. Zacharie as a guinea-pig for his annual anatomy lecture - an imaginatively colourful variation on the mutilation theme; but Juliana, one of the Pope's many concubines, catches sight of Jack and,

with a lustful collachrimation lamenting my Iewish Promunire,  
that bodie and goods, I should light into the hands of such  
a cursed generation, inuented the means of my release.<sup>1</sup>

She thereupon contrives to substitute some poison for the medicine that Zacharie had prescribed for the Pope; and on the sudden death of his Holiness's Grand-sublimity-taster all the Jews of Rome are banished from the city by a Papal edict. Zadoch and Zacharie take the news badly, and in their frenzy betray their medieval origins:

If I must be banisht [cries Zadoch], if those heathen dogs  
will needs rob me of my goods, I will poyson their springs  
& conduit heades, whence they receiue al their water round  
about the citie; He tice all the young children into my  
house that I can get, and cutting their throates barrell  
them vp in poudring beafe tubbes, and so send them to  
victuall the Popes gallies. Ere the officers come to extend,  
He bestow an hundred pound on a doale of bread, which He  
cause to be kneaded with scorpions oyle that will kill more  
than the plague. He hire them that make their wafers or  
sacramentary gods, to mingle them after the same sort, so in  
the zeale of their superstitious religion shall they languish  
and droup lyke carrion.

More happie than the patriarches were I, if, crushte to death  
with the greatest torments Romes tyrants haue tride, there  
might be quintesent out of me one quart of precious poison.  
I haue a leg with an issue, shall I cut it off, & from his  
fount of corruption extract a venome worse than anie serpents?  
If thou wilt, He goe to a house that is infected, where  
catching the plague, and hauing got a running sore vpon me, He  
come and deliuer [Juliane] a supplication, and breath vpon her.  
I knowe my breath stinkes so alreadie, that it is within halfe  
a degree of poison. He pale her home if I perfect it with anie  
more putrifaction.<sup>2</sup>

The recurrence of these images more than three centuries after the expulsion of the Jews from England merely testifies to the ineradicable persistence of the medieval Jewish bogey in the English literary imagination - an image which 200 years of residence in the country had done little to belie. Contact with the Jews and their alien traditions

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<sup>1</sup>"The Unfortunate Traveller," The Works of Thomas Nashe, II, 305.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 311-12.

had, if anything, confirmed the superstitious rumours of pre-Conquest times, adding a touch of credulity to the myth of the Christ-killers; and the preconception of the Jew existing in English folk-mythology seems to have dictated the medieval history of the image.

In 1290 the Jews, now impecunious and drained of their former economic utility, were officially expelled from England as a matter of political expediency - an expedient rationalized, however, on predominantly religious grounds: "To the honour of the Crucified," read the promulgation of exile, "we have caused the Jews to go forth from our realm."<sup>1</sup> But their absence from the country failed to obscure the impression left behind them, and the Jew once again assumed a fearsome mythical identity - the bogey emanating from a preconception of the Jewish Antichrist. Historical accounts of mutilation and crucifixion provided ample material, and the great names in medieval poetry - Chaucer, Gower, Langland, together with the anonymous balladists and dramatists of the age - recreated their image of the Jew from the bogeyman associations of the 12th and 13th Centuries, consolidating a concept which was to endure until the literature of the Renaissance. It seemed inevitable that, after their expulsion and at a time when the Jews were unknown and alien to the English, the image should have derived from a pasteboard stereotype of ancient standing. It is all the more remarkable that Marlowe and Shakespeare should have transcended the limitations of so inflexible and static a convention to create the greatest Jewish personages in English literature.

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In post-expulsion times monastic history relinquished the Jewish figure to imaginative fiction; and the poet transformed it radically. Before 1290 there was a specific need for the invention of the delcide Jew, mutilator, poisoner, and harbinger of plague - the need, as I have suggested, for some sort of social scapegoat in whom the Middle Ages could localize the evil of the world, the need for an image of powerful propoganda potential capable of rationalizing society's persecution of the hated Jewish usurer. But the expulsion of English Jewry clearly

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Marcus Arkin, "When the Jewish Goose stopped laying Golden Eggs," Jewish Affairs, X, No.3 (March, 1955), 17.

obviated the necessity of such images; and the crucial difference between the medieval propagandist and the poet or, for that matter, the Nazi and the medieval balladist, is centred in their dissimilarity of motive. For the poet of the 14th and 15th Centuries appears to have revived the image of the ritual-murderer less for anti-Semitic propaganda than to re-affirm his faith in Christianity, to spread the honour of God, to celebrate the miracles of the Virgin, and point a special moral lesson - as does Chaucer's Prioress:

O cursed folk of Herodes al newe,  
 What may your yvel entente yow availle?  
 Hordre wol out, certeyn, it wol nat faille,  
 And namely there th'onour of God shal sprede;  
 The blood out crieth on youre cursed dede.<sup>1</sup>

The motives of the medieval poet and balladist were essentially religious, and their emphasis was invariably placed upon the miracle of the martyred child rather than upon its butchery. The motives of the Nazis who revived the image were predominantly political. Antichrist themselves, they sought no affirmation of religious faith, no miraculous resurrection of the murdered child, nor any paen of praise for the righteous working of God's providence. Their main concern was to provoke an emotional reaction in the mob by concentrating on the criminal depravity of the Jewish crucifier - an instance of the appalling extremes to which the image can be taken when divorced from the duality of the Christian attitude. But in the poetry of the Middle Ages, Jewish persecution consequent upon the blood-accusation frequently gives way to their conversion following the revelation of a miraculous resurrection of the martyred child - the Satanic Christ-killer yielding to the image of the Jew converted.

Chaucer's contribution to the ritual-murder genre, although admittedly hostile to the Jewish homicides, incorporates several significant variations on the Hugh of Lincoln theme from which it derives - variations already discernible in the numerous 13th and 14th Century analogues to the Prioress's Tale.<sup>2</sup> In the first place, it differs

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<sup>1</sup>"Prioress's Tale," lines 574-78, p.162. All line references derive from Fragment VII in the Robinson edition.

<sup>2</sup>Vide Carleton F. Brown, "Chaucer's 'Prioresses Tale' and its analogues," P.M.L.A., XXI (1906).

radically from Matthew Paris's historical account of the incident by its very form and intention - a poem dedicated to the Virgin in celebration of her miracles, a narrative embodiment of religious tribute to

This welle of mercy, Cristes moder swete,  
protectress of martyred children and participant in the bereavement of the sorrowing mother. It opens with the Prioress's fervent invocation to the Virgin, as to some pagan muse, immediately establishing the context and spirit in which the whole is to be read - a poem deriving from the "Cult of the Virgin" genre:

O mooder Mayde! o mayde Mooder free!  
O bussh unbrent, brennyng in Moyses sighte,  
That rayshedest down fro the Deitee,  
Thurgh thyn humblesse, the Goost that in th'alighte,  
Of whos vertu, whan he thyn herte lighte,  
Conceyved was the Fadres sapience,  
Help me to telk it in thy reverence!<sup>1</sup>

This lyrical, almost liturgical framework to the tale at once determines the tone and emphasis of the unpleasant incident about to follow, and an aura of religious transcendentalism alleviating the enormity of the Jewish crime; and the identity of the sacrificial victim -

This gemme of chastite, this emeraude,  
And eek of martirdom the ruby bright,<sup>2</sup>

is suitably distinguished from the infinitely less saintly Hugh of Lincoln by his religious piety and his zealous devotion to the Virgin, a deliberate remodelling of the original source material to suit the devotional nature of the narrative. Her sentimental description of the child, moreover, is perfectly in keeping with the Prioress's "conscience and tendre herte"<sup>3</sup>:

Among thise children was a wydwas sone,  
A litel clergeon, seven year of age,  
That day by day to scole was his wone,  
And eek also, whereas he saugh th'ymage  
Of Cristes mooder, hadde he in usage,  
As hym was taught, to knele adoun and seye  
His Ave Marie, as he goth by the weye.<sup>4</sup>

And to intensify the compliment to the Virgin, the clergeon's favourite

<sup>1</sup>"Prioress's Tale," lines 467-73, p.161.

<sup>2</sup>"Prioress's Tale," lines 609-10, p. 163.

<sup>3</sup>"Prologue to The Canterbury Tales," line 150, p.18.

<sup>4</sup>"Prioress's Tale," lines 502-508, p. 161.

song - composed in reverence of Christ's mother and sung to honour Her - is the Alma Redemptoris Mater which he always sings on his way to school through the Jewish ghetto. The Jews, however, cannot endure the Christian prayer, and Chaucer depicts them in their malice as conventional medieval anti-Christians - usurers engaged in "lucre of vilanye", "cursed folk of Herod" - the arch slayer of little innocents, and venomous agents of the Devil:

Our firste foo, the serpent Sathanas,  
That hath in Jus herte his waspes nest,  
Up swal, and seide, 'O Hebrayk peple, alas!  
Is this to yow a thyng that is honest,  
That swich a boy shal walken as hym lest  
In youre despit, and synge of swich sentence,  
Which is agayn youre lawes reverence?<sup>1</sup>

They thereupon conspire to kill the child, hiring a ghetto murderer who grabs him as he passes singing by, slits his throat and flings him in the Jewish cess-pool - a violent, brutal crime, but neither dwelt upon with the relish of the propagandist nor protracted as the crucifixion scene in the Mystery Cycles. The murder is subordinated to the miracle and Chaucer disposes of the deed in a couplet, passing on immediately to the sorrow of the grieving mother - a Virgin Mary figure, whose piteous condition completes the iconographical pieta of the poem, calling as she does "on Cristes moder make and kinde." Eventually she wanders into the Jews' quarters, directed by Christ towards the very spot where her murdered boy lies buried in the dung; and then, miraculously, the whole ghetto begins resounding with the child's singing of the Alma Redemptoris. The Christian folk come running to marvel at the miracle, and the child-martyr is taken in procession to the nearest abbey escorted by the thronging crowd and his weeping mother:

His mooder swomyng on the beere lay;  
Unnethe myghte the peple that was there  
This newe Rachel bryng fro his beere.<sup>2</sup>

Unobtrusively, almost unconsciously, the juxtaposition of Old Testament matriarch and her New Testament counterpart is established in the

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<sup>1</sup>"Prioress's Tale," lines 558-64, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., lines 625-27, p. 163.

narrative - Rachel's mourning providing a paradigm in medieval typology for the sorrow of Mary - an almost unwitting acknowledgement of the duality of Jewish images in the theological tradition of the Middle Ages; for even in the course of reviling the Jews, the medieval poet can still conceive of the alternative to his revulsion.

The little child, after testifying to the miracle of the Virgin and reaffirming the faith of the Christian community, finally yields up the ghost and is entombed in a marble shrine like some medieval saint - a monument more illustrious than that accorded Hugh of Lincoln whose death in Paris's account is unaccompanied by either miracle or revelation, despite the Prioress's concluding invocation to this prototypical child-martyr as if to some divine intercessionary:

O yonge Hugh of Lyncoln, slayn also  
 With cursed Jewes, as it is notable,  
 For it is but a litel while ago,  
 Preye eek for us, we synful folk unstable,  
 That, of his mercy, god so merciabie  
 On us his grete mercy multiplie,  
 For reverence of his mooder Marie. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the tale ends, as it began, on a note of religious fervour, with an invocation and a prayer - the whole clearly intended as a statement of Christian faith, a semi-liturgical tribute to Mary Mother of Mercy. But if it differs from Paris's account of the Hugh of Lincoln incident in intention and religious emphasis, it differs also from its analogues in the rigorous punishment meted out to the homicidal Jews:

With torment and with shameful deeth echon  
 This provost dooth this Jewes for to sterve  
 That of this mordre wiste, and that anon.  
 He nolde no swich cursednesse observe.  
 "Yvele shal have that yvele wol deserve";  
 Therefore with wilde hors he dide hem drawe,  
 And after that he heng hem by the lawe.<sup>2</sup>

Such, however, is not the fate of the Jews in the great majority of the analogues. The earliest extant version of Jewish ritual-murder in the Book of Miracles records the wonder and amazement of the Jews at the

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<sup>1</sup>"The Prioress's Tale", lines 684-90, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., lines 628-34, p. 163.

miracle and their voluntary conversion to Christianity;<sup>1</sup> and their lives are almost invariably spared to the everlasting honour of Christianity - for the conversion of the Jewish infidel seems primarily to confirm the efficacy of the Christian faith to the Christian believers themselves. He seems, as it were, to provide a necessary object lesson for the periodical revival of intense religious fervour, the means of demonstrating to medieval Christianity the miraculous dispensation of mercy even to the unbeliever.

The popular Scottish ballad of Sir Hugh or the Jew's Daughter - in all its 21 variations - similarly derived from the Hugh of Lincoln incident and served to perpetuate the ritual-murder myth throughout the 14th Century. In ballad-form, however, the crime differs considerably from The Prioress's Tale in that the homicide is perpetrated not by a conspiracy of Jews but by an autonomous, seemingly unmotivated and mysterious Jewess whose identity remains obscure. Dr. Jacobs has suggested<sup>2</sup> that the original of this shadowy murderess may possibly have been Belleassez, the Chief Rabbi of Lincoln's daughter, whose marriage attracted a large number of English Jews to the city at the time of Hugh's notorious martyrdom. It seems equally probable, however, that the "Jew's Daughter" derives from Old Testament Biblical sources - from the figure of Dinah, for instance, the sexually enticing daughter of Jacob;<sup>3</sup> or even from Eve, the arch-temptress, as the symbolic touches in the ballad would suggest. In the Jamieson version of the ballad, little Hugh's football lands through the Jew's window and the daughter inveigles the young child upstairs to retrieve it:

How will I come up? How can I come up?  
 How can I come to thee?  
 For as ye did to my auld father,  
 The same ye'll do to me.

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<sup>1</sup>Vide Carleton Brown, "Chaucer's Prioress's Tale", . . .", p. 488.

<sup>2</sup>Jacobs, Jewish Ideals and Other Essays, pp. 217 ff.

<sup>3</sup>See Chap. IV, p. 95, for a discussion of the image of the Jew's beautiful daughter, its probable origins and its development.

She's gane till her father's garden,  
 And pu'd an apple red and green;  
 'T was a' to wyle him sweet Sir Hugh,  
 And to entice him in.

She's led him in through ae dark door,  
 And sae has she thro nine;  
 She's laid him on a dressing-table,  
 And stickit him like a swine.<sup>1</sup>

The poetic details of the ballad remain obscure - "my auld father" (Adam, perhaps?) and the nine dark doors - but the bare facts of the crime correspond fairly closely to the actual historical incident. The body is wrapped in lead and pitched, like Hugh of Lincoln's, into the Virgin's draw-well where the distracted mother discovers it. But the balladist departs from the original by incorporating in his narrative the miracle of the resurrected child, the voice crying from the well -

The lead is wondrous heavy, mither,  
 The well is wondrous deep,  
 A keen pen-knife sticks in my hart,  
 A word I donnae speik.<sup>2</sup>

And the supernatural atmosphere of the miraculous resurrection is intensified by the ghostly chiming of the bells of Lincoln:

And a' the bells o' merry Lincoln,  
 Without men's hands were rung;  
 And a' the books o' merry Lincoln,  
 Were read without man's tongue;  
 And ne'er was such a burlial  
 Sin Adam's days begun.<sup>3</sup>

Once again, the miracle seems to take precedence over the murder and there is no record of any punishment meted out to the Jew's daughter. In fact, she disappears completely from the narrative as if the balladist had lost all interest in her; and only in the Percy Papers are we given some indication of her fate:

She's tane her mantie about her head,  
 Her pike-staff in her hand,  
 And prayed Heaven to be her guide  
 Unto some uncouth land -<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Hugh of Lincoln", Child's collection of English and Scottish Popular Ballads, ed. Sargent-Kittredge (Cambridge, Mass: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1904), p. 369.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Calisch, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted by Jacobs, p. 218.

<sup>4</sup>"The Jew's Daughter", English and Scottish Popular Ballads, p. 371.

an obvious co-incident of the two images of Jew's daughter and Wandering Jew, both apparently doomed to perpetual exile and eternal penitence for their anti-Christian crimes. Since the 14th Century, however, medieval prejudice against the Jewish deicide seems to have abated in the folk-memory; for although the ballad is still sung - particularly, it seems, in the negro quarters of New York - the identities of the protagonists have undergone considerable change, and only a corruption of the original is discernible in the title of the latest variation: "Little Harry Hughes and the Duke's Daughter".<sup>1</sup>

Closely allied to the "kinderschaendung" genre, moreover, and probably deriving from similar accounts of ritual mutilation, is the medieval charge against the Jews of desecrating the holy wafer of the Eucharist in diabolical displays of anti-Christian hatred. But this image, it seems to me, originated - like so many other apparently anti-Semitic images - from a specific need in the religious life of medieval Christianity: the need, in this case, to be reassured of the power of the host, to be convinced of the phenomenon of transubstantiation; and the figure of the Jew in such accounts is clearly manipulated to reflect the doubt and wavering uncertainty in the Christian mind itself.<sup>2</sup> For the obvious intention of these tales of sacramental wafer desecration seems to inhere in the marvelous proof of the Doctrine of the Real Presence consequent upon the miracles that follow the profanation of the host; and the inevitable conversion of the amazed and sorrowfully repentant Jews serves to confirm the Christian belief in the efficacy of transubstantiation.

The most significant embodiment of this theme in medieval literature is found in the anonymous Croxton Play of the Sacrament variously catalogued as Non-Cycle Mystery, folk-drama or interlude, an essentially

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<sup>1</sup>Wilde Jacobs, 218-19.

<sup>2</sup>Parkes points out in The Jew in the Medieval Community that the image of the Jew as the subject of a miracle leading to his conversion probably derives originally from the iconoclastic controversy of the 11th Century. The iconoclasts, who desired the abolition of images, were opposed by the iconodules who defended their use and proved the efficiency of images in a series of stories relating to the conversion of Jews by images. The iconodules, in turn, most probably influenced the clergy of the Middle Ages who created the legend of the profanation of the Host and the subsequent conversion of the Jews. (See Parkes, p.32). See also Trachtenberg, Chap. VIII: "Host and Image Desecration", pp.109-23.

transitional play bridging the gap between the reverent drama of the Middle Ages and the irreverent comedy of the 15th Century.<sup>1</sup> It opens with a lengthy prologue, enunciating for the audience the bare bones of the plot - a tale of the Aragonian merchant, Sir Aristorius of Eracles, who is bribed by a rich Jew of Surrey to procure the holy sacrament for a Jewish desecration-ceremony intended to test the doctrine of transubstantiation. The merchant complies, and the wafer is stabbed, nailed, boiled, seethed, and baked - when suddenly the figure of Christ materializes from the host and the Jews are promptly converted by the miracle of His Presence in the Eucharist. In conclusion, the prologue reminds his audience of God's "remnant according to the election of grace"<sup>2</sup> - His merciful extension of salvation to the Jews, warning them at the same time against the Jewish sin of doubting:

Be-low thus God at a tyme showyd hym thare,  
 Thowgha hys mercy & hys myght;  
 Unto the Jewes he gan appere  
 That thai shuld not lesse hys heavenly lyght.

So therfor, frendis, with all your myght  
 Unto yowar gostly father shewe your synne;  
 Beth in no wayhe daye nor nyght,  
 No name off doubtis that Lord put in;

ffor that the doubtis the Jewys than in stode,-  
 As ye shall se playd, both more & lesse,-  
 Was yff the Sacrament war fleshe & blode.<sup>3</sup>

This, it seems to me, is the very doubt which probably gave rise to the drama - the uncertainty existing in the Christian mind mirrored in the behaviour of the doubting Jews and scotched and obviated through their agency.

It is Jonathas, the principal Jew of the drama, vowing homage to his God Mohammed as Barabas is later to do; who voices the primary doubt prevailing in the play:

The belave of this Crysten man ys false, as I wene,  
 For thai belave on a cake, - me thynk yt ys onkynd. -

<sup>1</sup>The manuscript is assigned to the end of the 15th Century, a date corroborated by the prologue:

"Thys myracle at Rome was presented, for sothe,  
 In the yere of ouer Lord a Mcccclxi." (lines 58-59).

<sup>2</sup>Romans 11:5.

<sup>3</sup>"The Play of the Sacrament", lines 61-71; Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama, ed. J.M. Manly (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1897), Vol. 1.

And alle they seye how the prest dothe yt bynd,  
 And be the myght of hys word make yt flessh & blode, -  
 And thus be a conceyte thel wolde make vs blynd, -  
 And how that yt shuld be he that deyed upon the rode.<sup>1</sup>

His fellow Jews - Jazon, Jadzon, Masfat and Malchus - all swearing by "Machomete so myghty", decline to believe this tenet of Christian faith and decide to put it to the test. So Jonathas, as chairman of the Jews, approaches the Christian merchant; and in a bargaining scene reminiscent of the wrangling between Judas and the High Priests, Sir Aristorius eventually agrees to steal the wafer for a sum of £100. Once in their clutches, the Jews lay the Eucharist upon the kitchen table, rehearse the origins of the Christian mass, and then set about putting the sacrament to the proof:

Jason: Yff that thys be he that on Caluery was mad red,  
 Onto my mynd, I shalle kenne yow a conceyt good:  
 Surely with ower daggars we shalle ses on thys bredde,  
 And so with clowtis we shall know yf he haue eny blood.

Jadson: Now, by Machomyth so myghty, that meuyth in my mode!  
 Thys ys masterly ment, thys matter thus to meue;  
 And with ower strokys we shalle fray hym as he was on the rode,  
 The he was on don with grett repreue.

Masphat: Yea, I pray yow, smyte ye in the myddys of the cake,  
 And so shall we smyte theron woundys fyve;  
 We wylle not spare to wyrke yt wrake  
 To prove in thys brede yf ther by eny lyfe.<sup>2</sup>

The necessity of proving life in the bread and the burden of guilt which any such investigation must inevitably entail are conveniently transferred to the Jewish agents of apparent Christian doubt; and with cries of "Have at it! Have at it!" they re-enact the traditional crucifixion scene with the macabre grotesquerie of the Mystery Cycles. In the ingenuity of torture to which the now bleeding wafer is subjected the blasphemy of the earlier drama is, if possible, overgone. For not satisfied with the outpouring of blood, the Jews call for a cauldron of boiling oil in which to seethe the sacrament - and then the mood of ribald yet horrific farce sets in. Jonathas, unable to cast the Host off his hand, runs beserk and the other are obliged to strap him to a post and hammer nails through

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<sup>1</sup>"The Play of the Sacrament", lines 119-24; Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama, ed. J. M. Manly (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1897), Vol. 1.

<sup>2</sup>"The Play of the Sacrament", lines 369-80.

his wafer-gripping hand - the gruesome result of which being the unfortunate dismemberment of the hand in question. Nor does the arrival of a comic quack mountebank serve to remedy the consieration of the Jews; and Jonathas, giving his limb up as lost, orders the others to pluck the nails out one by one and filling both hand and wafer into the boiling oil - which they do. The cauldron bubbles suddenly with blood; but Jonathas, determined to belie the miracle, resorts to baking the Eucharist in a red-hot oven in order to staunch the bleeding - whereupon the oven bursts apart, heeding at the cranial, and a blood-smearred image of Jesus appears to the Jews, reproaching them for their sadistic cruelty:

Why blaspheme you me? Why do ye thus?  
 Why put you me to a new torment?  
 And I dyed for you on the crosse?  
 Why consyder not you what I dyd crye?  
 Why lie that I was with you, ye had no valaurye.  
 Why remember ye nott my bitter chaunce,  
 How your kynne dyd me awaunce  
 For clayming of myn anherytaunce?  
 I show you the straytnesse of my grynance,  
 And alle to asue you to my mercy.

But the Jesus who appears to these Jews is no wrathful, vengeful deity intent upon punishing his tormentors. He is the Jesus who cried from the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" - the God of mercy, the dispenser of forgiveness even to his traducers. And one by one the Jews fall to their knees before Christ, begging Him for conversion, baptism and mercy in the Latin phraseology of the Roman Catholic liturgy:

Jonathas: Tu es protector vite mee; e quo trepidabo?  
O thu, Lord, whyche art my defendour,  
 For dred of the I trynble & quake.  
 Of thy great mercy lett vs receyue the shewre!  
 And makehly I aske mercy, amandys to make.

Jason: Lacrimis hostis conscientiam nostram baptizamus;  
Lord, out of grevous sowepe & out of drynes to lyght,  
He graut's somous lrruak.

Masbat: O gracyous lord, forgyfe me my mysdoke!  
With lamentable hart: miserere mei, Deus!

Malchas: Lord, by the water of contrycion lett me aryse:  
Asperges me, Domine, Ysopo, et mundabor.

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"The Play of the Sacrament", lines 651-66.

Ibid., lines 661-65; 669; 672-73; 676-77; 680-81.

It is a highly stylized and formal ritual of conversion - perhaps the most elaborate ceremony of this nature in English literature - a celebration in dramatic form of the great power of the Eucharist in effecting the conversion of the unbeliever, a triumphal affirmation of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, and a reminder, perhaps, of the Pauline promise of eternal availability of Christian mercy to the Jewish infidel:

Jhesus:           To all you that desyre in any wyse  
                     To aske mercy, to graunt yt redy I am,  
                     Remember I lett yowre wyttis suffyce,  
                     Et tunc non esuriam a vobis faciam esum.<sup>1</sup>

Christ then succeeds, where the quack doctor had failed, in restoring Jonathas' hand; and the Jew, in a scene of contrition, recants his sinful disbelief, turns his religious devotions from Mohammed to Christ, and is absolved of his transgressions by the bishop. The play eventually concludes with yet another elaborate and liturgical baptismal ceremony - followed by Jonathas' solemn declaration of faith in his new-found Saviour and a traditional piece of didactic moral admonishment directed towards the audience:

God omnipotent esuermore looke ye serue  
 With deuocion & prayre whylle that ye may;  
 Dou't yt not be wyllie you preserue  
 ffor ahe good prayer that ye say to hys pay;  
 And therfor in euery daw tyme loke ye nat delay  
 ffor to serue the Holy Trynyte,  
 And also Mary, that smete may;  
 And kepe you in perfyte loue & charyte.<sup>2</sup>

As religious drama, the Exorton Play of the Sacrament is admittedly trite in its moralism and laborious in its determination to affirm and re-affirm the Christian faith through the image of the Jew. Its scenes of comedy are, for the most part, gratuitous and tasteless without the strong parodic and thematic significance of, for instance, the comic scenes in The Second Shepherds' play; and as "theatre of cruelty" it might have provided a source of horrific fascination for the groundlings. But dramatic history, it seems to me, has taken insufficient account of the play - not as religious drama or later medieval comedy or even as "theatre of cruelty", but as that form of drama which was to grow

<sup>1</sup>"The Play of the Sacrament", lines 686-89.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., lines 908-15.

in popularity and importance throughout the course of the following century as a record of the form and pressure of contemporary economic affairs: the drama of medieval Avarice and the Renaissance usurer. For an invidious spirit of acquisitiveness permeates the play, a sense of the vastly expanding commercial and mercantile life of England and its concomitant economic morality which, in the later 16th Century, was to challenge radically the stability of ordered medieval values. It is a spirit embodied in the two major protagonists of the play - Aristorlus the Christian, and Jonathas the Jew - both merchants, both immensely wealthy and powerful, both representative of the middle-class business-man who was soon to emerge from the change in the structure of Renaissance society, both products of the decline of the aristocracy and both evidently profiting from the opening of trade relations with foreign nations. It is in this mercantile capacity that Aristorlus first introduces himself:

Syr Arystorly is my name,

A merchants myghty of a royall araye;  
 Ful wyde in this worlde spryngyth my fame,  
 Fore kend & knowne, the sothe for to saye,  
 In all maner of londis, without any naye,  
 My marchandysse renneth, the sothe for to tell;  
 In Gene & in Janyse & in Genewaye,  
 In Surrey & in Saby & in Salern I sell.<sup>1</sup>

And he proceeds to enumerate, in alphabetical order, the many lands and cities with which he trades: Antyoche and Almayn, Braben and Briteyn, Colabre and Coleyn, Dordrade and Denmark, France, Gyldre and Galys, Hamborowhe and HOLLAND, Jerusalem and Jherico - and so on and on, embracing most of Europe and the Middle East, a vast commercial empire rivalled only by that of Barabas in Marlowe's play. And he concludes this catalogue with thanks to God for his wealth:

No rain in thys world may weld more rycheesse;  
 All I thank. God of hys grace, for he yt me sent;  
 And as a lord's pere thus I've I in worthynesse.<sup>2</sup>

He is not, of course, an English merchant - no Covetous Man or usurer ever is; but his economic greed is obviously symptomatic of what was later

<sup>1</sup>The Play of the Sacrament', lines 9-16.

<sup>2</sup>The Play of the Sacrament', lines 37-39.

to develop into a crisis in the economic life of English Christian society - a crisis in which the figure of the Jew was once again to play a major role.

In this respect, if no other, the figure of Jonathas the wealthy Jewish merchant assumes an importance far transcending his function as Christ-killer and mutilator. He stands, in the Croxton play, as the lag-end of one tradition and the avant-garde of another - a dramatic progenitor of Barabas and Shylock, the Jewish moneyman and capitalist, the financier whose glittering inventory of gold and jewels and spice-laden vessels and agents dazzles with its power and magnificence:

For I thanke the hayly that hast me sent  
Gold, sylver & presyous stonys,  
And abundance of spycis thou hast me lent,  
As I shall rehearse before you onys:  
I have ematysit's ryche for the nonys  
And baryllis that be bright of ble,  
And saphyre samely I may show you attonyis  
And crystalys clere for to see!

I have dyamentis dore-nourthy to dresse,  
And ameraldis, ryche I trow they be,  
Onyx and ochalis both more & lesse,  
Topazyons, smaragd's of grete degre,  
Perly's pracyous grete plante;  
Of rubes ryche I have grete renowne;  
Crepandis & calcedonyes samely to see,  
And curyous carbuncly's here ye fynd noon;

Spycis I have both grete & smale  
In my shyppes, the sothe for to saye,  
Gyngere, lycorasse and camyngalie,  
And fygis fatte to plese you to paye,  
Peper and saffyron & spycis smale,  
And datis wola dulcett for to dresse,  
Almundis and reys, full every male,  
And reysones both more & lesse!

Clowys, greynis & gyngor grene,  
Hace, mastyk that myght ys,  
Synymons, sugar, as you may sene,  
Long peper and Indas lycorys,  
Orangis and apples of grete apryce,  
Purgarnetis & many other spycis -  
To tell you all I have now, I-wys, -  
And soche other merchandysse of every sondry spycis.

Jow Jonathas thys ys my name,  
Jazon & Jazdon thei waytyn on my wyllie,  
Masfat & Malchus they do the same,  
As ye may knowe, yt ys bothe rycht & skylle.  
I telle you alle, by dal and by hyll,  
In Eracias ys noon so moche of myght,  
Werfor ye owe tenderli to tende me tyllie,  
For I am chefe merchanthe of Jewes, I telle you be ryght.!

Barabas, in an infinitely more illustrious play, is to enunciate a similarly exotic and sensuous catalogue of gems and riches. But between Jonathas and Barabas there intervenes a large and cumbersome body of dramatic literature in which the economic image of the Jew evolves gradually from his medieval origins as allegorical Avaritia to his Renaissance counterpart in the moneyman and usurer. It is from this dramatic genre, so closely associated in the medieval mind with the Christ-Killier, that the greatest Jewish figures in English literature derive.

Remarked Ben: better keep out the jews  
or yr/ grand children will curse you  
Jews, real Jews, chazims, and neschek  
also super-neschek or the international racket!

EZRA POUND, Seventy Cantos, Canto LII.

111

MEDIEVAL AVARICE AND  
RENAISSANCE USURER:  
THE ECONOMIC IMAGE  
OF THE JEW.

A semantic consideration of this familiar modern colloquialism -  
"Jew'd - serves primarily to reveal an encrustation of powerful "affective  
connotations" in Christian culture identifying it less with a religion,  
a race, or a physical type, than with a distasteful form of economic  
odium: a symbol of corrupting financial exploitation, Ezra Pound's  
USURA, the racketeer, the bankruzzard. The seat to this image has been  
firmly set by the eminent German sociologist, Sombart<sup>3</sup>, with his  
contention that capitalism is not only a hereditary Jewish aptitude, but  
that the "materialistic commercialism" characteristic of the capitalist  
spirit is clearly traceable to the principles of the Jewish religion.  
Significantly, both Pound and Sombart reconstruct their respective  
conceptions of the Jew from the debris of the Middle Ages - from the  
fear and detestation of the scapegoat Jewish usurer, and the fundamental  
misinterpretation of Jewish economic morality.<sup>4</sup> For like nearly every

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<sup>3</sup>"Neschek" is a Hebrew word generally translated as "usury"; "chazims" seems to be a grammatically faulty attempt at the Hebrew word for "swine".

<sup>4</sup>Yida S.I. Noyakawa, Language in Thought and Action (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1941). He sets out to prove that "the 'Jew' created by intentional definition of the word, simply is not there."

<sup>5</sup>Werner Sombart, The Jews and Modern Capitalism (reprinted in New York: Collier Books, 1962), with an Introduction by S.F. Mosellitz.

<sup>6</sup>Judaism nowhere sanctions the taking of usury, and the Jewish religion expressly forbids the acceptance of interest from either Jew or Gentile. See Exodus 23:25 and Leviticus 25:35-37. Deuteronomy 23:20 seems, apparently, to condone the Jew's taking of usury from the Christian, and was interpreted in this way by the medieval theologian. But the Hebrew word "neschek", one of the few concepts in the economic vocabulary of the Old Testament, was clearly intended for an agricultural rather than a commercial economy; and the rabbis continued to interpret the word as "security" rather than "usury", condoning the acceptance of security from a stranger who might leave the community at any time without honouring his debt. See Parkas The Jew in the Medieval Community, pp. 275 ff.

image of the Jew, this economic symbol derives essentially from the conditions of thirteenth century English society, from the gradual development of commercial relations in the Western world and the conveniently insecure status of the Jew in the Christian community. Valued primarily for his financial utility, the Jew was forced by a combination of circumstances to engage in a usurious activity theologically prohibited to the Christian; and the scapegoat function of the usurer served to make him the victim rather than the profiteer of this necessary economic system. "Not the Jews as they were made capitalism," writes Professor Hoselitz in his anti-thesis to Sombart's work, "but capitalism made the Jews what they are."<sup>1</sup> And the medieval origins of the economic image of the Jew seem, indeed, to substantiate this view.

William the Conqueror was probably the first English monarch to encourage Jewish immigration from the continent. For at a time when capital was in unprecedented demand Jewish gold conveniently provided the king with the means of welding the country into an organic state, enabled the barons to pay their dues, and the Royal Treasurer to augment his coffers by oppressive Jewish taxation. Originally the Jews had entered England as merchantmen; but there was the constant danger of their mercantile role clashing with the interests of the Christian merchants. Agriculture, moreover, provided an unsuitable alternative, for the feudal prohibitions against Jewish land-ownership would inevitably ruin them; and if they attempted to engage in any form of skilled trade, the powerful Guilds were quick to resist the intrusion of undesirable foreign competition. So it was that, by obliging this comparatively small community to pay a disproportional bulk of the nation's taxes, the Exchequer virtually forced the Jews into money-lending activities, exploiting them as an indirect method of taxing society. As a race of chartered usurers, however, the Jews derived certain benefits from the Crown; for under the feudal laws, Royal protection was automatically extended to all rightless aliens so that the Jews became, in effect, the personal property of the King.

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<sup>1</sup>Hoselitz's introduction to Sombart's The Jews and Modern Capitalism, pp. 16-17.

his own economic scapegoat, the channel through which he could tap the resources of his country. And as the Royal demands grew more exorbitant, so the Jews were obliged to increase the rate of interest on their loans, incurring the inevitable hatred of their debtors. Thus began the semantic blur; for the word "Jew" - which in the Roman world had denoted a person of the Jewish faith, and which suggested a particular type of merchant to eleventh century Europe - now became inextricably involved with the damnable practice of usury. Within a century "Jew" and "usurer" became almost synonymous terms of abuse.<sup>1</sup>

Continually in debt and chronically impecunious, the sovereigns of the thirteenth century increased the pressure on the Jews until the profits of usury constituted nearly a third of the total received from a single tax. The presence of Jews, moreover, seemed to give the ruling monarch a sense of security - particularly in the potential emergency of having to raise a special tallage in times of unrest; nor was it unusual for the princes and barons to have an entire colony of Jewish usurers at their disposal. Chaucer's Prioress's Tale - one of the earliest literary suggestions of this form of economic exploitation - deals with just such a colony; and although the setting is adroitly shifted to another continent, the situation described is peculiarly English:

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,  
Hateful to Crist and to his compaignye.<sup>2</sup>

The maintenance of a special money-lending ghetto evidently served medieval society as a convenient means of circumventing the theological restrictions imposed upon any effective form of credit-system. Economic development had always been dependent upon the permissive authority of the Church; but insofar as borrowing at interest was concerned, this permission was consistently withheld. All forms of commercial profit were

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion of the historical background to medieval Jewish moneylending, see James Parkes's Jew in the Medieval Community and A.M. Hyamson's History of the Jews in England (London: Nathuen, 1928).

<sup>2</sup>"The Prioress's Tale," lines 488-492, p. 161.

condemned, ipso facto, as "lucre of vileynye" and hateful to Christ; and not only was it impracticable, but virtually impossible for a Christian to engage in financial activities which enabled him to gain at another's expense. For no man could profess Christianity and yet engage in "foule usure". Such a conflict of roles was intolerable, and some means had to be sought whereby society could adhere to its religious convictions while at the same time profiting from the rapid development of trade. An alter ego was needed to supplement this deficiency in the world of medieval economics; and the Christian financier managed to achieve this end without offending the Church by laying his sin upon the shoulders of the Jew. It was, moreover, an economic tactic which could easily be rationalized. For usury was traditionally regarded as God's curse upon the Jews - a curse inflicted, like a host of others, as punishment for the unforgivable Jewish crime of deicide, for the Jews' complicity in the crucifixion of Christ. And this popular belief finds explicit utterance in Langland, as the allegorical figure of Faith turns wrathfully on the Jews and speaks her dark prophecy against them:

Thanne gan Faith felly - the fals lures dispise,  
 Called hem caytyves - accursed for euer,  
 For this foule vyleynye. 'veniaunce to 3ou alle!  
 . . . . .  
 For be this derkenesse ydo - his deth worth avenged,  
 And 3e, lordynes, han ylost - for Lyf shal haue the maistrye,  
 And 3owre fraunchise, that fre was - fallen is in thraldome,  
 And 3e, cherles, and 3owre children - chieue shal 3e neure,  
 He haue lordship in londe - ne no londe tylye,  
 But al bareyne be - and vsurye vsen,  
 Which is lyf that owre lordur - in all lawes acurseth.<sup>1</sup>

This is, of course, a perfectly accurate image of the status and role of the Jew in the English community of the thirteenth century - a nation without rights, the serfs of the king and his treasury, a people without land of their own, denied the ownership of property and forced to practise usury in order to survive. The responsibility for this race of usurers,

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<sup>1</sup>"Then Faith turned fiercely on the Jews and cursed them saying "May God's vengeance fall on the lot of you, cowards that you are! For this vileness you shall be accursed for ever. . . . And as soon as this darkness is over, Life himself shall conquer, and you, my lords, will have lost your battle. Then all the liberties that God has given you shall turn to slavery; you shall become serfs, and all your children with you; never again shall you prosper, never have land or dominion or plough the soil again. But you shall lead barren lives, and make your money by usury, a l'villhood condemned by God in all his commandments."<sup>40</sup> Piers Plowman (circa 1386), ed. Skeat (Oxford: O.U.P., 1961), I, 526; lines 92-94; 101-107. (All lines references derive from B. Passus XVIII in the Skeat edition). Translation by J.F. Goodridge (Penguin Classics, 1959), p. 258.

however, is attributed neither to economic necessity nor to the deliberate exploitation of the Jews by the feudal nobility. God's vengeance, it seems, was sufficient justification for the plight of medieval Jewry and sufficient authority for the advantage taken of the usurer by the Christian community.

But the permissive attitude towards Jewish usury could be rationalized also by a specious interpretation of the scriptural sources of economic morality; and the doctrinal bases which forbade the taking of interest by Christians were found conveniently inapplicable to the Jews. The authoritative passage in the Gospels condemning usury is to be found in Luke:

And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again.<sup>1</sup>

But as the Jew neither accepted the Christian scheme of ethics nor came within the jurisdiction of the Church, these injunctions were not considered binding upon him. Jewish law, moreover, appeared to favour the taking of interest, and the Old Testament passage which yielded to the greatest interpretative flexibility was that from Deuteronomy -

Unto a stranger thou mayst lend upon usury: but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury.<sup>2</sup>

a passage frequently utilized by the Church in her condonation of Jewish usury. For to the medieval theologian this text implied a licence permitting the Jews to take interest from the Gentiles, while the Christians were permitted to take interest from no one - for were not all men brothers in Christ?

Subjected in this way to the circumstances of England's economic development, courted by society to further the ends of Christian commerce and cursed by society to satisfy the scruples of Christian conscience,

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<sup>1</sup>Luke:6: 34-35. It is strange, as Parkes points out (p. 276), that the medieval Church should have overlooked Christ's Parable of the Talents in its consideration of economic morality - a parable which seems to suggest as clear a fundamentalistic argument for the taking of interest as any. See Matthew 25: 26-27.

<sup>2</sup>Deut. 23:20. The Hebrew word  $\overline{\text{ל}|\Psi\text{ל}}$ , as I have suggested (p.46, fn.4) does not mean "usury", although it may carelessly be interpreted as such.

the image of the Jewish usurer acquired a certain inevitable ambiguity - an ambiguity which persisted into the Renaissance, finding its epitome in the figure of Shylock. It was a composite image created partly out of the need for Jewish agency among the nobility, partly by the theological condemnation of usury, and largely by popular prejudice against the detested money-lender who was also the slayer of Christ. But the simultaneous existence of contradictory images - one, at least, recognizing the utility value of an economic scapegoat and the others decrying its criminality - clearly proved impracticable towards the end of the thirteenth century. It was then that an image of the Jew was selected to the exclusion of all others - not that of the engine of finance, but an image of the usurious anti-Christ whose economic morality was undermining the whole structure of English society. The ecclesiastical condemnation of usury was turned vehemently upon its practitioners; and it was forgotten, for the while, where the ultimate responsibility for the Jews' activities actually resided.

Needless to say, the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 co-incided with a sharp decline in their economic value. Overtaxation had rendered them virtually effete, and extortionary measures were implemented even under severe torture.<sup>1</sup> Tallages on the small Jewish community were doubled and re-doubled<sup>2</sup> until the Jews were driven to the extremity of eating into their capital and disposing of their bonds on landed property,

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<sup>1</sup>It is recorded how King John, in 1210, forced a Jew to part with 10,000 marks by ordering a tooth to be drawn each day until he relented: "By the space of seven daies together he stood seedfast, loosing everie of those daies a tooth, but on the eight day, when he should come to have the eight tooth and the last (for he had but eight in all) drawne out, he paid the monie to save that one, who with more wisdom and lesse paine might have doone so before, and have saved his seven teeth, which he lost with such torments, for these homilie toothdrawers used no great cunning in plucking them fourth (as may be conjectured)." See Rosenberg, Appendix III, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup>Between 1188 and 1290 the Jews were subjected to tallages amounting to no less than 300,000 marks (about £200,000), excluding fines and levies. See the annals compiled by J. Jacobs, Jewish Ideals and other essays, pp. 180-83.

which the feudal lords were only too eager to take up. As the baronial policy of land-grabbing continued, it became increasingly evident that the balance of Royal power was being undermined; and statutory measures were immediately taken to prevent the contraction of loans on the security of landed property.<sup>1</sup> As the lesser nobility could offer no other form of security, however, the Jews found themselves all but deprived of an economic function of prime importance. When Edward I ascended the throne it became quite apparent that Jewish funds were no longer of any significance in the economy of England, and further restrictive legislation<sup>2</sup> made the Jews wholly incapable of performing their original services to the Crown. A problem had been created which the king was powerless to solve - except by the quick and effective measure of expulsion; and although the promulgation of exile was rationalized on purely religious grounds<sup>3</sup>, it was evident that religion was being used to mask an embarrassing and insoluble economic predicament. In 1290 about 16,000 Jews were forced to leave England under pain of death; and the profession of usury was left open to the less scrupulous of native Christians assisted by some money-lending bankers from Italy.

The borrowing of money at interest had obviously to continue in a developing commercial world, and ingenious means of circumventing the ecclesiastical injunctions against usury were soon devised.<sup>4</sup> But every European country which had expelled its Jews soon came to regret its actions; for compared to the Christian usurer, the Jew appeared infinitely more tolerable. And the medieval poets, forgetting their former prejudices, waxed sentimental for the absent Jewish money-lender and his reasonable

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<sup>1</sup>The Provisions of Jewry (1269) also cancelled all existing obligations.

<sup>2</sup>Statute de Judaismo (1275) completely forbade the lending of money at interest.

<sup>3</sup>The promulgation read: "In the honour of the Crucified, we have caused the Jews to go forth from our realm." See Marcus Arkin, "When the Jewish Goose Stopped Laying Golden Eggs," p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>See Parkes, p. 329.

rates of interest.<sup>1</sup> Even the Germans were torn between the detestation of the Jew and the fairness of his dealings in the face of Christian oppression:

Gar liddlich war der Juden gesuoch [wrote Sebastian Brant],<sup>2</sup>  
Die Kristen-Juden sie vertriben;  
Mit Judenspiess die selben rennen -  
Und schwight darzuo all recht und gsatz.

And the image of the "Kristen-Juden" - that new species of usurious profiteer - grew in importance as European society came to recognize the corruption of the Christian financier:

. . . after the expulsion of the Jews [wrote a Norman chronicler] they could not find any money, except by borrowing it through agents from certain Christians, both clerics and laymen, who lent at such an enormous rate of interest that it was more than double what was charged by the Jews.<sup>3</sup>

The insistent complaints against their extortions when the Jews were present, and the enchantment which the distance of their banishment lent them, merely serves to emphasise the confusion of medieval Christianity's attitude towards the Jewish usurer. And a similar state of mind seemed to prevail in Elizabethan England - an age faced with an alarming crisis in economic morality, one in which the image of the Jew assumed a significance and pertinence indiscernible in any other period of English literature.

What the sixteenth century had inherited from the Middle Ages was, among other things, its God-centred economic world-view - that frame of mind which recognized the humblest of secular activities as part of a divine purpose, which regarded any form of commercial profit as a mortal sin tantamount to avarice, and saw the lending of money as an exercise in Christian charity, one of life's fundamental duties. But the need for

<sup>1</sup>"Car Juifs furent debonnes  
Trop plus en faisant tels affaires  
Que ne furent ore chrestien. . .  
Mais si li Juifs demoure  
Fussent au reame de France  
Chrestien moult grant aidance  
Eussent en que ils n'ont pas."  
Quoted by Parkes, pp. 337-38.

"For Jews were excessively generous in such matters, more so than any Christian. . . But if the Jews had stayed in France, the Christians would have profited greatly by it, which profit they now lack." The Chronicle of Geoffrey of Paris, lines 3121-3123; 3162-3165.

<sup>2</sup>"Really tolerable was what the Jews had asked; the Christian-Jews drove them out. They practise the art of the Jewish cut-throat, and all justice and laws are silent over it." Brant, Ship of Fools (1493); Quoted by Parkes, pp. 337-38.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted by Parkes, pp. 336-37.

credit in an expanding commercial world began gradually to undermine the theological structure of medieval economics; and the Church came to fear the practice of usury as a menacing attempt to translate the religious framework of medieval metaphysics into a legal system where economic conduct would become an autonomous compartment of life, unamenable to moral criteria. It represented a weakening of Church authority, a refutation of canon law, a serious threat to the ordered theocentric way of life - and, as such, it was intolerable. In accordance with various ecclesiastical enactments, the damnable sin of usury was indiscriminately classified with homicide, sacrilege, perjury, sodomy, incest and parricide; and, like these, could not be remitted by a priest in the confessional. Usurers, in turn, were coupled with sorcerers, fornicators, brothel-keepers, adulterers, and robbers<sup>1</sup>; and Dante consigned them to the Seventh Circle of his Inferno, scorched with cinders and stung by sparks:

So bite and scratch throughout the summer day  
 The tortured dogs now swiftly here, now there,  
 Whenever fleas and flies and vermin prey.  
 But when I came at each in turn to stare,  
 Of all beneath that fiery torture I  
 Knew not one face, but saw that each one bare,  
 Hung from his neck, a purse emblazoned by  
 Its special colour and its special crest  
 Whereon its owner seemed to feast his eye.<sup>2</sup>

It was not only an embryonic economic crisis, however, which the Middle Ages had bestowed upon the Elizabethans. For the satirical-social poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had also evolved a series of images and symbols through which this crisis could be illustrated and anatomized: the familiar allegorical panoply of Avarice, Covetousness and Usury - those disembodied medieval vices which gradually came to assume human shape during the Renaissance, eventually appearing on-stage in the person of the usurious Jew. The gradual evolution of the usurer from an abstract entity in a catalogue of vices, through the Seven Deadly

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<sup>1</sup>Vide R.H. Tawney's introduction to Thomas Wilson, *A Discourse upon Usury* (1572), (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1925), pp. 106 ff.; and Parkes, Chapter VIII: "The Medieval Theory of Usury", pp. 275-306.

<sup>2</sup>Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno* (circa 1300), (London: O.U.P., 1961), tr. by Warwick Chipman. Canto XVII, lines 49-57.

Sins of the Morality tradition, to his inevitable association in the medieval mind with the traditional Jewish image, seems to have its inception in the poetry of Gower and Langland writing in the closing decades of the 1300s.<sup>1</sup>

The Confessio Amantis (1386-1390) seems particularly sensible of the economic revolution which the practice of usury had effected in the domestic life of the Middle Ages, the havoc wrought merely by the taking of a bean where a pea had once been lent; and the close association between Usury and the sin of Avarice is emphasised in Gower's procession of Vices:

Upon the bench sittende on hih  
 With Avarice Usure I sih,  
 Full clothed of his oghne suite,  
 Which after gold makth chace and suite  
 With his brocours\*, that renne aboute      \*brokers  
 Lich unto racches\* in a route.                \*hounds

.....

Usure with the riche duelleth,  
 To al that evere he belth and selleth  
 He hath ordeined of his sleyhte,  
 Mesure double and double weyhte:  
 Outward he selleth be the lasse,  
 And with the more he makth his tasse,  
 Whereof his hous is full withinne.<sup>2</sup>

Even where Usury was not necessarily the offspring of Avarice, it was invariably her profession - as Chaucer's Coveitise in the Romaunt of the Rose suggests:

And that is she that for usure  
 Leneth to many a creature  
 The lasse for the morwe wynnynge,  
 So coveitous is her brennyng.<sup>3</sup>

But the specific identification of the sin of Avarice with the concept of usury and its profession by the Jews, occurs in Piers Plowman where Avarice is humbled before Repentance and interrogated by her:

"Vsedestow euere vsurie," quod Repentaunce • "in alle thi lyf-tyme?"  
 "Nay, sothly," he seyde • "save in my ȝouthe.  
 I lerned amonge Lombardes • and Iewes a lessoun,

<sup>1</sup>A.B. Stonex, "The Usurer in Elizabethan Drama", P.M.L.A., XXXI (1916), suggests a "faint and uncertain" line of descent from the medieval Avaritia to the Elizabethan usurer; but the affinities are inherent in more than the mere outward appearance or the physical descriptions of these types as Stonex suggests.

<sup>2</sup>Gower, Macaulay edition, II, 66-7.

<sup>3</sup>Chaucer, Robinson edition, p. 567. The association between Avarice and usury seems to persist in Elizabethan literature - as, for instance, in Spenser's pageant in Duessa's House of Pride, The Faerie Queene, I. iv. 27.

To wey pens with a peys • and pare the heuyest,  
 And lene it for loue of the crosse • to legge a wedde and lese it;  
 Such dedes I did wryte • 3if he his day breke.  
 I haue no maneres thow rerages • than thow miseretur et commodat."<sup>1</sup>

Avarice's bitterly satirical rejection, in the final line, of those Christian criteria of economic morality - miseretur et commodat, compassionate and charitable lending - indicates the transvaluation of established values which threatened the Middle Ages, and was fully accomplished by the middle of the sixteenth century. Ironically and mistakenly the Jews are held responsible for instructing one of the Deadly Sins in the finer points of its avaricious profession - for although "coin-clipping" was one of the most frequent and serious charges levelled against medieval Jewry, the extortionary measures described by Langland were essentially those of the English money-lenders, whose usury differed radically from that of the Jews.<sup>2</sup>

But the collocation of economic corruption and Jewish activity had been too firmly ingrained for any logical analysis of the connection between the contemporary dilemma and the alleged responsibility of the Jews. A symbol of Greed and Exploitation had been established; and as the economic pressures increased, so this image became more predominantly Semitic - an image which the Elizabethans seem to have rediscovered in the medieval poets, embellished with their own descriptive details, and utilized as an "objective correlative" for the rising middle-class financier. The image of Covetousness in Piers Plowman, for example, might have served as the prototype for a whole tribe of sixteenth century usurers:

And thanne cam Coueytise • can I hym nou3te descryue  
 So hungriliche and holwe • sire Heruy hum loked.

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<sup>1</sup>"Have you ever in your life practised usury?" "No, certainly not, except in my young days. I did pick up a thing or two then, I admit, chiefly from Jews and Lombards. They showed me how to weigh coins with a balance, clip the heavier ones, and then lend them out, all for love of the cross - the one on the back of the gold pieces! The borrower would give me a pledge he was almost certain to lose, and that was worth more to me than the clipped coins. And you should have seen the agreements I used to draw up in case my debtors didn't pay on the nail. I've acquired far more properties through arrears of debt, than I ever could have got by 'showing kindness and lending.'" Langland, *Skeat edition*, p. 150. *B Text*, Passus V, lines 240-46. Translated by Goodridge (Penguin Classics), p. 106.

<sup>2</sup>The main difference was that the Jew lent on interest which accrued from the day of loan, while the Christian, to circumvent the ecclesiastical restrictions on usury, employed a "pledge" system: he allowed a certain period of time to elapse within which repayment might be made without any charge; but a pledge was forfeited if repayment was not made on the day specified. The creditor invariably stipulated a time-period within which repayment could not possibly be made. (See Parkes, p. 329). This was probably the form of usury practised by the Lombards.

He was bitelbrowed • and baberlipped also,  
 With two blered eyghen • as a blynde hagge;  
 And as a letheren purs • lolled his chekes,  
 Wel sydder than his chyn • thei chiueled for elde;  
 And as a bondman of his bacoun • his berde was bidraueled.  
 With an hode on his hed • a lousl hatie aboue,  
 And in a tauny tabarde • of twelue wynter age,  
 Al totorne and baudy • and ful of lys crepynge.<sup>1</sup>

The tawney hood was, of course, the statutory colour which the Jews were obliged to wear as a means of identification, and which later became the traditional garment of the money-lender - a convention which seems to have survived in the 1500s, if only in Bacon's rejection of the notion that "Usurers should have Orange-tawney Bonnets, because they do Iudaize."<sup>2</sup> And for comparison and contrast with Landlond's allegorical vice, here is Thomas Nashe's rumbustious description of the Covetous Man's Renaissance equivalent:

At length (as Fortune serued) I lighted vpon an old, stradling Vsurer, clad in a damaske cassocke, edged with Fox fur, a paire of trunke slops, sagging down, like a Shoemakers wallet, and a shorte thrid-bare gown on his backe, fac't with moatheaten budge; vpon his head he wore a filthy, course biggin, and next it a garnish of nightcaps, which a sage butten-cap, of the forme of a cow-sheard, ouer spread very orderly: a fat chuffe it was, I remember, with a gray beard cut short to the stumps, as though it were grimde, and a huge woorme-eaten nose, like a cluster of grapes hanging downe-wards.<sup>3</sup>

The descriptions are fundamentally similar. Both are etched with the same ribald accuracy of observation, the same gusty particularity. But Nashe's final hyperbolic detail indicates one stage further in the evolutionary process of Avaritia: the usurer has now assumed the grotesque Semitic features of the traditional Elizabethan stage-Jew.

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They say we are a scattered nation [says the Jew of Malta]:  
 I cannot tell, but we have scambled up

<sup>1</sup>"And then came Covetousness; no words can describe him, he looked so hungry and hollow, such a crafty old codger! He had beetling brows and thick, puffy lips, and his eyes were as bleary as a blind old hag's. His baggy cheeks sagged down below his chin, flapping about like a leather wallet, and trembling with old age. His beard was all bespattered with grease, like a serf's with bacon fat. He wore a hood on his head with a lousy cap on top, and a dirty-brown smock at least a dozen years old, torn and filthy and crawling with lice." Langland, Skeat edition, p. 146. Passus V. Lines 188ff. Translated Goodridge, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>Bacon, "Of Usurie", *Essays*, ed. A.S. Sweet (Cambridge: U.P., 1899).

<sup>3</sup>"Pierce Penilesse, his Supplication to the Diuell," *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. McKerrow-Wilson, I, 162-63.

More wealth by far than those that brag of faith,  
 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.<sup>1</sup>

None of Barabas's scattered business-associates seems to have established himself in England, and for him to have included an English Jew in his catalogue of merchants would probably have been an historical anachronism. For after the expulsion of the Jewish usurers and until their re-admission during Cromwell's regime, the image of the Jew in English literature appears to have been conditioned by immemorial forms of race-prejudice rather than by the observation or actual knowledge of contemporary Jews.

There have been several speciously logical arguments, however, for the presence of Jews in Elizabethan England - arguments posited mainly by literary historians intent on rationalizing the pervasive portrayal of the usurious Jewish villain in the dramatic literature of the age. But the controversial question is more often begged than proven:

The Jew figured in the Elizabethan playhouse at all stages of the development of the Elizabethan drama [wrote Sir Sidney Lee], and . . . it is only possible to account for his presence by the assumption that he figured to a proportionate extent in Elizabethan society.<sup>2</sup>

There was certainly a small colony of Marrano refugees in Shakespeare's London,<sup>3</sup> but they were Christians by conversion; and far from engaging in the practice of usury, they served the Queen as an invaluable source of intelligence in Spanish affairs-of-state, or as intermediaries in trade negotiations with her enemies. What is certain, however, is that these Marrano Jews provide a totally inadequate explanation for the sudden emergence of the Jew on the Elizabethan stage and his rapid rise in popularity; nor do Sir Sidney's assumptions account convincingly for the undertones of apparent anti-Semitism in the drama of the later sixteenth century. It is inconceivable that there should have been any specific "Jewish Problem" in Elizabethan England, and A.W. Ward is more probably

<sup>1</sup>Marlowe, The Jew of Malta, I.i., p.237.

<sup>2</sup>Sir Sidney Lee, "Elizabethan England and the Jews", N.S.S. Transactions 1887-92, p. 166. This view is supported by Lucien Wolf, but opposed by Cardozo.

<sup>3</sup>Vide C.J. Sisson, "A Colony of Jews in Shakespeare's London", Essays and Studies, XXIII (1937), 38-51. The term "Marrano" refers to the Jewish refugees from Spain and Portugal who became converted to Christianity but often observed their Judaism in secret.

correct in his appraisal of the controversy:

The popular feeling which prevailed in England against the Jews [he writes] cannot be set down as more than the continued unthinking and indiscriminating acceptance of a popular prejudice of ancient standing.<sup>1</sup>

But the attitude of mind towards the Jew seems to have been rather more complex and less "unthinking" than Ward suggests. For if there was no Jewish Problem, there was certainly a Christian dilemma in the closing decades of the century; and both Barabas and Shylock function as particularly disturbing indications of a crisis in contemporary economic morality which the Renaissance tried to rationalize through the image of the Jew. It was during the 1570s that this latent crisis suddenly erupted in the heated Usury Bill debate which raged both in and outside Parliament; and the controversial issues raised found dramatic expression in a spate of topical usurer plays, inundating the stage with troops of moneylending businessmen, all exhibiting the traditionally Semitic traits of the archetypal Jew. The two finest Jewish roles in the Elizabethan repertoire developed from this genre, and Marlowe and Shakespeare were clearly instrumental in ensuring the continued and intensified popularity of the villainous and usurious stage-Jew.<sup>2</sup>

The changing world-picture in which the tawney-bonneted usurer practised his extortions was one which witnessed a decay of the aristocratic but effete economic dynasty of the Middle Ages; and the Elizabethan, torn between the medieval condemnation of usury and the commercial necessities of his contemporary world, found himself in a critical position of choice. The need for credit in a developing financial world had been ignored or overlooked by the early economists, until the opening of new worlds and the sudden expansion of Elizabethan trade made it virtually impossible to remain oblivious to the conflict between Christian charity and the credit requirements of business dealings. Those whose economic outlook remained decidedly medieval, saw in the rise of Renaissance enterprise not the

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<sup>1</sup>A.W. Ward, "Some Political and Social Aspects of the Later Elizabethan and Earlier Stuart Period," The Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. Ward and Waller (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1950), V, 366.

<sup>2</sup>Stonex lists the numerous usurer plays with a short synopsis of their plots and form.

crudities of a young and brilliant civilization, but the collapse of economic morality and the end of an immemorial tradition; and men of the "old school", like Thomas Wilson, clung adamantly to the staid economy of the Middle Ages, bitterly resisting the advance of a new order and lamenting

that men have altogether forgotten free lending, and have given themselves wholye to lyve by fowle gayning, makinge the lone of monye a kinde of merchandise, a thinge directlye against all lawe, against nature, and against God. And what should this meane, that, in steade of charitable dealing, and the use of almose (for lending is a spice therof), hardenes of harte hath nowe gotten place, and greedie gayne is cheefelye folowed, and horrible extorcion commonly used? I do verely beleve, the ende of thys worlde is nyghe at hande.<sup>1</sup>

The end of Dr. Wilson's world was certainly nigh at hand; for the close of the century saw the dissipation of an entire scheme of medieval economic thought - one which, as Tawney indicates,<sup>2</sup> had attempted to treat financial affairs as part of a hierarchy of values with religion at the apex. And the lesser issue, centred in the Usury Bill, was clearly symptomatic of the greater - the crumbling of an integrated theocentric society to its atomies.

The new school of economic philosophy, with Sir Francis Bacon as its champion, was well aware that the greater part of English commercial activity was pursued by young merchantmen borrowing at interest - a consideration which made usury an indispensable factor in the rapid development of trade; "so as," says Bacon, "if the Usurer either call in or keepe backe his Money, there will ensue presently a great Stand in Trade."<sup>3</sup> This was the practical attitude which characterised the advancement of economic learning in the late 16th century; and the new order contended that money-lending at controlled rates of interest, far from being a heinous sin against God and one's fellow man, was in fact an essential element in modern economic dealings. Bacon's qualified condonation of usury derives, it seems, from the anti-medievalism which was to characterize the economy

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Wilson, ed. R.H. Tawney, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>Tawney's introduction to A Discourse upon Usury, pp. 106 ff.

<sup>3</sup>"Of Usurie" (1597), Essays, ed. A.S. Sweet, p. 124.

of the next fifty years, and his refutation of orthodox medieval principles indicates an initial movement towards the revolutionary "new philosophy" with its altered world-view. For, he maintained -

It is a Vanitie to conceive that there would be Ordinary Borrowing without Profit; and it is impossible to conceive the Number of Inconveniencies that will ensue, if Borrowing be Cramped.<sup>1</sup>

The essay Of Usurie amounts, in fact, to a careful scientific analysis of the question in purely economic terms, stripped of the "Wittie Invectives against Usurie", and the traditional declamations of the Middle Ages: "that It is a Pitie the Devill should have God's part, which is the Tithes"; "that Usurers should have Orange-tawney Bonnets because they do Iudaize"; "that it is against Nature for Money to beget Money"; and so on. But Bacon moved with the times and, unlike Dr. Wilson, was able to accept the hard-hearted Renaissance world with a sense of stoical inevitability and without the medievalist's regret:

I say this onely [he remarks], that Usury is a Concessum propter Duritiam Cordis (a concession by reason of hardness of heart);; For since there must be Borrowing and Lending, and Men are so hard of Heart as they will not lend freely, Usury must be permitted.<sup>2</sup>

His economic world was evidently peopled with Shylocks, not Antonios; business deals were to be struck by unsentimental merchants, not by charitable philanthropists; and it may be presumed that his New Atlantis (1627) would have been governed by this progressive commercial spirit, rather than by an effete set of religious rules intended to regulate the conduct of a basically agricultural community.<sup>3</sup>

These, then, were the two opposing schools of economic thought which debated so heatedly in the House of Commons on the controversial Usury Bill of 1571 - a Bill which served to bring the entire matter to a sudden head, and which resulted in a re-consideration of Jewish economic morality. Indeed, one of the basic arguments in the debate for the legal justification of interest was the scriptural text in which God apparently

<sup>1</sup>"Of Usurie", (1597), Essays, ed. A. S. Sweet, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., pp. 122-23.

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of The New Atlantis and the role of the Jew in Bacon's Utopian community, see Chap. VI, p. 149.

condoned Jewish usury among the Gentiles:<sup>1</sup>

God did not so hate it [maintained a certain Mr. Holley], that he did utterly forbid it, but to the Jews amongst themselves only, for that he willed they should lend as Brethren together; for unto all others they were at large: and therefore to this day they are the greatest Usurers in the World. But be it, as indeed it is, Evil, and that men are men, no Saints, to do all these things perfectly, uprightly and Brotherly; yet ex duobus malis minus malum eligendum; and better may it be born to permit a little, than utterly to take away and prohibit Traffick, which hardly may be maintained generally without this.<sup>2</sup>

This argument was supported by other members, and similar attempts were made to rationalize contemporary commercial activity according to the economic tenets of the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> But Dr. Wilson, the parliamentary representative of the conservative faction, opposed the motion vigorously:

He shewed that the Divines do call Usury a Spider, a Canker, an Aspis, a Serpent and a Devil; he shewed how in nature the offences of Homicide and Usury are to be compared.<sup>4</sup>

A few decades later, Shakespeare was to make precisely the same correlation; and The Merchant of Venice stands as the last and the most powerful argument of medieval Christianity against the advent of a new economic era.

The eventual outcome of the Usury Bill debate, however, was a triumph for the "new" economists. A measure was passed which permitted a rate of interest not exceeding 10% on loans - although conceding, as a sop to the old order, that "all Usurie being forbydden by the Lawe of God Is synne and detestable."<sup>5</sup> But the Law of God was one thing and the Law of Man another; and in accordance with the latter, money-lending in England became open and perfectly legal. Despite all, there seemed a general tendency to regard the taking of interest as something fundamentally alien to the Christian way of life, something peculiarly Jewish; and this crisis in economic morality precipitated the yearning desire for a scape-goat to bear the guilt of usurious activity and relieve the Christian merchant of his need to "Judaize". Society once more felt a need for

<sup>1</sup>See p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Debate on the Usury Bill in the House of Commons, 1571<sup>st</sup>, Tudor Economic Documents, ed. Tawney and Power (London: Longmans & Co., 1924), p. 155.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 158-59.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 156-57.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

the Jews and their comparatively moderate rates of interest; and Dr. Wilson was led to draw an invidious comparison between the Jewish usurer and his extortionate Christian counterpart:

What is the matter [he wrote] that lawes are so universallie hated wheresoever they come? For soothe, usurie is one of the chief causes, for they robbe all men that deale with them, and undoe them in the ende. And for thys cause they were hated in England, and so banyshed worthelye, wyth whome I woulde wyshe all these Englishmen were sent that lende their money or their goods whatsoever for gayne, for I take them to be no better than lawes. May, shall I saye: they are worse then lawes. For go whither you wil throughout Christendom, and deale with them, and you shall have under tenne in the hundredth, yea sometimes for six at their handes, whereas english usurers exceede all goddes mercye, and will take they care not howe muche, wythout respecte had to the partye that borroweth, what losse, daunger, hinderaunce soever the borrower susteyneth. And howe can these men be of god that are so farr from charitie, that care not howe they get goods so they may have them?<sup>1</sup>

It was this very conflict of roles, this clash between the man of Charity and the man of Business, which seemed intolerable to those whose attitudes remained conservatively medieval; the general opinion that

'tis less evil  
In a state to cherish Jews, than Christian usurers<sup>2</sup>

re-echoed in the plays of the later Jacobean dramatists; and the repeated portrayal of the stage-usurer as a Jew, an alien in the Christian community, at a time when England was evidently teeming with rapacious native money-lenders, indicates this latent awareness of usury as something decidedly foreign, un-Christian and consequently at variance with the national and traditional way of life - an activity better left, as Webster flippantly suggests, to the Jews:

Flamino: Would I were a Jew.  
Marcello: O, there are too many.  
Flamino: You are deceived. There are not Jews enough, Priests enough, nor gentlemen enough.  
Marcello: How?  
Flamino: He prove it. For if there were Jewes enough, so many Christians would not turn usurers; if Priests enough, one should not have six benefices; and if gentlemen enough, so many earlie mushrooms, whose best growth sprang from a dunghill, should not aspire to gentilitie.<sup>3</sup>

The lack of Jews and the lack of gentlemen seemed, in fact, to be related

<sup>1</sup>Wilson, ed. Tawney, p. 232.

<sup>2</sup>Shirley, "The Gentleman of Venice" (1632), III, i; The Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley, ed. Gifford and Dyce (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), V, 34.

<sup>3</sup>Webster, "The White Devil" (1612), III, III; The Complete Works of John Webster, ed. F.L. Lucas (London: Chatto and Windus, 1927), Vol. III

aspects of the same problem; for the dunghill mushrooms that were sprouting all over England were representative of a new business class: the money-men for whom usury was a major form of economic activity, the "low peasantry" who were using their loans to snatch landed estates from the impoverished nobility. And as the moneyed middle-class gradually rose in power and importance, so the feudal aristocracy - the Bassanos, with their costly apparel and roystering generosity - gradually declined. Chivalry was seen to be defaced by usury, and nobility beaten down, so that the old order with its aristocratic Christian values came to regard the usurer as a dangerous upstart determined to change the relative economic positions of the landed gentry and the commercial bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup> A lament for this economic ruination, one of the consequences of the new usury laws, seems to find expression in The Merchant of Venice - a play more aware than any other of the changing economic structure of Elizabethan England, and more conservative than most in its adherence to traditional Christian values.<sup>2</sup> For by the time that Shakespeare came to write his comedy, the statutory 10% that the Usury Act had established as the maximum rate of interest became, by means of legal circumvention,<sup>3</sup> the minimum charge; and the medieval objections to usury flared up with renewed

<sup>1</sup>For the socio-economic background to the age in general and The Merchant of Venice in particular, see Tawney's chapter on "The Needy Gentleman" in his introduction to A Discourse upon Usury, and E.C. Pettet, "'The Merchant of Venice' and the Problem of Usury," Essays and Studies, XXXI (1945).

<sup>2</sup>"Arragon: O that estates, degrees, and offices,  
Were not deriv'd corruptly, and that clear honour  
Were purchas'd by the merit of the wearer! -  
How many then should cover that stand bare!  
How many be commended that command!  
How much low peasantry would then be gleaned  
From the true seed of honour! and how much honour  
Pick'd from the chaff and ruin of the times,  
To be new-varnished!" (I, ix. 41-49)

[All quotations from The Merchant of Venice are taken from the New Arden Shakespeare series, edited by John Russell Brown (London: Methuen, 1961), hereinafter referred to as Merchant.]

Cf. Tawney: "The financial dependence of rural England on credit supplied by London, of which these financial transactions were the symptoms, had a social effect of the first importance. . . . Since only the merchants could keep the landowners afloat, what happened was that land was transferred from the dying feudal nobility and old-fashioned squires to the commercial middleclass." (p. 40-41.)

<sup>3</sup>For example, by entering into agreements whereby the debtor pledges himself to pay interest as a "voluntary gift"; or undertakes to pay a penalty for failure to repay the creditor on due date.

intensity, pointedly directed against the Shylock-type of middle-class businessman.

It was this clash between two opposed and contradictory economic world-views which seemed to characterize that period of transition between the old world of the Middle Ages and the new world of the 17th Century; the elegant, witty world of aristocratic medieval values, where Christian charity and generosity predominated - Shakespeare's Belmont; and the hard-hearted world of the commercial exchange, of money values, contractual obligations and usury - Shakespeare's Venice. The dramatic conflict which resulted from this opposition found topical expression in the popular usurer-play and made the appearance of the Jew upon the Elizabethan stage a virtual inevitability.

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The chief protagonist of the usurer-play - the "yellow tooth'd, sunck-eye'd, gowtie shankt" moneylender<sup>1</sup> - seemed to offer a provident dramatic opportunity for revitalizing the stage-Jew with contemporary pertinence; for not only was the archetypal Jew a usurious villain, but the medieval drama had established a certain genre within which the Jew had capered like some grotesque marionette. Nor was the re-emergence of the usurious Jew upon the Elizabethan stage a chance phenomenon born of some inexplicable resurgence of race-hatred. Admittedly, the notorious Lopez trial had afforded the Elizabethan populace an opportunity for Jew-baiting - an infamous affair in which the Queen's personal physician, a converted Spanish Jew, had been arraigned and convicted of a "popish plot" to poison her;<sup>2</sup> but Marlowe's Jew of Malta had already anticipated the noxious exploits of Dr. Lopez by several years, and life seemed, indeed, to be imitating art in a curiously stereotyped fashion. The Queen's doctor merely served to perpetuate the image of the poisonous Jewish physician, providing the dramatists with a variation on the economic image of the Jew - but it was essentially a variation and not a development of the accepted image; for the notoriety of the Lopez trial seems hardly sufficient an

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<sup>1</sup>Marston, "Jacke Drum's Entertainment" (1601), Act 1; The Plays of John Marston, ed. H. Harvey Wood (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1939), III, 181.

<sup>2</sup>See Appendix I: "The Lopez Affair."

explanation for the continued interest of the age in the Jewish moneylender.

The image of the Jewish usurer seems rather to derive from a persistent tradition, ineradicably ingrained in earlier dramatic forms, which conceived of the stage-Jew as an incarnation of all the anti-social traits of medieval society; and the Judas Iscariot role of the Mystery Cycles stands as probably the earliest progenitor of the Elizabethan Shylock - for upon the Judas figure devolved the prototypical part of the hard-bargaining usurer which the Middle Ages had come to associate with the Jew. The suggestion in the gospels<sup>1</sup> that Judas was put "in charge of the common purse" seems to have provided the medieval dramatist with a wonderful opportunity of depicting him as a haggling embezzler:

For of his penys purser was I [says Judas] ,  
And what pat me taught was vntill,  
The tente parte pat stale I ay still.<sup>2</sup>

The 10% of Christ's treasury converted by Judas to his own pocket was, significantly, the very rate of interest which the medieval and, later, the Elizabethan usurer required - not only in England, it seems, but on the continent as well; and the haggling Judas appears as a stock figure in the European Passion Play, bargaining for the betrayal of Christ, and vociferously objecting to each of the thirty pennies counted out -

this penny is red, this one is sick, this one is brocken, this one has a hole in it, this one is improperly stamped, this is too black, look at the long crack in this one, here's one that's dull -<sup>3</sup>

and so on, to the amusement of some medieval German audience who probably saw in this portrayal the Jewish money-lenders of their own acquaintance.

As a result of his identification with Judas, moreover, the Jewish usurer formed an inevitable association with the Devil as well; for Judas's commercial inspiration was evidently attributable to Satan, and several medieval tales actually present the Devil as an active business-partner in the Jew's usury.<sup>4</sup> In the later morality drama, the Judas Iscariot role of the Mystery Cycles was assumed by a grotesquely Semitic Satan

<sup>1</sup>John 13: 29.

<sup>2</sup>The York Mystery Plays, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted by Trachtenberg, The Devil and the Jews, p. 193.

<sup>4</sup>There is a suggestion of Satan's influence over Judas in Luke 22:3; and the medieval dramatists seem to have developed and inflated the suggestion.

accompanied by his clownlike servant, the Vice; and even this convention seems to have persisted in the Renaissance usurer-play, for the Elizabethan money-lender is seldom to be found without his comic servant and each Volpone has his Mosca: Shylock, for instance, is served by Gobbo; Barabas, by Ithamore; Marston's Mammon by Flawne, his page;<sup>1</sup> Haughton's Pisaro by a zany called Frisco;<sup>2</sup> and Penurio is the hungry minion of Fletcher's miserly Lopez.<sup>3</sup> The function performed by the comic servant, moreover, is closely analagous to the role of the Vice - that of mocking, deriding and jeering at the Usurer-Devil, while double-crossing and sometimes frustrating his villainous intentions. Indeed, the latent awareness in Elizabethan drama of the morality play origins of the Jewish usurer is reflected not only in this traditional comic relationship, but verbally as well. Shakespeare's usurer - that "Devil in the likeness of a Jew" - serves constantly to emphasise the traditional interchangeability of the Judas-Satan roles. Nor is it by chance that Ithamore remarks of his Jewish master that "the hat he wears, Judas left under the elder when he hanged himself";<sup>4</sup> for the typical association of Devil, Jew and Vice has already been established in the play and explicitly voiced by the clown: "Why," he quips in a chance remark, "the devil invented a challenge, my master writ it, and I carried it. . ."<sup>5</sup>

Barabas, of course, like Shylock, is explicitly Jewish and their racial and religious differences are crucial to the plays in which they appear - but this is by no means true of each and every usurer in Elizabethan drama. Few, in fact, are as integrally and essentially Jewish as the protagonists of Shakespeare and Marlowe - and yet "Jewishness" is almost invariably implied, either in the Satanic associations or in the actual visual presentation of this character-type onstage. Marston's

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<sup>1</sup>Marston, "Jacke Drum's Entertainment".

<sup>2</sup>Haughton, "Englishmen for my Money" (1598); Old English Plays, ed. Dodsley-Hazlitt (London: Reeves and Turner, 1875), Vol. X.

<sup>3</sup>Fletcher, "Women Pleas'd" (1620); The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher, ed. Henry Weber (Edinburgh: J. Ballantyne and Co., 1812).

<sup>4</sup>Marlowe, The Jew of Malta, Act IV. vi.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., III. iii.

Mamon is a case in point - a relic of the Satanic morality figure in the process of evolving into a Renaissance usurer: "the diuel in the shape of Mamon"<sup>1</sup> with whom "the Diuell and double Duckats still associate".<sup>2</sup> He is obviously a pale and plagiarized shadow of Shylock, running mad and ranting at the loss of his bonds<sup>3</sup> and finally ending his usurious career in "a Citie of Jurye, called Bethlem, Alias plaine Bedlame";<sup>4</sup> but what makes the Devilish Mamon most specifically "Jewish" is that piece of traditional stage-property which adorned nearly every Elizabethan money-man, and to which frequent reference is made: his bulbous and "fierie" nose of alarming proportions, a fashion which (together with the matted red wig) was an obvious inheritance from the popular Judas tradition of the Middle Ages. The original Jew of Malta, by all accounts, seems to have had so elaborate a contraption that peepholes were a positive necessity for the actor playing the role - a detail suggested by Rowley in A Search for Money (1609), where Mounsier Money is described with his "visage (or vizard) like the artificiall Jewe of Maltaes nose. . . upon which nose, two casements were built, through which his eyes had a little ken of us."<sup>5</sup> This false appendage, in turn, established a vogue of grotesque Jewish pantomime which persisted until the closing of the theatres, providing the audience with an endless source of amusement. Pisaro, for instance, in Englishmen for my Money (1598) by William Haughton, has a nose able "to shadow Paul's it is so great", and provokes a spate of derisive comments from his servant:

Ay, go, old huddle [says Frisco], for the best nose at smelling out

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<sup>1</sup>"Black Drum's Entertainment," p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 198.

<sup>3</sup>"Alas my Obligations, my Bonds, my Obligations, my Bonds. Alas, alas, alas. . . Obligations, Obligations: Alas my Obligations, I am undone, undone, undone." "Black Drum's Entertainment," p. 218.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., p. 237.

<sup>5</sup>Rowley, quoted in The Complete Works of John Webster, ed. F. L. Lucas, III, 339, fn. 3.

a penfold that I know. Well, take heed, you may 'haps pick up worms so long, that at length some of them get into your nose, and never out after. But what an ass am I to think so, considering all the lodgings are taken up already, and there's not a dog kennel empty for a strange worm to breed in.<sup>1</sup>

And constant reference is made to the usurer's outsize nose in similar portraits by Marston, Lodge, Rowlands, Chapman, and others.<sup>2</sup>

At some stage in the long process of dramatic evolution the grotesque Judas figure of medieval popular drama seems to have formed an alliance with the Avarice of allegorical poetry - a process of evolution accelerated, no doubt, by the social and economic forces of the mid-16th Century which served to remould this traditional image from a vicious abstraction to a particular contemporary evil. The Deadly Sin of Avarice came to be re-interpreted in terms of usurious practice, and the Covetous Man gradually assumed the stage personality of the usurer who, in accordance with the dramatic conventions of the Middle Ages, retained the business ethics and physical appearance of the Jew.

The last phase of this evolutionary process is clearly discernible in Respublica, a political-morality play of 1553, in which the Vice appears in the likeness of a Jew, introducing himself with the announcement that "My very true, unchristian name is Avarice"; and as Barabas, his co-religionary descendant, is later to do, carefully disguises his identity beneath the ambiguous cloak of "Policy" -

The name of Policy [he remarks] is of none suspected -  
Policy is ne'er of any crime detected.  
So that, under the name and cloak of Policy,  
Avarice may work facts, and scape all jealousy.<sup>3</sup>

Both the verbal and thematic echoes of The Jew of Malta (1592) are evident; and one of the facts which this potentially Machiavellian politician manages to work is the lucrative profession of usury - for of the thirteen moneybags hanging from his waist, "this bag [he says, pointing at one] is

<sup>1</sup>Haughton, V. iii; Dodsley-Hazlitt edition, X, 554.

<sup>2</sup>Vide Celeste Wright, "Some conventions regarding the Usurer. . .," pp. 178 ff.

<sup>3</sup>"Respublica," I. i. Lost Tudor Plays 1460-1566, ed. J.S. Farmer (London: Early English Dramatists Society Publication, 1907), p. 182.

mine interest of this year's usury."<sup>1</sup> Thirty years later<sup>2</sup> this Avarice figure actually assumes the name of Usury in Robert Wilson's Three Ladies of London (1584), a transitional morality play in which the three allegorical ladies in question - Love, Fame and Conscience - are persecuted by personifications of such contemporary ills as Lucre, Fraud, Dissimulation, Simony, and (inevitably) Usury. The latter, as might be expected, threatens to undermine the most sacred foundations of English society, robbing Love and Conscience of their house, slitting the throat of Hospitality, ruining Plain-Dealing, and even trying to murder Liberality - activities which overflow into the play's sequel, The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London (1585). It is in this latter play that Usury's parentage is called into question, and is found to be Semitic in origin:

Usury: Whatsoever ye do, be not traitors to your native country.

Simony: 'Tis not our native country, thou knowest. I, Simony, am a Roman: Dissimulation, a mongrel - half an Italian, half a Dutchman: Fraud so, too - half French and half Scottish; and thy parents were both Jews, though thou wert born in London, and here, Usury, thou art cried out against by the preachers.<sup>3</sup>

This attempt to rationalize the evils of contemporary English society and the need to believe that such economic ills were somehow alien and un-English accounts, to a large extent, for the recurrent image of the Jewish stranger in the Christian community - a concrete symbol of the vexing "Jewishness" inherent in the rising middle-class of 16th Century England.

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<sup>1</sup>"Respublica," I.I. Lost Tudor Plays 1460-1566, ed. J.S. Farmer (London: Early English Dramatists Society publication, 1907).

<sup>2</sup>Some time during this 30 year period between Respublica and The Three Ladies of London there appeared a play, now lost, called The Jew. Brief mention is made of it in Gosson's The School of Abuse (1579) where, after condemning the players as corrupters of the Commonwealth, he singles out a few exceptional plays which are "without rebuke" - including among them "The Jew and Ptolome, showne at the Bull, the one representing the greedinesse of worldly chusers, and bloody mindes of Usurers: The other, etc." Vide J.R. Brown, Introduction to New Arden edition of The Merchant of Venice, p. xxix. To what extent this missing play might have served as a model for The Merchant of Venice or what relic it might have been of the Avarice-Usurer-Jew transition in the morality tradition is a matter for mere speculation. See also Landa, pp. 47-54; and Sir Sidney Lee, "Elizabethan England and the Jews", pp. 143-145.

<sup>3</sup>Wilson, "The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London" (1585); Old English Plays, ed. Dodsley-Hazlitt, VI, 456-57.

This, after all, was the aspect of contemporary economics which so distressed Dr. Wilson - the idea that the Christian was gradually undergoing an economic metamorphosis into the popular image of the medieval Jew.

There is a seemingly irrelevant episode in Wilson's Three Ladies of London (1584) which serves to illustrate this very dilemma. It concerns a scheming Christian merchant who, like Shakespeare's Antonio, had borrowed a sum of 3,000 ducats from a gentle Jewish money-lender called Gerontus. This is, indeed, one of the few instances in Elizabethan drama where the Jewish usurer is made to appear in a favourable light - but the important point is that the fair-dealing of the Jew is deliberately manipulated to cast the cupidity and treachery of the Christian into clearer perspective; and the dramatic opposition of Jewish fidelity and Christian falsity pervades this parenthetical episode in the play. It is a theme which dates back to the sentimental yearning of the medieval poets for the honest Jew when faced with the unscrupulous tyranny of their native businessmen; and Wilson emphasises this idea in all three scenes where the two men appear together. "Surely," says Gerontus when the merchant refuses to honour his debt -

Surely, if we that be Jews should deal so with one another,  
We should not be trusted again of our own brother;  
But many of you Christians make no conscience to falsify your faith,  
and break your day.<sup>1</sup>

As in The Merchant of Venice, the claim eventually comes before a court of law. But the crafty merchant, to evade the debt, declares his intention of casting off his Christianity and turning Turk - for, according to an ancient Turkish ordinance, all debts are cancelled by conversion. Rather than be a party to this dishonest ruse, however, and to prevent the merchant from prostituting his religion, the Jew offers fair terms:

Pay me the principal [he asks]; as for the interest, I forgive it you.  
As yet the interest is allowed amongst you Christians, as well as in  
Turkey: Therefore respect your faith, and do not seek to deceive me.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian merchant, nevertheless, remains adamant; and seeing how matters

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<sup>1</sup>Wilson, "The Three Ladies of London" (1584); Old English Plays, ed. Dodsley-Hazlitt, VI, 328.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 356.



And with young orphans planted hospitals,  
 And every moon made some or other mad,  
 And now and then one hang himself for grief,  
 Pinning upon his breast a long great scroll  
 How I with interest tormented him.<sup>1</sup>

As a dramatic work in the "usurer-play" genre, however, The Jew of Malta is of minor importance. Its really great significance as a product of the late 16th Century - that which it shares thematically with Ben Jonson's Volpone (1606) - is the image it presents of the new economic society where commercial values and the money-ethic become the new standards of morality, where Mammon holds the balance of power in his grip, and business enterprise is dominated by a particular political philosophy. In the lovely world of Shakespeare's Belmont, money represents an instrument of Christian charity and liberality; on the island of Malta, however, money is power - the tremendous power of wealth divorced from bulk, of infinite riches in a little room. And the general principle conditioning economic morality is one of selfish profiteering, a demonstration of Montaigne's thesis that

...no man profiteth but by the losse of others: . . .  
 let every man sound his owne conscience, hee shall finde, that  
 our inward desires are for the most part nourished and bred  
 in us by the loss and hurt of others.<sup>2</sup>

"For so I live," cries Barabas, "perish may all the world!"<sup>3</sup>

It was this "ethic of rapacity" which Shakespeare was to oppose in The Merchant of Venice (1597), clearly indicating what Marlowe in his plays had consistently denied - the existence, namely, of some antithetical "ethic of liberality",<sup>4</sup> some norm of Christian conduct even within the changing structure of English economic life. Antonio, the merchant of the title, may be a member of the rising commercial class of the 16th Century, but there is nothing of Barabas in his humanism. It derives, as

<sup>1</sup>Marlowe, The Jew of Malta, II, iii., p. 265.

<sup>2</sup>Michael de Montaigne, "The Profit of One Man is the Damage of Another", Essays, trans. Florio (Everyman's Library; London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1928), I, 104.

<sup>3</sup>Marlowe, Jew of Malta, V. vi.

<sup>4</sup>Widie Rosenberg, p. 29.

Pettet suggests, from the theocentric tradition of the Middle Ages:

Antonio's objection to usury [he writes] and in particular his practice of granting free loans, raises him to the level of a symbol of the whole medieval attitude, for the positive core of tradition teaching on the usury question was precisely that loans ought to be a pure act of Christian charity, without interest.<sup>1</sup>

This was the dying tradition for which Dr. Wilson so grievously mourned - the gospel tradition which enjoins all men to engage mercifully in generosity to others, to lend freely -

hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.<sup>2</sup>

The scriptural association of free lending and mercy is of paramount importance in the play, and Antonio functions as the embodiment of this basic tenet of Christian morality; for even though the spendthrift Bassanio is already indebted to him, he is nevertheless prepared to give more money for the mere asking:

be assur'd [he says]  
My purse, my person, my extremest means  
Lie all unlock'd to your occasions.<sup>3</sup>

Antonio's open-handed generosity remains unimpaired when the bond is forfeited, even to the extent of his disclaiming every shred of Bassanio's indebtedness:

Sweet Bassanio [he writes] . . . my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit, and (since in paying it, it is impossible I should live), all debts are clear'd between you and I, if I might but see you at my death.<sup>4</sup>

The spirit of the Gospels seems, once again, to illuminate Antonio's actions -

Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.<sup>5</sup>

Yet it is for this very reason that Shylock, "the child of the 'cash-nexus'",<sup>6</sup> loathes him so intensely:

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<sup>1</sup>E.C. Pettet, 'The Merchant of Venice' and the Problem of Usury', Essays and Studies, XXXI (1945), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Luke 6: 35-36.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, I. I., 137-39.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., III. II., 314-18.

<sup>5</sup>Luke 6: 30.

<sup>6</sup>Pettet, p. 29.

I hate him for he is a Christian:  
 But more, for that in low simplicity  
 He lends out money gratis, and brings down  
 The rate of usance here with us in Venice.<sup>1</sup>

For the Jewish usurer, taking interest from his neighbour in need, refusing to lend charitably without the assurance of a bond, exemplifies that "ethic of rapacity" which governed the new economic morality. And if the conduct of Antonio is infused with the spirit and language of the Gospels, it soon becomes evident that his dramatic antithesis - the Jewish usurer - gradually emerges as a representative of the Old Testament legality which appears to sanction the taking of interest from strangers. Indeed, the theological overtones in the text point to an unmistakable opposition of the Old Law and the New; and this opposition is made explicit by Shylock's citation of an Old Testament analogy to rationalize his usurious profession - the analogy drawn between Jacob's methods of increasing his flocks, and the "breeding" of money at a rate of interest to augment his own treasury.

This was a way to thrive [he concludes], and he was blest:  
 And thrift is blessing if men steal it not.<sup>2</sup>

Antonio, however, rejects this specious argument:

This was a venture sir that Jacob serv'd for,  
 A thing not in his power to bring to pass,  
 But sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven.  
 Was this inserted to make interest good?  
 Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?<sup>3</sup>

This argument, of course, is the old Aristotelian polemic against usury upon which the Middle Ages based their "wittie invectives." "They say," remarks Bacon in his essay On Usurie, ". . . It is against Nature, for Money to bet Money"<sup>4</sup> - and Antonio evidently subscribes to this commonplace objection:

If thou wilt lend this money [he says to Shylock], lend it not  
 As to thy friends, for when did friendship take  
 A breed for barren metal of his friend?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, I. iii, 37-40.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I. iii, 84-85.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., I. iii, 86-90.

<sup>4</sup>Bacon, Essays, "Of Usurie".

<sup>5</sup>Merchant, I. iii, 127-29.

True Christian friendship contemns usury, lends expecting nothing in return; and Antonio clearly allies himself to those New Testament precepts which regulate man's economic behaviour towards man, while Shylock justifies his usury by the permissive authority of the Old Law. In terms, therefore, of purely theological economy the Christian and the Jew come to represent not only the clash of two traditions or two classes, but the conflicting values and ideologies of their respective Laws - a conflict which gathers momentum as the play unfolds, reaching a climax with the triumph of Christianity in the trial scene.

The Merchant of Venice, moreover, shares with The Jew of Malta that sense of a transvaluation of ordered and stable values, an awareness of the encroachment of the money-ethic upon human relationships and the ensuing equation of human life and affection with material possession:

O sir [Barabas tells Lodowick], your father had my diamonds.  
Yet I have one left that will serve your turn:-  
I mean my daughter.<sup>1</sup>

And his raptures on regaining his moneybags - "O girl! O gold! O beauty! O my bliss!"<sup>2</sup> - evidently influenced Shakespeare's representation of the same sense of preposterous perversion. Shylock's raging is made to appear even more grotesque, reported at second hand by Solanio:

I never heard a passion so confus'd  
So strange, outrageous, and so variable  
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets, -  
"My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!  
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!  
Justice, the law, my ducats, and my daughter!"<sup>3</sup>

The relative value of daughters and ducats seems hopelessly confused - although not so later, when Shylock clearly indicates which loss he values the more:

Why there, there, there, there! a diamond gone cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfort, - the curse never fell upon our nation till now, I never felt it till now, - two thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels; I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear; would she were hears'd at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Marlowe, II, III, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., II, i, p. 256.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, II, VIII, 12-17.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., III, i, 76-82.

And not only human values, but moral values as well are assessed in terms of the money ethic - a point which Shakespeare makes almost simultaneously with Shylock's entrance:

Shylock: Three thousand ducats for three months, and Antonio bound.  
Bassanio: Your answer to that.  
Shylock: Antonio is a good man.  
Bassanio: Have you heard any imputation to the contrary?  
Shylock: No no, no, no, no: my meaning in saying he is a good man, is to have you understand me that he is sufficient.<sup>1</sup>

Concepts of "good" and "bad" are uprooted from their Christian context, emptied of moral content, and forced to stand for values that can be calculated according to a man's bank-balance. A good man, in Shylock's world, is a wealthy man; while in the passing world of the Christian humanist the wealthy man was figured as an incarnation of Covetousness, Avarice and a Deadly Sinner.

It is the world of Belmont that stands as a constant reminder of "value" in the comedy, of the deceptive power of the money ethic, and the consequences of confusing the two. The death's head in the casket and the scroll with its grim warning that "gilded tombs do worms enfold" comment continually upon the perverted values of Venice, advocating the idealized values of the medieval aristocracy with its adherence to a God-centred economy. And so it is that the Judaizing Devil and his ethics are so vehemently rejected by the magnanimous generosity of the old order, and that the hard-hearted Jewish usurer - that representative in Elizabethan drama of the rising middle-class businessman - is spurned like a stranger cur by the tender-hearted medievalist. But Belmont and its values were being rendered progressively effete by the new order, and the "Beautiful Mountain" appears in The Merchant of Venice as the last stronghold of the old tradition against the forces of the new. A few years later, when Ben Jonson looked to Venice as a suitable setting for his *Fox*, this alternative offered by Shakespeare was no longer even remotely possible; and Volpone presides over that economic world which Dr. Wilson saw as in a nightmare:

And what should this meane, that, in steade of charitable dealing, and the use of almose (for lending is a spice therof), hardenes of harte hath nowe gotten place, and greedie gayne is cheefelye folowed, and horrible extorcion commonly used? I do verely beleve, the ende of thys worlde is nyghe at hande.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Merchant, I. III, 8-15.

<sup>2</sup>See p.60, fn. 1.

Volpone:

Dear Saint,  
Riches, the dumb god, that givest all men tongues,  
Thou canst do nought, and yet makest men do all things;  
The price of souls; even hell, with thee to boot,  
Is made worth heaven! Thou art virtue, fame,  
Honour, and all things else! Who can get thee,  
He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise -

Mosca:

And what he will, sir. Riches are in fortune  
A greater good, than wisdom is in nature.

BEN JONSON, Volpone.

IV

MARLOWE'S BARABAS:  
THE JEW AS CAPITALIST  
FINANCIER AND MACHIAVEL.

"Haile the world's soul, and mine," sings Ben Jonson's Fox at his morning matins before the saintly shrine of Riches, the dumb God in whose image he is made. For in Volpone's Venice the fountainhead of values - of virtue, honour, nobility, valour, honesty and wisdom - is synonymous no longer with the Godhead of the Christian humanist. Values, here, are automatically conferred merely by the acquisition of the attributes of wealth; and wealth alone confers status and respect upon its possessor: "Who is honour'd now [as the rich Jew of Malta remarks] but for his wealth?" As it is in Venice, so, similarly, on the Isle of Malta; for Jonson's *Comedy of Humours* (as Prof. Levin suggests)<sup>1</sup> clearly begins where Marlowe's *Tragedy of Humours* leaves off, both evidently deriving from the same awareness of a preposterously transvalued world, dominated by the capitalistic spirit, and revolving on a golden axis. Jew, Christian and Moslem seem all infected by the bite of the gold-bug, motivated by the same acquisitive instinct, and inspired by devotion to a common God - a characteristic exchange in the third act of Marlowe's play indicating the world-wide prevalence of this obsession, the pervasiveness of the universal quest for wealth:

Ferneze: Welcome, great bashaw; how fares Calymeth?  
What wind drives you thus into Malta road?

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<sup>1</sup>Harry Levin, The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 101.

Callapine: The wind that bloweth all the world besides:  
Desire of gold.<sup>1</sup>

Desire of gold attracts the Turks to Malta; desire of gold persuades the Governor of Malta to fleece the Jews and then break faith with the Turks; desire of gold prompts Friar Jacomo to attack Friar Barnardine; and desire for gold is the driving force behind Barabas's activities - his Christianization of Abigail, his double-crossing of the Turks, and his assumption of power over the Governor. Barabas is, in fact, an incarnation of the materialism of his world, a representative of gold's enormous power in the sphere of Maltese and, by analogy, Renaissance politics.

The economic world over which the Jew presides is by no means limited to Malta. The island is merely the headquarters of Barabas's vast commercial network ramifying over the space of the entire Northern hemisphere - the same expansive universe opened up in the late 16th Century by the trading ventures of Renaissance merchantmen. It is the world of the multi-millionaire businessman with his troops of shipping agents, foreign contacts and merchant friends whom he controls - as Steane puts it<sup>2</sup> - "very like the Wall Street tycoon answering several phones at once, sending his breezy, brassy commands to the uttermost ends of the earth." Fleets of Barabas's trading-vessels sail to Persia and to Palestine, laden with Spanish oils and wines of Greece - to Egypt, Crete and the Mediterranean islands with spice and silks; the custom duties which he is obliged to pay upon a single cargo could easily buy up half a dozen Maltese merchants; his investments are European-wide and his credit apparently unlimited:

In Florence, Venice, Antwerp, London, Seville,  
Frankfort, Lubeck, Moscow, and where not,  
Have I debts owing, and, in mostj of these,

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<sup>1</sup>Marlowe, The Jew of Malta, III. v. 1-4. All subsequent quotations are taken from the Regents Renaissance Drama Series edition of the Jew of Malta, ed. R. Van Fossen (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1965). Hereinafter referred to as Jew.

<sup>2</sup>J.B. Steane, Marlowe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: U.P., 1964), p. 178.

Great sums of money lying in the banco.<sup>1</sup>

His is the world of high finance, of the Stock Exchange and the money-market; and Barabas himself appears as a progenitor of the capitalist financier upon whose economic power depends the solvency of nations, whose financial aid determines the rise or fall of governments.

Something of this capitalistic spirit emanates from Barabas's opening soliloquy in his countinghouse, with heaps of gold before him, the glittering symbol of the universal money-ethic of the play. It is an opening very like that of *Volpone*<sup>2</sup> - except that while Jonson's Christian capitalist adores his gold in a parody of liturgical devotion, Marlowe's Jew contemptuously dismisses his with a snort:

Here have I purs'd their paltry silverings.  
Fie! what a trouble 'tis to count this trash.<sup>3</sup>

It is not the possessive instinct which animates Barabas so much as the immense power of wealth in the abstract - "wealth" quite independent of heaps of paltry coin, "wealth" dissociated from mere quantity; and what he seems to adumbrate is the money-power of the investment, the translation of paltry cash into something inherently valuable, into jewels and precious stones

of so great price  
As one of them, indifferently rated,  
And of a carat of this quantity,  
May serve in peril of calamity  
To ransom great kings from captivity.<sup>4</sup>

He looks forward to that economic principle whereby the increase of wealth becomes simultaneous with the diminution of bulk as it contracts into pure and concentrated power - the compressed power of that most celebrated of Marlovian images:

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.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Jew*, IV. i. 70-73.

<sup>2</sup>Fletcher's *Women Pleas'd* contains a similar scene. Act I. ii. finds Lopez (whose name suggests an affinity with the notorious doctor) seated at a table laden with jewels and money. See *The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher*, Vol. IX.

<sup>3</sup>*Jew*, I. i. 6-7.

<sup>4</sup>*Jew*, I. i. 28-32.

<sup>5</sup>*Jew*, I. i. 33-37.

In his philosophy of capitalistic enterprise Barabas clearly anticipates the modern investor, banker, financial backer, the man whose power is infinitely greater and often more stable than that of the political faction he controls. His desire for gold, moreover, is synonymous with his lust for the controlling power of wealth, scorning the temporal rule of kings and barons for the far greater power of directing the destiny of Malta from within his little room; and, in this, he speaks on behalf of all his Jewish capitalistic contemporaries:

I must confess [he says] we come not to be kings;  
That's not our fault: alas, our number's few,  
And crowns come either by succession  
Or urg'd by force; and nothing violent,  
Oft have I heard tell, can be permanent.  
Give us a peaceful rule; make Christians kings,  
That thirst so much for principality.<sup>1</sup>

It is not the power of Tamburlaine that Barabas desires - a power too unstable, dangerous and impermanent. He wants the power behind the power of Tamburlaine, which only gold can grant him. And even when the Governorship of the island falls into his clutches, he cedes it to Ferneze in return for all the wealth of Malta - thereby securing a power more absolute and profitable than the other, and reducing the city and its people even more securely under his control. It is an image infinitely more impressive and infinitely more disturbing than that of the Jewish usurer - the dispenser of political offices, a trader in crowns and kingdoms, the capitalist financier whose wealth can buy up cities and thrones and powers and dispose of them as easily:

Why [cries Barabas at the height of his success] is not this  
A kingly kind of trade, to purchase towns  
By treachery, and sell 'em by deceit?<sup>2</sup>

And how many of Barabas's scattered co-religionists, one wonders, are engaged in similar kingly kinds of trade? Barabas, we are explicitly reminded, is not the only Jewish power-capitalist. There is also

Kirriah Jairim, the great Jew of Greece,  
Obed in Bairseth, Nones in Portugal,  
..... some in Italy,

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, I. i. 127-133.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, V. v. 46-48.

Many in France, and wealthy every one;  
Ay, wealthier far than any Christian.<sup>1</sup>

If Barabas is in any way representative of his financial nationals there remains for our contemplation the prospect of the entire European continent enmeshed in a network of Jewish investments, punctuated with centres of Jewish power radiation, and controlled by Jewish gold. That the Jew should have been the most convenient symbol Marlowe had at hand for his conception of Renaissance money-power seems, moreover, a perfectly logical consequence to the already established image of the usurer - a further image of the Jewish moneyman elevated beyond petty usury to a universal economic issue; and in the figure of Barabas is found what is perhaps the most patent identification in literature of the Jew with the rising capitalistic spirit, an obvious progenitor of Werner Sombart's famous sociological thesis on The Jews and Modern Capitalism.<sup>2</sup> For him, as indeed for Marlowe, the propensity to capitalism is inherent in the Jewish faith - the blessing of Abraham, God's gift to Jewry; and it seems all the more inevitable that the Renaissance dramatist should have symbolized his capitalist in the person of the Jew:

Thus trolls our fortune in by land and sea,  
And thus we are on every side enrich'd:  
These are the blessings promis'd to the Jews,  
And herein was old Abram's happiness.  
What more may heaven do for earthly man  
Than thus to pour out plenty in their laps,  
Ripping the bowels of the earth for them,  
Making the sea their servants, and the winds  
To drive their substance with successful blasts?<sup>3</sup>

Again the sense of Barabas's enterprising power - his energetic exploitation of natural resources, his ransacking of the world for riches, aided and abetted by the grace of heaven and served by the elements. For any comparable sense of the immense power inherent in capitalistic trading ventures, we are obliged to turn to Dickens's description of the upper-middle-class financier in the opening pages of Dombey and Son.

But the image of the Jew in Marlowe's play is by no means limited

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, I. i. 121-125.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter III, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup>Jew, I. i. 101-109.

to an incarnation of capitalism. Barabas is a grotesque potpourri of multiple disparate Jewish images drawn from widely varying sources, a combination of the medieval Jewish stereotype with the current bogies of Renaissance humanism - the usurer with the power-politician, the Judas with the Machiavel. Indeed, Marlowe's conception of Judaism is interpreted largely in Machiavellian terms, and the total result is a conglomerative image deriving largely from the grafting of an ancient Devil to a contemporary one: Machiavelli embellished with all the characteristics of the medieval Jew - poisoner, usurer, murderer, and anti-Christ. And the close association of the Jewish capitalist financier with the Machiavel is made explicit in the prologue, Machiavelli himself introducing his Jewish accomplice to the audience:

I come not, I,  
To read a lecture here in Britain,  
But to present the tragedy of a Jew,  
Who smiles to see how full his bags are cramm'd,  
Which money was not got without my means.  
I crave but this: grace him as he deserves,  
And let him not be entertain'd the worse  
Because he favours me.<sup>1</sup>

The device is ingenious in controlling the audience reaction to the central figure - an invitation to hiss and boo Barabas, if you dare; a device calculated to affect an audience in much the same way as Marx or Lenin might, if made to speak the prologue to a Brechtian comedy on Broadway. For Machiavelli brings with him the cynical philosophy of expediency and opportunism in personal and political affairs, calculated to disrupt the tenets of theocentric Christianity by redefining man's relations with the State. Cunning supercedes ethical morality; Providential Design is rejected in favour of the humanist's manipulation of his own affairs. And the prologue, with its subversive dictum, sets the essential tone for Marlowe's drama of the Jew.

But most significant in the prologue are those elements which are thematic to the play itself - and particularly Machiavelli's blatant accusation of hypocrisy levelled against those who openly reject his expediency yet surreptitiously engage in it themselves:

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, Prologue 28-32.

Admir'd I am of those that hate me most:  
 Though some speak openly against my books,  
 Yet will they read me. . . .

Barabas, the protégé of Machiavel in the play proper, provides the agency for exposing the unblushing hypocrisy of the Christian society in which he lives - the hypocrisy of the Knights of St. John who, professing Christianity, compromise their values by sacrificing them to expediency, and this with the seeming innocence of those unversed in Machiavelli's principles. Religion, in the image of the Prologue, is indeed a "childish" toy bandied about like a rubber-ball in a curious game devoid of rules, where the sharp-witted win by cheating and the foolish loose through ignorance, that cardinal sin in the Machiavellian catalogue. It is a preposterous, Jensonian type of world, a world of transvalued values in which normal standards of political morality are reversed with grim and ironic logic:

Many will talk of title to a crown [says Machiavel];  
 What right had Caesar to the empire?  
 Might first made kings, and laws were then most sure  
 When, like the Draco's they were writ in blood.<sup>2</sup>

This rationalization of ruthless governmental opportunism, in which legal right no longer constitutes the main criterion of rule, is soundly argued. Even Caesar's claim to the title of Emperor was dubiously legitimate; for the greatest kings and rulers are created not by legal right, but by the ruthless assumption of power, maintained by unscrupulous and bloody measures. Anarchy is sound policy; usurpation the means of effecting this policy; and the political cunning of the Machiavel the prime requisite of the usurper. Thus the old dynastic control of government gives way to the rule of the Prince and the wealthy politician whose money controls the balance of power within the state.

Barabas, combining both functions of Machiavel and Jewish money-man comments consistently throughout the play upon the major themes propounded by the Prologue - the themes of governmental opportunism and the hypocritical reliance of the Maltese Christians upon the Machiavellian

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, Prologue, 9-11.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, Prologue 18-21.

which they profess to abhor. And his Jewishness is perfectly suited to this function, for the Jew - alienated both by race and religion from the Christian society in which he lives - is at perfect liberty to explode the myth of Christian integrity without being exploded with it. From a safe vantage point outside the social circle the Jewish alien is free to raise his voice in caustic and satiric comment upon the "ethics of hypocrisy" about him, exposing (in the consciousness of his own moral superiority) the disjunction between Christian profession and Christian practice:

Who hateth me but for my happiness? [asks Barabas]  
Or who is honour'd now but for his wealth?  
Rather had I, a Jew, be hated thus,  
Than picied in a Christian poverty;  
For I can see no fruits in all their faith;  
But malice, falsehood, and excessive pride,  
Which methinks fits not their profession.  
Happily some hapless man hath conscience,  
And for his conscience lives in beggary.]

Renaissance Christianity must either live in poverty or compromise its conscience. But to profess Christianity and, at the same time, subscribe to the now money-ethic of the age is an arrant falsehood which betrays the Christian faith. This is Marlowe's comment on contemporary society; and the Jew, Barabas, is his means of criticism.

The operative word in the passage is, of course, "profession" - a re-iterated term of deliberate ambiguity which points repeatedly throughout the play to the wide disparity between the doctrine and the deeds of Maltese Christianity. It contains a double sense of "the faith professed by Christians" as well as the "practical employment" of the Christian society; and the two senses are shown to be mutually exclusive. For while "professing" adherence to the values of their faith, their actual "profession" as the ruthless scheming of the Machiavel - a discrepancy in ethics which reaches a satiric climax in the Governor of Malta's sanctimonious rationalization of extortionary measures against the Jews on a trumped-up religious pretext. Malta's monetary tribute to the Turks being long overdue, a small handful of the Island's Jews is made responsible for its payment under pain of heavy penalties; and

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Jew, I. i. 110-118.

Indignant at the Governor's injustice, Barabas inquires whether the Jews are to contribute to the levy in equal measure with the Maltese. "No, Jew," snaps Ferneze in that tone of aggressive brutality which gradually dominates the dialogue of the play -

No, Jew, like infidels,  
For through our sufferance of your hateful lives,  
Who stand accursed in the sight of heaven,  
These taxes and afflictions are befall'n.<sup>1</sup>

This unctuous rationalization of Jewish responsibility on the grounds of "blood-guilt" is given added support by a Maltese Knight who resorts to the same expedient justification:

If your first curse fall heavy on thy head,  
And make thee poor and scorn'd of all the world,  
'Tis not our fault, but thy inherent sin.<sup>2</sup>

This is the facade of "group-thinking" behind which the Christians justify their actions, secure in the pseudo-Christian argument raised to rationalize their political opportunism; but Barabas promptly exposes their self-righteous hypocrisy and its inconsistency with the faith which they profess:

Will you, then, [he asks] steal my goods?  
Is theft the ground of your religion?<sup>3</sup>

And Ferneze Pharisaically replies:

No, Jew, we take particularly thine  
To save the ruin of a multitude:  
And better one want for a common good,  
Than many perish for a private man.<sup>4</sup>

The ironic satire of this retort derives from the unmistakable New Testament echo beneath the surface, reminiscent of the ultimate political expedient - the justification offered by Caiaphas and the Pharisees for sacrificing Jesus to the authorities;<sup>5</sup> and the Phariseism of the Christian

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, I. II. 62-65.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, I. II. 107-109.

<sup>3</sup>Jew, I. II. 94-95.

<sup>4</sup>Jew, I. II. 96-99.

<sup>5</sup>See John 18: 13-14.

confers (as Steane suggests) "an almost Christlike status on the Jew." Barabas rises indignantly to the situation, emphasising constantly the appalling misuse of Christian doctrine for political ends, vehemently rejecting the major premise of their rationalization:

What? bring you scripture to confirm your wrongs?  
Preach me not out of my possessions,  
Some Jews are wicked, as all Christians are:  
But say the tribe that I descended of  
Were all in general cast away for sin,  
Shall I be tried by their transgression?  
The man that dealeth righteously shall live:  
And which of you can charge me otherwise?<sup>1</sup>

The argument is specious, but (except for its wild generalization) unanswerable and morally quite sound. And Ferneze's insinuation that Jewish "profession" is suspect anyhow, serves only to underscore his Pharisaical reliance upon his own (apparently different) "profession":

Out, wretched Barabas!  
Sham'st 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.  
Excess of wealth is cause of covetousness,  
And covetousness, O, 'tis a monstrous sin.<sup>2</sup>

It is the tone of the humbug preacher with his pretentious piety, which re-echoes in the moral sermonizing of the Chadbands and Pecksniffs, the same broad farcical tone of "the old English humour to quote Elliot's well-known judgment, the terribly serious, even savage comic humour, the humour which spent its last breath on the decadent genius of Dickens."<sup>3</sup> "Serious humour" - for its force is radically critical, insinuating, as it does, an ironic interchange of roles, the archetypal Covetousness now devolving on the Christian rather than the Jew; and "savage humour" - for the satire is destructive in its stringency, in its frank exposure of the unctuous hypocrisy of Christian "profession". And as the Knights of Malta leave the stage, discussing the "simple policy"<sup>4</sup> of breaking

<sup>1</sup>Jew, I. II. 110-117.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, I. II. 118-124.

<sup>3</sup>T.S. Elliot, "The Blank Verse of Marlowe", The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen, 1950), pp. 92-93.

<sup>4</sup>"simple policy": foolish statecraft.

league with the Turks, Barabas seizes this cue for a succinct summing-up remark on the "New" religion of Renaissance Christianity - the religion of the Machiavel:

Ay, policy! that's their profession,  
And not simplicity, as they suggest.<sup>1</sup>

Barabas is, of course, exploiting the double sense of words by charging them with overtones of irony; and his ambiguous reference to "policy" introduces yet another celebrated iterative pattern in the play: the thematic opposition of governmental order and political opportunism.

The ambiguity of "policy" derives, it seems, from a medieval to a Renaissance metamorphosis of meaning - both conflicting senses of the word existing simultaneously in the late 16th Century. To the Christian humanist the term referred to a theocentric ordering of public affairs by a government essentially concerned with the welfare of the state. To the "new politician" of the Renaissance, well versed in The Prince, the term assumed certain cynical implications, suggesting the pursuit of one's own self-seeking ends by shrewdness, cunning and dissimulation.<sup>2</sup> It is clearly the medieval sense of the word which the departing Knight employs; and Barabas's snap rejoinder neatly reverses this traditional sense, indicating, in his equation of "profession" with "policy", the extent to which the Christian values of the Middle Ages have become perverted on the Island of Malta. For theirs are obviously the political principles of which Machiavelli had spoken in the Prologue - the "policy" of Caesar and Draco; and the image in the Prologue of Phalaris bellowing in the brazen bull is a warning of the dire consequences that overtake the prince who miscalculates his policy<sup>3</sup> - the consequence that ultimately overtakes Barabas in his attempt to out-Machiavel the

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, I. ii. 160-161.

<sup>2</sup>Vide Howard S. Babb, "'Policy' in Marlowe's 'The Jew of Malta'", English Literary History, XXIV, No. 2 (June, 1957), pp. 86-87.

<sup>3</sup>See the Prologue: "Which maxim had Phalaris observ'd, / H'had never bellowed in a brazen bull, etc." Phalaris, the Sicilian tyrant had been overthrown and roasted in the very brazen bull in which he burned his enemies. This seems to be an early intimation of the fate awaiting Barabas in the steaming cauldron.

Machiavels.

"Men are," maintains Shakespeare's bastard Edmund, "as the time is."<sup>1</sup> And Barabas acknowledges a similar awareness of the form and pressure of his times - the realization that the world in which he lives is dominated by the ethics of political expediency, and that to oppose them he must fight with the very weapons of the Machiavel. "Policy" becomes his counter-measure, his only means (as he explains to Abigail) of self-protection against the machinations of the Christians:

Daughter, I have it: thou perceiv'st the plight  
Wherein these Christians have oppressed me:  
Be rul'd by me, for in extremity  
We ought to make bar of no policy.<sup>2</sup>

Policy, moreover, as his Maltese extortioners have instructed him, makes no bar of utilizing Christianity for furthering its ends; so Barabas follows suit, trading upon the "deceit-potential" of religious faith -

for religion [as he tells his daughter]  
Hides many mischiefs from suspicion.<sup>3</sup>

She must regain his gold from its hiding place in the nunnery, his erstwhile house, by masquerading as a novice - deliberately concealing her dissimulation beneath pretended piety, on the principle that one may

As good dissemble that thou never mean'st,  
As first mean truth, and then dissemble it.  
A counterfeit profession is better  
Than unseen hypocrisy.<sup>4</sup>

The rationalization of his policy is ingenious; but it points, at least, to that moral superiority of the Jew which inheres in his ability to distinguish between deception and self-deception, motive and act, treachery and hypocrisy. It is his very lack of moral ambiguity, his ethical and intellectual superiority to the society which he scourges and satirizes that elevates Barabas and allies him with his fellow Machiavels upon the

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<sup>1</sup>Shakespeare, King Lear, V. III. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, I. II. 268-271.

<sup>3</sup>Jew, I. II. 279-280.

<sup>4</sup>Jew, I. II. 288-291.

Elizabethan stage - with Flamíneo, de Bosola, and Jonson's gallery of rogues. For, as Miss Mahood points out -

The rogue who deceives everybody except himself is far more acceptable than the self-deceiving hypocrite who flatters himself that his own shady deeds are directed by the highest motives.<sup>1</sup>

Barabas, indeed, obliges us to acquiesce in his roguish villainy by a willing suspension of our moral censure; and Marlowe's constant use, in this play, of the aside forces the audience to become the repository of his comic villain's confidence, unwitting accomplices in his devilry. But he has the audience's sympathy as well - particularly when the double-dealing Governor of Malta misappropriates the Turkish tribute by repudiating the validity of any contractual agreement between infidels and Christians, "these barbarous misbelieving Turks"<sup>2</sup> and the honourable Knights of Malta.<sup>3</sup> And Barabas, fleeced of his wealth on false pretences, seems justified in carrying the religious reasoning behind Ferneze's rationale to its logical extreme, using, once again, the argument of Christianity against the Christians themselves and bettering his instruction:

It is no sin [he maintains] to deceive a Christian,  
For they themselves hold it a principle  
Faith is not to be held with heretics;  
But all are heretics that are not Jews.<sup>4</sup>

It is this grimly logical form of argument based upon a preposterous major premise which typifies Barabas's smartness - a boomeranging kind of wit which seizes on a maxim of Christian hypocrisy, pushes it to a logical extreme, and sends its whirling back. The sheer exuberance of this devil's

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<sup>1</sup>M.M. Mahood, Poetry and Humanism (London: Johnathan Cape, 1950), p.78.

<sup>2</sup>Ferneze derives this doctrine from Baldwin of Bohemia who, in Tamburlaine, holds that

"with such infidels,  
In whom no faith nor true religion rests,  
We are not bound to those accomplishments  
The holy laws of Christendom enjoin."  
Tamburlaine, Part Two, II. II.

<sup>3</sup>Jew., II. II.

<sup>4</sup>Jew., II. III. 310-313.

advocate commands our acquiescence in his activity, Marlowe so devising things that when we most admire Barabas we most willingly subscribe to his anti-Christian wit; for as long as Marlowe's Jew provides a critical-satiric comment on the corruption in the Christian society, he retains the unholy integrity and amoral superiority of a Marlovian "angel with horns."<sup>1</sup>

If Barabas has exuberance, intelligence and wit, he also possesses, in the opening scenes, a melancholy Job-like grandeur - an image of the suffering Jew of the Old Testament whose patience in adversity invests him with an aura of reflected magnificence. Deprived by the Governor of his riches and possessions, and destitute - except for three small-scale Jewish comforters - the comparison with Job immediately presents itself. But Barabas's gloomy lamentation "transposed to the minor harmonics of the Old Testament"<sup>2</sup> is not, it seems to me, entirely free of parody. The tone of the speech, as indeed of the entire play, is particularly elusive - even more so if one tries to reconcile the Job-like mourning with the fiery wig and bottle-nose of the original Barabas; and those critics who laud the "scriptural grandeur" of the passage and lament its inconsistency with the brutal poetry of later scenes seem to underrate the veiled grotesquerie of Barabas's complaint - a grotesquerie not wholly out of keeping with the exaggeration of the whole. It opens on a note of apparent mock-seriousness, Barabas scornfully comparing the paltry losses of Job with his own more grievous suffering, and arrogantly intimating that he could have bought Job up-beasts and all - without much effort, "and yet have kept enough to live upon";

So that not he, but I may curse the day,  
The fatal birthday, forlorn Barabas,  
And henceforth wish for an eternal night,  
That clouds of darkness may enclose my flesh,  
And hide these extreme sorrows from mine eyes:  
For only I have toil'd to inherit here  
The months of vanity and loss of time,  
And painful nights have been appointed me.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vide Steane, p. 172, who places Barabas in a Richard III tradition.

<sup>2</sup>Vide Levin, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup>Jew, I. II. 190-198.

Wealthier than Job, his tragedy is consequently the greater; and he borrows the utterance of his prototype to express his own more miserable state, snatching a familiar phrase here and another there until his outcry approximates the original in both imagery and tone to a remarkable degree.<sup>1</sup> But the gap between the "mighty line" and a parody of Biblical poetry seems narrowed to a hair's breadth in these much admired passages. As formal lament, the verse is suitably if not somewhat exaggeratedly melancholic; but as parodic poetry it is ingenious in its affinity to the style of the Hebraic poet - an affinity which immediately illuminates the disparity between the merely bankrupt Jew and the man of intense spiritual suffering, afflicted to the marrow of his being.

There is, it seems to me, a similar strain of parodic exaggeration in Barabas's fervent prayer at the opening of the second act. It can hardly be regarded as the tone of "a prophet imprecating the avenging Jehovah",<sup>2</sup> for all its sonorous qualities:

O, Thou, that with a fiery pillar ledd'st  
The sons of Israel through the dismal shades,  
Light Abraham's offspring, and direct the hand  
Of Abigail this night; or let the day  
Turn to eternal darkness after this.<sup>3</sup>

His presumptuous appropriation of divine assistance for recovering his gold is magnificently absurd - a megalomaniacal request for God to illuminate the path to his moneybags with a mighty pillar of fire; and the resounding poetry peters out into the anti-climactic contrast of the sons of Israel in the desert with Abigail's hand groping in the dark. The great Marlovian music is subtly modulated - although not in quite the manner that critical commendation of the poetry would suggest. It does not create a tragic figure of the Jew; nor does the "scriptural grandeur" in which he stands illuminated remain unmodified by the grotesque hyperbole beneath the verse. The language is magnificently in keeping with the nature of the chief protagonist - an exuberant, exaggerated dialectic animating a vivified "humour" of Jonsonian proportions. It

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<sup>1</sup>Compare the speech in its entirety with, for instance, Job 3: 1-9; 7: 1-12.

<sup>2</sup>See Levin, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup>Jew, II. i. 12-16.

invests him with a mock-heroic grandeur, with an awesome villainous splendour which is never wholly dissipated - despite the play's much-debated deterioration as it progresses. The poetry may fail in subtlety and the dialogue become more harsh, but its essential zone - ranging somewhere between hyperbolic parody and the seriously savage humour of which Eliot writes - remains relatively unimpaired until the final curtain falls.

It is a commonplace of criticism that as The Jew of Malta unfolds, a process of regression is initiated in both the language and coherence of the play and its protagonist - the degeneration of a supposedly heroic figure into a monstrous caricature, and the concomitant dwindling of his once proud verse into an electric cackle of irony and malice.<sup>1</sup> One school of critics insists (with scant justification) that some other dramatist - most probably Heywood - scribbled in the final acts following a bare Marlovian plot; and Miss Bradbrook accounts for the drama's inconsistency by pointing to the substitution of a technique of action for a technique of verse.<sup>2</sup> There is not, it seems to me, as marked a disproportion between the two halves of the play as criticism generally claims - although the accelerating crudity of caricature in Marlowe's presentation of Barabas can hardly be denied. If there is some disproportion in the play, however, a falling off of intensity and a lapse into caricatured monstrosity, it may rather be located, I would suggest, in a dissipation of Barabas's essential Jewishness, in a diminution of the important function of the Jew as Jew. For as Barabas's role as the commentator upon the hypocrisy of Christian "profession" becomes subordinated to his role as Machiavellian avenger, so his Jewish significance is slowly pared away until The Jew of Malta eventually becomes The Machiavel of Malta. Levin puts the point succinctly:

As Barabas progresses [he writes], the Old Testament recedes into the background, and the foreground is dominated by The Prince.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Henderson is fairly representative of this view. Vide Christopher Marlowe (London: Longmans & Green, 1952).

<sup>2</sup>H.C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, (Cambridge: U.P., 1935), p. 158.

<sup>3</sup>Levin, p. 96.

Barabas seems, in short, to develop from a morally sharp-witted Jew whose Jewishness is integral to his dramatic role, to a self-destructive power-politician whose Jewishness is neither here nor there.

In the later soliloquies Barabas's speculations are no longer illuminated by scriptural reflection; for as mock-Job capitulates to mock-Machiavelli, so the image of the Jew is re-interpreted in purely Machiavellian terms, the ingeniously manipulated tones of biblical lament eventually giving way to the conventional declarations of self-confessed hypocrisy:

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.  
 I learn'd in Florence how to kiss my hand,  
 Heave up my shoulders when they call me dog,  
 And duck as low as any barefoot friar,  
 Hoping to seem them starve upon a stall. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Schooled in the city of the Florentine, Barabas becomes more a disciple of Machiavel than one of Judas's descendants; and by giving a Machiavillainous twist to the Jewish bogey, Marlowe manages to invest a medieval stereotype with new Renaissance overtones, a transition which seems to occur when the exploited and persecuted Jew turns venomous in his lust for anti-Christian vengeance.

Barabas's desire to avenge himself upon the Governor of Malta immediately extends to an exaggeratedly vindictive anti-Christian hatred, a resolute determination to eliminate as many of his enemies as possible - irrespective of offence; and the first victims of this indiscriminate revenge are Mathias and Lodowick, the two young suitors for the hand of Abigail his daughter. By engineering their destruction, however, he inevitably alienates Abigail's affection - the only humanizing influence in his existence; and her estrangement and apostasy serve only to further his regression into a monstrously unsympathetic caricature, guilty even of poisoning the gentle Abigail upon whose death the last spark of humanity and compassion is extinguished in the play. She is, of course, the other major Jewish image in the play - the apparent prototype of a long line of rebellious Jewish daughters and apostate Jewesses in English literature, from Shakespeare's Jessica to Zangwill's Victorian heroines.

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, II. III. 20-26.

But from what source the image of the Jew's daughter ultimately derives is by no means certain.<sup>1</sup> The love of the Christian youth for the Jewess apparently dates back to collections of 13th Century exempla<sup>2</sup> in which the Jew's daughter seems to function as an exotic and sometimes dangerous sexual symbol - a sexuality not entirely absent from the Jewesses of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Jean-Paul Sartre, indeed, points to a recurrence of this sexual symbol in Western-European literature:

The words "a beautiful Jewess" [he writes] contain a very particular sexual significance, vastly different from that implied, for example, by "a beautiful Rumanian", or "a beautiful American". It is because, as it were, they emanate a subtle odour of rape and massacre.<sup>3</sup>

No matter the ugliness or evil of the Jew, his daughter is invariably a paragon of loveliness, "matchless beautiful",<sup>4</sup> like Abigail, an object of desire to handsome Christian gentlemen. Catching sight of her masquerading in the habit of a novice, Mathias voices his regret that so fair a creature should be "strangely metamorphos'd nun":<sup>5</sup>

Tut, she were fitter for a tale of love [he says]  
 Than to be tired out with orisons;  
 And better would she far become a bed,  
 Embraced in a friendly lover's arms  
 Than rise at midnight to a solemn mass.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>It is at least possible that her sexuality and the part she plays in destroying her lovers derive from the Old Testament account of Jacob's daughter Dinah, whose beauty was the cause of the Hivite massacre: "'And Dinah, . . . went out to see the daughters of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her. And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel.'" Genesis 34: 1-3. Two of Dinah's brothers promptly revenge the family honour by slaughtering the entire tribe, and Dinah proves the unintentional destroyer of her Gentile lover. This is the prototypical instance of that "odour of rape and massacre" that Sartre associates with the image of the Jewess. The same odour emanates from the familiar medieval ballad of The Jew's Daughter in which the beautiful Jewess entices the Christian youth into her house and kills him. It is, moreover, an easy transition from the Jew's attractive daughter to the exotic Jewish whore of the 19th Century French novelists - Balzac, Zola, Proust, and de Maupassant. See Rosenberg, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>See B.D. Brown, "Medieval Prototypes of Lorenzo and Jessica", Modern Language Notes, XLIV (1929), pp. 227-32.

<sup>3</sup>Sartre, Portrait of the Anti-Semite, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup>Jew, I. ii. 377.

<sup>5</sup>Jew, I. ii. 374.

<sup>6</sup>Jew, I. ii. 362-366.

And Barabas unscrupulously utilizes Abigail's sexuality to achieve his Machiavellian revenge, forcing her to lure both Mathias and Lodowick to destruction, literally prostituting her - as she comes to realize - as an unwitting agent of his "policy":

Hard-hearted father, unkind Barabas,  
Was this the pursuit of thy policy?  
To make me show them favour severally,  
That by my favour they should both be slain?

. . . I perceive there is no love on earth,  
Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks.<sup>1</sup>

Profoundly disillusioned with her experience of the world - "purchased [as she says] with grief"<sup>2</sup> - Abigail withdraws into the nunnery, embracing her new-found faith with greater sincerity than any Christian in the play. But such virtue is short-lived in Malta. A few scenes later she dies of Barabas's poisoning - but still affirming her belief in Christianity:

Death seizeth on my heart. Ah, gentle friar,  
Convert my father, that he may be sav'd,  
And witness that I die a Christian.<sup>3</sup>

But wherever faith is most sincere, Marlovian cynicism is most apparent: "Ay," rejoins the gentle friar, "and a virgin, too; that grieves me most."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most consistent unifying element in the drama is its characteristic strain of anti-Christian satire which, as it gathers momentum, grows more grotesquely farcical; and Barabas, insofar as he functions as its instrument, becomes accordingly extravagant, a type of anti-Christ incarnate as he instructs his servant in the ways of Jewish Machiavillainy:

. . . listen to my words [he tells him],  
And I will teach thee that shall stick by thee.  
First, be thou void of these affections:  
Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear;  
Be mov'd at nothing, see thou pity none,  
But to thyself smile when the Christians moan.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jew, III. III. 36-39; 48-49.

<sup>2</sup> Jew, III. III. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Jew, III. vi. 38-40.

<sup>4</sup> Jew, III. vi. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Jew, II. III. 168-173.

And the well-schooled Ithamore replies, "O brave, master; I worship your nose for this."<sup>1</sup> In case we had forgotten, our attention is once again directed to the grotesquerie of Marlowe's bottle-nosed Jewish caricature; and Ithamore's intrusion in the plot serves primarily to push Barabas even further towards absurd monstrosity, performing, as he does, the traditional function of the medieval Vice - that of exposing his devilish master to ridicule and laughter. Instead of laughing with Barabas, Ithamore now directs our laughter at him, ruining the Jew's incipient dignity by jeering at his nose or entertaining his degenerate companions with a parody of superstitious anti-Semitism: "'Tis a strange thing of the Jew," he tells them, "he lives upon pickled grasshoppers, and sauc'd mushrooms. . . . He never put on clean shirt since he was circumcis'd. . . . The hat he wears, Judas left under the elder when he hang'd himself."<sup>2</sup> By reducing Barabas to absurdity, he simultaneously assists in denigrating his essential Jewishness; and with the sinister association of the Moslem and the Jew in a sworn anti-Christian alliance, the farcical development of the plot sweeps all the Jew's significance before it. Barabas seeks no longer to justify his treachery on the principle of Jewish quid for Christian quo, and the psychological motivation which sprang primarily from his Jewishness is dissipated in the over-exaggerated machinations of the Machiavel.

For Marlowe, of course, the great advantage of the Jewish image was that it contained within itself its own macabre grotesquerie, the legacy of medieval Europe, investing Barabas with an horrific quality unattained by any other Machiavel. In his rumbustious catalogue of occupations, these bogeyman associations - poisoner of wells, murderous physician, and usurious extortioner - all enhance his terror-value as a Jew, brought up to date (as it were) and Machiavellianized:

As for myself, I walk abroad a' nights  
 And kill sick people groaning under walls;  
 Sometimes I go about and poison wells;  
 . . . . .  
 Being young, I studied physic, and began

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, II. III. 174.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, V. I. 58-64.

To practise first upon the Italian;  
 There I enrich'd the priests with burials,  
 And always kept the sexton's arms in ure  
 With digging graves and ringing dead men's knells.

.....  
 Then after that was I an usurer,  
 And with extorting, cozening, forfeiting  
 And tricks belonging unto brokery,  
 I fill'd the jails with bankrupts in a year,  
 And with young orphans planted hospitals,  
 And every moon made some or other mad,  
 And now and then one hang himself for grief. . .<sup>1</sup>

The sheer exuberance and gusto of this preposterous confession is quickly caught up and capped by Ithamore's equally outrageous account of his anti-Christian activities:

Once at Jerusalem, where the pilgrims kneel'd,  
 I strow'd powder on the marble stones,  
 And therewithal their knees would rankle, so  
 That I have laugh'd a-good to see the cripples  
 Go limping home to Christendom on stilts.<sup>2</sup>

It suits the slave to chime in with his master's tone of mockery and, for his own advantage, places his services at the disposal of Barabas's maniacal schemes. They shake hands upon the deal:

Make account of me [says Barabas]  
 As of thy fellow; we are villains both,  
 Both circumcised, we hate Christians both,  
 Be true and secret, thou shalt want no gold.<sup>3</sup>

And in a typical Devil-Vice alliance<sup>4</sup> they formulate their "policy" of vengeance with sadistic ingenuity. Lodowick and Mathias are the first

<sup>1</sup>Jew, II. III. 175-197.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, II. III. 209-213.

<sup>3</sup>Jew, II. III. 214-217.

<sup>4</sup>Ithamore frequently suggests this medieval partnership:  
 "Why, the devil invented a challenge, my master writ it and I  
 carried it, first to Lodowick, and imprimis to Mathias."  
 (III. II. 18-19).

"Enter Ithamore with the pot.

Ithamore: Here 'tis master.

Barabas: Well said, Ithamore.

What, hast thou brought the ladle with thee too?

Ithamore: Yes, sir; the proverb says, he that eats with the  
 devil had need of a long spoon. I have brought  
 you a ladle." (III. iv. 52-55)

to go, each turned against the other; then Abigail and the entire nunnery are poisoned in a pot of rice; next, Friar Jacomo is strangled and Friar Bernardine cunningly implicated and hanged for murder. But the greater the extravagance of Barabas's vengeful machinations, the less effective he becomes as a satirical exploder of religious humbug. His criticism of Christian society deteriorates from witty intellectual argument to snide asides on the sexual licentiousness of nuns and friars, or to a burlesque of the confessional:

- O, holy friars, the burden of my sins  
Lie heavy on my soul. Then, pray you, tell me,  
Is't not too late now to turn Christian?  
I have been zealous in the Jewish faith,  
Hard-hearted to the poor, a covetous wretch,  
That would for lucre's sake have sold my soul.  
A hundred for a hundred I have ta'en  
And now for store of wealth may I compare  
With all the Jews in Malte. But what is wealth?  
I am a Jew, and therefore am I lost.  
Would penance serve for this my sin,  
I could afford to whip myself to death.<sup>1</sup>

Again the tone of mocking parody peculiar to the play - a parody of penitence and flagellation, of the extortionate interest of the Jewish usurer, and the Covetous Man's smooth-faced disclaimer of his gold: "But what is wealth?" And as he mocks these gullible religious caterpillars, Barabas simultaneously tempts them with his store of riches until the uncontainable cupidity of the Church flares up in an open scuffle between the two religious orders. The anti-clericalism of the scene is almost Jonsonian in technique - an incarnation of religious hypocrisy in two animated "humours", allowing them to demonstrate their own depravity by pitting one against the other. Christianity no longer needs the wit or criticism of the Jew to point out its corruption. Their own grotesque behaviour damns them as effectively as Barabas's satire.

Act IV, indeed, is dominated less by the spirit of Black Comedy than that of Black Pantomime - by the comicality of the two religious caterpillars and the ribaldry of the whores and pimps and cutpurses of Malta's sleazy underworld. Caricatures masquerade as human beings, and verbal caricature describes their sheer absurdity. Thus Ithamore of Pilia Borza:

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, IV. i. 47-58.

And now I think on't, going to the execution, a fellow met me with a muschatoes like a raven's wing, and a dagger with a hilt like a warming pan, and he gave me a letter from one Madam Bellamira, saluting me in such a sort as if he had meant to make clean my boots with his lips.<sup>1</sup>

All is grotesque, extravagant, inflated. Parody strikes in all directions, extending even to Marlowe's tongue-in-cheek self-parody in Ithamore's mock-Ovidian celebration of his love for Bellamira:

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 suger canes:  
Thou in those groves, by Dis above,  
Shalt live with me and be my love.<sup>2</sup>

But the crowning absurdity of the scene is Barabas's appearance in the trappings of a French lutanist complete with outlandish accent, an off-key instrument - "Must tune my lute for }sound, tweng, twang, first"<sup>3</sup> - and a poisoned nosegay in his hatband. By this stage, however, the Jewish villain has been almost entirely superceded by the mock-Machiavel, and very little of the medieval Jewish bogeyman remains - except, perhaps, for Barabas's poisonous propensities; but even these are less the tactics of the Jew than of the Machiavel. A complete absorption of his Jewishness by the Machiavellian aspect of his personality seems to overtake the Jew; and in the final act his race and his religion seem no longer of significance. The satirical castigation of Christian "profession" is subordinated to the operation of Real-politik - a demonstration of the self-consuming tendencies of rapacity in the image of the Machiavel out-Machiavelled. And the Jew becomes the victim, not the mouthpiece, of Marlowe's lessoning in "policy".

By betraying Malta to the Turk, Barabas is rewarded with the Governorship of the Island - a position of little practical value to him, unless it can provide an opportunity of exploiting this newly gained authority:

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, IV. ii. 26-30.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, IV. ii. 91-96.

<sup>3</sup>Jew, IV. iv. 29.

And since [he says] by wrong thou gott'st authority,  
 Maintain it bravely by firm policy;  
 At least unprofitably lose it not.  
 For he that liveth in authority,  
 And neither gets him friends nor fills his bags,  
 Lives like the ass that Aesop speaketh of. . .<sup>1</sup>

It is not the power of political authority he hankers after, but the greater power of hard cash; so, by a double-crossing counterplot against his Turkish allies, he sets Ferneze free and bargains away his office - at a considerable price - hoping thereby to benefit from both the Moslem here and Christian hounds:

Thus, loving neither, will I live with both,  
 Making a profit of my policy;  
 And he from whom my most advantage comes  
 Shall be my friend.  
 This is the life we Jews are us'd to lead;  
 And reason, too, for Christians do the like.<sup>2</sup>

His logic, however, begins to waver; for his machinations are directed not against the Christians he condemns, but against the ethically inoffensive Turks. Greed gradually begins to obscure Barabas's better judgment, his gravest error deriving from the bland assumption that "he from whom my most advantage comes shall be my friend." Discrimination is thrown to the winds with his new profit-making policy, and he destroys himself in siding with the more "profitable" Christians against the Turks. Ferneze not only proves treacherously unprofitable, but turns his "policy" against the Jew, and reaps the benefit of Barabas's best-laid plots. Policy ultimately overreaches itself, roasting the overreacher in the cauldron of his own devising.

Ferneze has the final word - that arch-hypocrite of the Maltese Establishment - shaking his head sagaciously over "the unhallowed deeds of Jews", and raising his pious eyes to heaven in thanksgiving for his victory. His is the triumph. Barabas has conveniently blown up the Turkish army; and he, in turn, has blown up Barabas. It is the triumph of an even greater unscrupulousness than the Jew's, the triumph of hypocrisy, cupidity and deceit. The denouement deliberately obviates that traditional Shakespearean sense of "restoration" or political

<sup>1</sup>Jew, V. II. 35-40.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, V. II. 111-116.

stability; and rule is once more placed at the disposal of the Machiavel.

The final impression of the play is nihilistic - the sense of a world devoid of values, one in which the infidel exploits the Christian who in turn exploits the Jew who in revenge exploits them both, a vicious circle of economic cannibalism rationalized on spurious religious grounds:

"It's no sin to deceive a Christian."<sup>1</sup>

"To undo a Jew is charity, and not sin."<sup>2</sup>

"Faith is not to be held with heretics,  
But all are heretics that are not Jews."<sup>3</sup>

Both Jew and Christian are ultimately reduced to the moral level of the Machiavel, Marlowe advocating neither creed as a preferable alternative to the other. No ethical standards of right remain, and the tone of his conclusion is perhaps best contained in the final stanza of Heinrich Heine's "Disputation" - a Hebrew Melody in which the Christians and the Jews argue for the respective merits of their own religions. Donna Blanca, the adjudicator, rises to give her verdict:

Which is right I hardly know -  
But, to tell the truth, I think  
That the rabbi and the friar, -  
That they both - forgive me - stink.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jew, II. III. 310.

<sup>2</sup>Jew, IV. IV. 76.

<sup>3</sup>Jew, II. III. 312-313.

<sup>4</sup>Heine, The Poetry and Prose of, ed. F. Ewen, (New York: Citadel Press, 1948), p. 280.

I pray yow, lat mercy been in youre harte,  
to th' effect and entente that God Almighty  
have mercy on yow in his laste Juggement.  
For Seint Jame seith in his Epistle:  
'Juggement withouten mercy shal be doon  
to hym that hath no mercy of another wight.'

CHAUCER, The Tale of Melibee.

V

SHAKESPEARE'S SHYLOCK:  
THE IMAGE OF THE JEW  
AS OLD LAW JUDGMENT.

Marlowe's heroes invariably find their counterparts in Shakespeare. They share, at times, a similar identity, evoke a comparable response - like Edward and Richard, those pitiful kings unfit to rule; or sometimes the Marlovian hero may appear onstage as the Shakespearean buffoon - the grandiloquent rumblings of Tamburlaine degenerating into the satiric pedantry of the mock-conqueror, Pistol, ranting on the battlefields of France; but in his most striking parallel, the Marlowe hero reappears in Shakespeare as the villain of the piece, Barabas and Shylock standing at wholly antithetical extremes of the Renaissance Humanistic scale.

The great utility value of the Jewish protagonist in Elizabethan drama, it seems to me, manifests itself in two quite different ways. For he may function either as a type of "Judaus ex machina", commenting upon the values of Christian society as they affect him [in his capacity] as a racial and religious alien; or, alternatively, he may operate as a symbolic incarnation of some set of alien and anti-Christian values at odds with the environment within which he "Iudaizes". This is the fundamental difference between Barabas and Shylock, a difference deriving partly from the radically dissimilar world-views of the two creative dramatists and partly from the different societies in which the Jew appears.

Although both plays evidently derive from the genius of the Renaissance humanist, the humanism which they represent and the values inherent in each seem quite distinct and separate - the two forms of humanism which Maritain has distinguished as "theocentric" and

"anthropocentric":

The first kind of humanism [he writes] recognizes that the centre for man is God; it implies the Christian conception of man at once a sinner and redeemed, and the Christian conception of grace and freedom. . . . The second kind of humanism believes that man is his own centre, and therefore the centre of all things. It implies a naturalistic conception of man and of freedom.<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare's humanism was essentially theocentric in form; for the philosophy which provides the structural framework of The Merchant of Venice clearly derives from a medieval world-view with its emphasis on the need for order, hierarchy, Divine Justice, Divine Mercy, and the harmonizing power of God; and the values shown as indispensable to humanity's salvation are the primary Christian virtues of faith, mercy, equity and love. This is the context in which Shylock functions as a type of anti-Christ, the Jewish alien in a God-centred Christian society, symbolic of all the disruptive elements so foreign to the ordered tenets of the old medieval world; and his conversion at the end of the play seems to represent the final collapse of corrupt values in a happy re-affirmation of true Christian virtue. Shakespearean comedy appears, indeed, to be of this essentially affirmative kind, reconfirming those social ideals which the tragedies probe and throw in doubt; and the many interpretations of The Merchant of Venice which insist on reading the play as a parody on Christianity seem to misrepresent its very spirit and purpose.<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, after all, was doing something more than merely refashion Marlowe's play. He was opposing its basic thesis.

The anthropocentric humanism of Marlowe had called the Christian values of the old order in doubt, and in so doing seemed to emphasise the need for replacing the virtues of spiritual salvation

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<sup>1</sup>Maritain, quoted by M. M. Mahood, Poetry and Humanism, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>The most recent of these readings is that of A. D. Moody, Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice (Studies in English Literature; London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1964).

with an altered set of values indispensable to man's political salvation in the contemporary world of progress and power. And Marlowe's rejection of the ordered theocentric world-view seems to find expression in the very nature and disposition of his chief protagonists: the Atheist, the Scythian shepherd, and the Jew responsible for exploding the myth of medieval Christianity. If, as some critics suggest, The Merchant of Venice can be read as a dramatic rejoinder to Marlowe's play, its rebuke derives less from the apparently humanized portrayal of the Jew than from Shakespeare's change of tone and intention. Marlowe had desecrated theocentric Christianity through the image of the Jew, and Shakespeare was intent on re-affirming its values through the same dramatic symbol.<sup>1</sup>

Of almost equal importance in distinguishing between the nature of the protagonists in these two plays is the image of society that each dramatist presents. Marlowe's Malta, at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, a geographical mid-point for the corruption and exploitation of several continents, is populated by unscrupulous and extortionary hypocrites. It is a society very like Ben Jonson's in Venice, where dog bites dog and scavenger preys upon scavenger - a

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<sup>1</sup>The critical point of view which insists that Shylock was intended as a sympathetic reply to Marlowe's anti-Semitic portrait seems to me to miss the essential nature of these two Jews and the function they perform in their respective plays. This is, however, the conventional view adopted by the Anglo-Jewish critics intent on exposing Marlovian anti-Semitism in favour of the sympathetic racism of Shakespeare. A fairly representative judgment is that of Dr. Philipson:

"There is all the difference [he writes] between the two plays that can be imagined as existing between a frightful and hideous caricature, which Marlowe's Jew is, and a heroic, intensely tragic figure, proud, deep, at times rising even to grandeur, such as Shakespeare's Jew is."

David Philipson, The Jew in English Fiction (New York: Bloch, 1927), pp. 37-38.

society of self-devouring evils where, in Ulysses' image,

. . . everything includes itself in power,  
Power into will, will into appetite;  
And appetite, an universal wolf,  
So doubly seconded with will and power,  
Must make perforce an universal prey,  
And last eat up himself.

Barabas is just such a wolf who, preying like Nemrod upon the corrupt world of Christian hypocrisy, perverts the power he has grasped and is tried in his own cauldron. Hellmouth once more reclaims its devil.

But if Barabas is a wolf in a society of wolves, Shylock is infinitely more morally reprehensible as a wolf in the Christian fold - and Shakespeare makes this image concrete in his comedy: "I pray you," says Antonio, the 'tainted wether of the flock' -

I pray you think you question with the Jew, -  
.....  
You may as well use question with the wolf,  
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb.<sup>2</sup>

Sympathetic criticism all too frequently reverses this relationship in its tendency to regard Shylock as the victim of Christian persecution, a hard-done-by Jew driven to revenge by the pressures of an anti-Semitic society. But this, again, is to conceive of the play as a Marlovian-type satire on Christian society, a contention inconsistent with the text. For Shakespeare's Venice is neither that of Volpone - a Mammon-worshipping society, quite out of touch with Christianity; nor is it the super-subtle, highly rational Venice of Othello. It stands as the great commercialemporium of Renaissance Europe, a city of paramount economic importance in world trade - as Antonio is to indicate:

The Duke cannot deny the course of law;  
For the commodity that strangers have

<sup>1</sup>Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, I. III. 119-124.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, IV. I. 70; 73-74. Sir Israel Gollancz contends that the Hebrew names in the play support this allegory, and suggests that Shakespeare derived the name of his Jew from the Hebrew יִשְׂרָאֵל roughly equivalent in pronunciation to the English "Shylock" - meaning "ascavenger" or "cormorant". (See Gollancz, Allegory and Mysticism in Shakespeare - A Medievalist on 'The Merchant of Venice', (London: Jones, 1931), pp. 24-25. It is difficult to determine whether Shakespeare actually engaged in Hebrew research (which is unlikely) or whether this is merely one of Sir Israel's many ingenious speculations. In deference to Sir Israel it should be admitted that the image of the cormorant was frequently applied to the usurer in Elizabethan literature - as in Thomas Wilson's Discourse upon Usury in which he speaks of money-lenders as "'greedie cormorante wolves in deeds, that ravyn up both beaste and man.'" (p. 182).

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.<sup>1</sup>

But Shakespeare's Venice is also an essentially Christian state - a state which, probably because of its trade and profit, finds itself caught up in the momentous economic crisis of the late 16th Century. Its society stands in the gravest danger of infection by the inroads of the new commercial spirit; and the image Shakespeare presents is that of Christianity confronted by a challenge to its basic premises, Christianity threatened by a new mercantile morality. It is Shylock, of course, and his "Jewish" values which represent the gravest threat to its stability - but Shylock is essentially an extreme manifestation of the internal symptoms of this moral condition, symptoms evident no doubt in Elizabethan England as in the various Venetian merchants of the play: in Gratiano, Salanio, Salario and others.<sup>2</sup> He stands as a dreadful warning to them of the criminal extremes to which mercantilism can extend when divorced from Christian values; and the Princess of Arragon and Morocco function as similar allegorical admonishments to Christianity against the corruption of the money-ethic. Indeed, the predominating tone of the play, it seems to me, is that of the moral warning - a tone typically (if not most poetically) sounded in the doggerel rhymes contained in Portia's caskets. "O hell! what have we here?" exclaims Morocco, opening the golden casket:

A carrion Death, within whose empty eye  
 There is a written scroll, - I'll read the writing.

'All that glisters is not gold,  
 Often have you heard that told,  
 Many a man his life hath sold  
 But my outside to behold,  
 Gilded tombs do worms infold:

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, III. iii. 26-31.

<sup>2</sup>These gentlemen, in opening the comedy, also establish its values and its dominant idiom. The language of trade and the mercantile world pervades the first scene with its chatter of argosies, ventures, spices and silks.

Had you been as wise as bold,  
Young in limbs, in judgment old,  
Your answer had not been inscroll'd.<sup>1</sup>

Shylock is the living exemplar of this moral, the "carrion Death" infecting the age, the money-ethic in action. To sentimentalize the Jew is to misconceive of his function in the comedy. To read the play as a satire on Christian hypocrisy is to overlook the triumphal celebration of Christianity over its traducer and the correct use of riches over the corrupt.

One cannot, of course, expect a unanimity of opinion among Shakespearean critics; but an objectivity of judgment must surely acquiesce in that aspect of the drama which remains constantly and consistently valuable. Not so, however, with The Merchant of Venice. Criticism has given rise to volumes of polemically convincing arguments advocating completely antithetical readings of the play - readings so diverse as to cast doubt upon their being centred in the same comedy. The sentimental humanitarianism of the early 19th Century, for instance, conceived of a Shylock "more than half a Christian", Hazlitt's image of a Jew more sinned against than sinning:

. . . our sympathies [he wrote of Keon's Shylock] are much oftener with him than with his enemies. He is honest in his vices; they are hypocrites in their virtues.<sup>2</sup>

And the more emotionally forceful Continental Romantics assumed defensively apologetic attitudes, transforming the play into a heated defense of persecuted Jewry. Thus Heine:

The play might have been a satire on Christianity, since Shylock's enemies are hardly worthy to unlace his shoes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, II. vii. 62-72.

<sup>2</sup>Hazlitt, The Chronicle, 6th April, 1816; quoted by J.R. Brown, "The Realization of Shylock," Early Shakespeare, ed. J.R. Brown and R. Harris (Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 3; London: Edward Arnold, 1961), pp. 193-94.

<sup>3</sup>H. Heine, Shakespeare's Maidens and Women (1839), quoted by A. Ralli, A History of Shakespearean Criticism (New York: Humanities Press, 1959), I. 248.

Or Victor Hugo:

Let Shylock be as implacable as he may, assuredly he will no more than equal his instruction. Even granting that he obtains a pound of Antonio's flesh, it will never outweigh in the scales of reprisal, the millions of corpses heaped in Christian shambles by the butchery of thirteen centuries.<sup>1</sup>

It was against this militant and sentimental defensiveness that Professor Stoll reacted in 1911 by re-establishing Shylock as a comic figure, a grotesque Bergsonian butt whose farcical presentation would of necessity obviate his inherently tragic potential;<sup>2</sup> and, a few years later, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch steered a cautious middle path by suggesting that although Shakespeare had intended to create a villainous Jew, his natural warmth-of-heart induced him, as a matter of course, to sympathize even with the Calibans of his creation.<sup>3</sup>

American- and Anglo-Jewish authors on the subject are no less dispassionate than the Romantics, nor more consistent in their criticism than the non-Jewish critics. They seem to fall into two near general categories: those who admire the play as a defence of Judaism, and those who detest it as anti-Semitic. Of the first school, Rabbi Dr. Philipson is fairly representative:

Shylock [he writes] stands as a grand creation of a master mind, essentially tragic, intense in his every word and action, a picture of what the best intended and highest mind, wishing to do some justice to the Jews, and to relieve the black and terrible picture presented by an earlier play, conceived to be true.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by E. N. Colisch, The Jew in English Literature . . . , p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>E. E. Stoll, Shakespeare Studies (New York: Macmillan, 1927), Chap. VI: "Shylock" (1911), pp. 255-336.

<sup>3</sup>Quiller-Couch, Shakespeare's Workmanship (Cambridge: U.P., 1951), Chap. V: "The Merchant of Venice", p. 80.

<sup>4</sup>For a history of Shylock Criticism, see Augustus Ralli, A History of Shakespearean Criticism, in two volumes.

<sup>4</sup>Dr. Philipson, p. 52.

Rabbi E. N. Calisch, similarly, considers the drama "tragic" - but for wholly different reasons:

It is the tragedy [he says] not of an individual, but of the century-enduring humiliation and insult to a whole people, the tragedy of the accepted misrepresentation of their life and character, of the fastening upon them of a cruelly false name, and making it a by-word and a reproach.<sup>1</sup>

This particular school is generally concerned with obviating the "Jewishness" of Shylock by attempting to disprove his psychological veracity,<sup>2</sup> or with rejecting the play completely as "the wildest farrago of nonsense ever devised by the wit of man."<sup>3</sup>

Nor is the stage-history of the Shylock role any more edifying in an attempt to understand the essential nature of "the Jew that Shakespeare drew." The deathly serious malice and savagery of Charles Macklin in the 1740s gave way to Kean's Romantic portrayal of the Man of Sorrows - the stage-counterpart of Hazlitt's criticism. Irving played the part with almost Disraelian dignity, Beerbohm Tree with the frantic gesticulations of a neurotically emotional Jew, Arliss intellectually, and Gielgud with passionate intensity.<sup>4</sup> Apart, perhaps, from Hamlet few other Shakespearean roles admit of such infinite diversity and variety of stage-interpretation - for few other roles seem compounded of so many ambiguities. But there is, it seems to me, a sense in which Shylock transcends his inherent contradictions in a complex image which subsumes all others - an image which derives less from any racial opposition than from a clash of conflicting values within a framework of Christian theology. The "New" critical approach which, in the past few decades, has re-directed attention more specifically to the language of literature and its form, serves to reveal a complex network of Biblical allusions in the texture of

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<sup>1</sup>E. N. Calisch, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>See, for instance, B. Friedlander, Shakespeare and the Jew (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1921): "'Shakespeare's greatest error lies in his complete failure to understand the true nature of a Jew's heart and soul.'" (p. 28).

<sup>3</sup>M. J. Landa, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed stage-history of Shylock, see Toby Lalyveld, Shylock on the Stage (Cleveland, Ohio: Western Reserve University Press, 1960). Also, J.R. Brown, "The Realization of Shylock," Early Shakespeare, Chap. IX.

The Merchant of Venice which looks beyond the purely narrative context with its Jewish-Gentile issues towards the metaphysics behind the comedy. And an appreciation of these metaphysics surely obviates the necessity of siding with either Dr. Philipson or Dr. Calisch in the perennial debate on the merits of Shakespeare's Jewish portraiture. SD

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The medieval basis of comic form - that movement from distress to joy, from the Fall of man to his Salvation in Christ - prefigured a Beatific Vision which, for the Christian Humanist of the Middle Ages, embodied the shape of ultimate reality. It was the Divine Comedy celebrated by the Passion Plays and Mystery Cycles in which the basic concepts of Sin, Judgment, and Salvation not only supplied the metaphysics for this powerful body of drama, but perpetuated a framework of universal symbolism upon which the structure of Renaissance drama could be reared. The theological themes of the earlier drama - Christ's Incarnation, Passion, and descent into Hell and their concomitant emphasis on the reality of sin, the fear of God's Justice, and fallen humanity's need for mercy - provided a vital and consistent mythology for the Elizabethan audience imbued with the Miracle and Morality tradition, a mythology of commonly held beliefs which seemed to have survived the progress towards a more secular society. For despite the secular exterior of Shakespeare's comedy, its internal organization is firmly established upon the medieval foundations of Christian belief, giving form, depth and universal significance to the particularities of a complicated plot. Shakespeare, in other words, was working upon two distinct levels of significance both implicit in the same basic set of circumstances: the God-level and the human, allegorical and literal. For if the Renaissance still maintained a close contact with the theological tradition of the Middle Ages, it also inherited its allegorical cast of mind - that ability to draw "simultaneous meanings on parallel planes of experience";<sup>1</sup> and in The Merchant of Venice, more than any other of his comedies, Shakespeare

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<sup>1</sup>N. Coghill, "The Basis of Shakespearean Comedy", Essays and Studies, 111 (1950), p. 17.

seems to have employed allegory not only to enrich the particular dramatic situation, but also to relate the secularized Renaissance figures to the theological structure of the Christian universe, linking his dramatic personae with the great metaphysical forces that control the destiny of Mankind.

Although The Merchant clearly derives, as I have indicated, from the genre of the usurer-play, Shakespeare seems to have employed this traditional dramatic form in a wholly original manner, using the contemporary economic crisis as a type of "objective correlative" for a moral allegory about basic Christian values - an allegory in which the Jew has a significance beyond that of a mere economic symbol. On the purely literal level, of course, the play deals with the acquisitive attitude that was wrecking the traditional values of the early 16th Century. On the allegorical level, however, this economic dilemma re-interprets itself readily in terms of Christian theology; for the whole conception of sin and salvation in Western Christendom is traditionally treated of in terms of economic imagery - the very word "redemption", in its etymological sense, signifying a "buying back" or "release by purchase". This figuring of the redemptive process in economic terminology dates back to the Golden Legend of the 13th Century where it finds its most explicit expression:

Eve took of the fiend sin by borrowing by usury, (saith St. Austin) and wrote an obligation. She laid it for pledge, and the usury is augmented, and grew unto all the remnant of the lineage. Then took Eve of the fiend sin, when against the commandment she consented to him. She wrote the obligation when she put her hand to the tree against the defence of God. She delivered pledge when she made Adam to consent to the sin, and thus the usury grew and augmented unto the remainder of all the lineage.<sup>1</sup>

The theological associations implicit in the economic imagery of The Merchant of Venice must surely have been familiar to the Elizabethan audience through countless sermons and commentaries which utilized the identical figures and tropes - as, for example, in Lancelot Andrewes' Christmas sermon of 1609:

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<sup>1</sup>J. de Voragine (fl. 1270), The Golden Legend, trans. William Caxton (1483), ed. F.S. Ellis (Temple Classics Series; London: Dent, 1900), I. 79-80.

For if one be in debt and danger of the law, to have a brother of the same blood, . . . will little avail him, except he will also come "under the law", that is, become his surety and undertake for him. And such was our estate. As debtors we were by virtue of chirographum contra nos, "the handwriting that was against us", which was our bond and we had forfeited it. . . . Therefore He [Christ] became bound for us also, entered bond anew, took on him not only our nature but our debt, our nature and condition both. . . . He had His name given Him, the name of Jesus, a Saviour. For then took He on Him the obligation to save us. And. . . at His Passion He paid even to the full; and having paid it, delevit chirographum, "cancelled the sentence of the Law" that till then was of record and stood in full force against us.<sup>1</sup>

Re-inforced and perhaps even generated by images of "debt", "bond", "Law", "surety", and "obligation" on the literal level, the theological overtones in The Merchant of Venice become explicit on the allegorical plane, calling to mind the immemorial myth of Mankind's fall and redemption that underlies the Christian drama of the Middle Ages: Adam, through his sin, had subjected all humanity to the Devil's bondage; but Christ, taking man's debt upon himself, had redeemed the sinful debtors from the bond of damnation; and when, on the Day of Judgment, the Devil comes to claim the soul of man in accordance with the strict legality of his bond, Christ has but to plead the cancellation of humanity's debt with a perfect justice that is also a perfect mercy.

A network of correspondences between the allegorical and literal levels immediately establishes itself, a system of anagogical mirrors which reflects the theological issues within the secular action: Shylock, craving the Law and demanding the penalty and forfeit of his bond, functions as the archetypal Evil to whom Mankind is bound through sin; Bassanio is Everyman in Renaissance dress - the riotous, pleasure-loving rake who draws up a contract with the Devil by borrowing on usury; Antonio, by pledging his life for the fulfilment of the obligation, stands as a Christ figure assuming the debt of Mankind and satisfying the claims of Divine Justice; and Portia, within this context, combines the images of "Mary, Mother of Mercie", the morality figure of the 85th Psalm, or

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<sup>1</sup>Andrewes, Sermons of the Nativity (Oxford: Parker, 1841), I, 79-80.

(as Sir Israel Gollancz suggests<sup>1</sup>) the principle of Salvation,

Grace Dieu -

fair, and (fairer than that word),  
Of wondrous virtues.<sup>2</sup>

And not only the allegorical technique of the Middle Ages, but the very form and structure of the medieval drama provides The Merchant of Venice with its climactic episodes. The trial scene, in particular, testifies to an ingenious transformation of the old Miracle and Morality tradition into a contemporary Renaissance situation, its entire dramatic framework deriving from the Day of Judgment play in the Mystery Cycles, and from its close equivalent in the later morality drama - the heavenly debate between Justice and Mercy, the two daughters of God, over the destiny of Mankind's soul. It is within this context of Christian allegory that the image of the Jew gains an added significance - an allegory in which Shylock comes to symbolize not only the Judaic spirit in open conflict with the Christian, but the strict legality of Old Law Justice at odds with the forgiving spirit of New Law Mercy. It is this essentially theological image which Shakespeare seems to have imposed with such originality upon the traditional image of the Jewish usurer.

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The principle operating in the Doomsday scenes which provide

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<sup>1</sup>Gollancz, Allegory and Mysticism in Shakespeare. The allegorical analysis and interpretation of The Merchant was initiated by Sir Israel as early as 1916, and many critics, in more recent years, seem to have followed suit. Most notable among these are: N. Coghill, "The Basis of Shakespearean Comedy", Essays and Studies, III (1950).

Honor Matthews, Character and Symbol in Shakespeare's Plays (Cambridge: U.P., 1962).

M.D.H. Parker, The Slave of Life (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955).

B.K. Lewalski, "Biblical Allusion and Allegory in The Merchant of Venice", Shakespeare Quarterly, XIII, No. 3. (Summer, 1962).

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, I. i. 162-63.

the climax to the medieval Mystery Cycles is that principle of "measure for measure" which Christ had preached upon the Mount:

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.<sup>1</sup>

And the dialogue in the play of the Last Judgment is nearly always based upon that passage in Matthew where Christ metes out mercy to those who have practised the Deeds of Mercy, and rigorous justice to those who have violated them.<sup>2</sup> This doctrine is essential to a proper understanding of the nature of Christian mercy in the climactic trial scene of The Merchant of Venice, and forms the very essence of Portia's plea to the vengeful Shylock:

. . . therefore Jew [she warns him],  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,  
That 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.<sup>3</sup>

There seems little need, however, for Portia to enumerate these "deeds of mercy". The Elizabethan audience must surely have been sufficiently aware of this fundamental doctrine of Christian conduct for Shakespeare to have taken it for granted; for it finds constant re-statement in the Miracle and Morality tradition from which The Merchant seems to derive - from the Doomsday scene of the Passion plays, to the ethical debate among the Daughters of God in the "Parliament of Heaven" tradition:

The seven deeds of Mercy whoso hath used  
To fulfil - the hungry for to give meat,  
Or drink to the thirsty; to the naked vesture,  
The poor or the pilgrim for to fetch,  
Or thy neighbour that hath need;  
Whoso doth mercy to his might  
To the sick or them in prison pyt,  
He doth to me: I shall him quit,  
Heaven's bliss shall be his mead.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew 7: 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 25: 31-46.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 193-98.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted by Honor Matthews, p. 80.

This is God's final verdict in the Judgment scene of The Castle of Perseverance (mid-15th Century) - and these same rules of conduct are exemplified, not only in the trial scene, but in nearly every aspect of the Shylock-Antonio opposition in the play. The extent, however, to which Antonio maintains these deeds of mercy is paralleled only by the extent to which Shylock violates them. This basic antithesis (as Miss Lewalski suggests)<sup>1</sup> is crystallized in the images of "venturing" and "thrift" - the first subsuming all Antonio's acts of magnanimity, that willingness to risk both possessions and life in the cause of friendship; and the second including all that is miserly in Shylock. It is an antithesis which appears most markedly in the business ethics and economic morality of these two major protagonists, particularly where their ethics relate to the performance of the paramount Deed of Mercy - that of helping one's neighbour in need. It is in this area, as I have already pointed out,<sup>2</sup> that the charitable lending of Antonio comes into open conflict with the usury of Shylock - Christian generosity against the "Jewish" profit-motive.

Quite apart from his usury, moreover, Shylock desecrates as many of the Deeds of Mercy as the dramatic circumstances of the play permit, reflecting his uncharity in every aspect of his relationship with the other dramatis personae.

. . . my master's a very Jew [complains his servant, Launcelot Gobbo]. . . . I am famish'd in his service. You may tell every finger I have with my ribs.<sup>3</sup>

It is this begrudging attitude which characterizes the Jew, that concern with the retention of his worldly possessions which finds expression in his proverbial admonishment to Jessica:

Fast bind, fast find, -  
A proverb never stale in thrifty mind.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lewalski, p. 329.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter III: pp. 74-76.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, II. ii. 100-103.

<sup>4</sup>Merchant, II. v. 53-54.

But his miserliness and thrift are infinitely less heinous than the obsessive, almost neurotic hatred he nourishes against Antonio, the merchant whose Christian charity proves so ruinous to the rate of interest on the Rialto:

How like a fawning publican he looks!  
 I hate him for he is a Christian;  
 But more, for that in low simplicity  
 He lends out money gratis, and brings down  
 The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
 If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
 I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.  
 He hates our sacred nation, and he rails  
 (Even there where merchants most do congregate)  
 On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,  
 Which he calls interest: cursed be my tribe  
 If I forgive him!<sup>1</sup>

Pharisaically self-assured beneath the protective facade of his sacred nation, he feels himself at liberty to despise Antonio's magnanimity, superciliously rationalizing it as "low simplicity" and "fawning" - and the racial issue is explicitly subordinated in his mind to the economic, while his vindictive desire for revenge is clearly rooted in the opposition between two antithetical money-ethics rather than in any Jewish-Gentile antagonism. Hatred is the dictum by which he lives; but Shylock, standing on his Jewishness and adducing the various religious differences between Antonio and himself, seems illogically to rationalize the essentially economic grounds of his hatred for Antonio by elevating them to a moral, racial issue. His hatred cannot be justified on purely religious grounds. In doing so he merely prostitutes his faith by using it as a protective shield against the Christian community in which he finds himself. It is a frequently hostile community and Antonio, admittedly, contributes in no small measure to the hostility of Shylock's environment:

. . . he hath disgrac'd me [complains Shylock], and hind'ed me half a million, laugh'd at my losses, mock'd at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, - and what's his reason? I am a Jew.<sup>2</sup>

Again the attempt to incriminate Antonio as an anti-Semite. Yet it is quite clear from their conversations that Antonio hates the Jew not as

<sup>1</sup>Merchant, I. III. 36-47.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, III. I. 48-52.

"Jew", but as the symbol of everything un-Christian: the greedy acquisitive attitude, the spirit of uncharity, and the breeder of barren metal.

Even Shylock's revenge is rationalized on religious grounds - a specious attempt to justify his malice by charging the Christian society with villainy against the Jews in general:

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.<sup>1</sup>

This rationalization, of course, is given the lie by Antonio's Christian example at the trial, when the tables are turned on Shylock and retaliation is placed in the other's hands; for although Shylock presses him to the point of death, Antonio's humility is not revenge. Forgiveness transcends vindictiveness, the spirit of the New Law triumphing over that of the Old.

This "I am a Jew" speech, moreover, is the sting in the scorpion's tail - the venomous end of a lengthy argument which misguided critical humanitarianism has insisted upon reading as a plea for racial toleration, a speech which begins with a snarl of purely arbitrary vindictiveness ("To bait fish withal"), which develops into a charge of illogically argued anti-Semitism ("and what's his reason? I am a Jew"), and then bursts into that most seemingly pathetic of passages:

. . . hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs,  
 dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the  
 same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same  
 diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the  
 same winter and summer as a Christian is? - If you prick us  
 do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you  
 poison us do we not die?

And then the climactic rationale behind his argument:

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. . .<sup>2</sup>

The emotive eloquence of Shylock is directed not towards a justification of his race, but of his vengeance - an extended and finely phrased syllogism which posits as its major premise that Jews resemble Christians

<sup>1</sup>Merchant, III. i. 62-66.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, III. i. 45 ff.

in all human respects; as its minor premise, that Christians avenge themselves for wrongs suffered; as its conclusion, that Jews are similarly entitled to revenge. To isolate and sentimentalize any one particular element of the syllogism is to misconceive of Shakespeare's treatment of the Jew.

Not a word [as E.E. Stoll points out] is put in for the nobler side of the Jewish character; and in lending Shylock his eloquence Shakespeare is but giving the devil his due.<sup>1</sup>

If Shylock is a humanized portrayal of the Jew, he is humanized as Iago is, or Edmund the bastard - a humanity which serves to intensify the danger of the Renaissance devil, making his evil of serious and threatening import. Moreover, as Bassanio remarks:

There is no vice to simple, but assumes  
Some mark of virtue on his outward parts -<sup>2</sup>

and so it is with Shylock's professed humanity, a humanity nine parts hypocrisy and one part self-pity, a simple vice concealed beneath a virtuous facade of Judaism on the one hand and a profession of Christian kindness on the other. But by manipulating these outward virtues to serve his vengeful ends he not only desecrates the values he so hypocritically professes, but makes the evil all the more invidious. Antonio, who sees beneath his "humanity" into the inward rot, anatomizes Shylock's moral being by emphasizing the disparity between appearance and reality:

An evil soul producing holy witness  
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,  
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.  
O what a goodly outside falsehood hath!<sup>3</sup>

And Shylock's humanity is of this very nature - the smiling cheek on the villainous face, the goodly outside masking his hypocrisy. Feeding fat the grudge he bears Antonio, with vengeance rankling in his heart, he smiles and offers "kindness":

I would be friends with you, and have your love,  
Forget the shames that you have stain'd me with,

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<sup>1</sup>Stoll, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, III. II. 81-82.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, I. III. 94-97.

Supply your present wants, and take no doit  
 Of usance for my moneys, and you'll not hear me, -  
 This is kind I offer.<sup>1</sup>

And the falsity in the offer is intensified in the irony of the pun - "kind" - which Shakespeare plays upon in various mutations for the remainder of the scene. It is the "kindness" of the Jew, his natural propensities, which generates the irony, ingeniously reversing the true sense of the word; for Shylock's "kind" - as his soliloquy has already indicated - is dangerous and vindictive; and the Elizabethan audience must surely have seized upon the double-sense immediately, a sense corroborated by the bond of flesh. It is an ominous scene, the treachery emanating from the ironies in the language itself and making Antonio's gullibility all the more disastrous:

Antonio: Hie thee gentle Jew.  
 The Hebrew will turn Christian, he grows kind.

Bassanio: I like not fair terms, and a villain's mind.<sup>2</sup>

Sentimental criticism, it seems to me, fails to take account of this essential contradiction in Shylock's nature - the disparity between his fair terms and his malicious intentions, a disparity which constitutes one of the governing ideas in the play. The familiar dichotomy of appearance and reality, as I have tried to indicate, exists as a major element in Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock - the goodly apple rotten at the core - and his inherent ambiguity seems to derive from this basic contradiction in his psychology. The Belmont episodes, however, are equally concerned with the co-existence of the "is" and the "seems", the false and the true, and the chronic inability of mankind to distinguish between them. In Belmont it is a question of true and false values; but the values are nevertheless those of the new economic society; and there is, it seems, an essential interrelationship between the two apparently dissociated worlds of the play - one which serves, on the allegorical level, to weld the play into a unity so tight that the Princes of Arragon and Morocco appear as manifestations of the Shylockian spirit.

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, I. III. 134-138.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, I. III. 173-175.

in different forms. For the moral alternatives offered to Shylock on the Venetian Rialto and the court of law are paralleled and re-inforced in the more spiritual world of Belmont, Portia's caskets clearly symbolizing the choice between spiritual life or death; and those suitors who choose falsely serve to heighten and intensify<sup>1</sup> the moral corruption of the Jew.

The two distinct elements of the comedy, of course, derive from wholly different sources - the Venetian scenes with their "pound of flesh" plot from Il Pecorone, a romance of the Italian Renaissance; and the casket episodes from an earlier work of the 13th Century, the Gesta Romanorum.<sup>1</sup> But Shakespeare's use of his sources is less illuminating than the extent to which he went beyond them; for in order to elevate both themes to a common denominator he seemed obliged to allegorize the secular and medievalize the Renaissance aspects of the novellae, and by so doing ingeniously re-inforced the mutual interdependence of the two separate parts. The Gesta apparently contained its own built-in allegory, and an investigation of its appended "moral" does much to illuminate the entire metaphysical structure of the casket scenes and the allegorical framework of the play in general. It concerns a young maiden whose worthiness to wed the Emperor's son depends upon her choice of one of three caskets placed before her. The allegory is explained as follows:

The Emperour sheweth this Mayden three vessells, that is to say, God putteth before man life & death, good and euill, & which of these he chooseth hee shall obtaine. . . . By the first vessell of golde full of dead mennes bones we shall vnderstand some worldly men, both mightie men & riche, which outwardly shine as golde in riches and pomps of this world. . . . By the second vessell of siluer we ought to vnderstand some Justices & wise men of this world which shine in faire speach but within they be full of wormes and earth, that is to saye, theyr faire speach shall auaille them no more at the day of iudgement, than wormes of earth. . . . By the third vessell of lead full of golde and precious stones, we ought to vnderstand a simple life and poore, which the chosen men choose, that they may be wedded to our blessed Lorde Jesu Christ by humilitie and obeysance.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Vide G. Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), I. 445-514.

<sup>2</sup>Vide The Merchant of Venice, ed. J.R. Brown. (New Arden edition; London: Methuen, 1961), Appendix V: p. 174.

The maiden clearly represents the human soul in search of salvation, the Emperor God, and Christ His Son. This was the allegorical substratum which Shakespeare built into The Merchant of Venice - Bassanio assuming an Everyman significance, Portia that of Grace Dieu (as Gollancz has it), and her suitors - like Shylock - representatives of the money-ethic, the worldly and the rich, shining in fair speech but full of worms and earth. Indeed, the whole point of the casket episodes seems to indicate the extent to which the money values have infected the moral choices of society.

Morocco, forced to choose, succumbs to the glittering exterior of the golden casket, confusing Portia's true value with that of gilded show; and his choice is determined by an arithmetical calculation of relative values - that morally chaotic computation which was the tragic error of King Lear:

Or shall I think in silver she's immur'd  
Being ten times undervalued to try'd gold?  
O sinful thought!<sup>1</sup>

But his calculations are erroneous. His choice is the way to spiritual death, as the symbol of the skull in the casket and its moral lesson inform him. And it is significant that the scene which follows Morocco's moral failure contains the report of Shylock's garbled cries for his daughter and his ducats, a similar confusion of human and financial worth. (No less significant is Portia's comment on the departing and defeated Morocco:

A gentle riddance, - draw the curtains, go, -  
Let all of his complexion choose me so.<sup>2</sup>

Not even in Belmont is the prejudice against the stranger or the coloured or the Semite wholly abjured. Her attitude, indeed, looks forward to that of Brabantio confronted by his Moorish son-in-law.)

If the golden casket symbolizes the corruptibility of outward wealth, then the silver casket - in terms of the moral allegory - represents the hypocritical pretense of righteousness which is the choice of those who "shine in faire speech" - like the Prince of Arragon.

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<sup>1</sup>The Merchant, II. vii. 52-54.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, II. vii. 78-79.

Puffed with conceit, he turns to this casket with its inscription, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves", and promptly assumes desert. Again, the error of choice is symbolized by the fool's head in the casket - the folly of vain and self-righteous presumption; and the doggerel in the fool's hand points to the basic difference between true judgment and false:

The fire seven times tried this:<sup>1</sup>  
 Seven times tried that judgment is,  
 That did never choose amiss.  
 Some there be that shadows kiss,  
 Such have but a shadow's bliss:  
 There be fools alive (twis)  
 Silver'd o'er, and so was this.<sup>2</sup>

So, of course, is Shylock as well - the Venetian equivalent of Arragon's self-righteousness who demonstrates no less that falsity of judgment which leads to spiritual death; and (as Miss Lewalski suggests)<sup>3</sup> the failure and moral lessoning of Arragon foreshadow his own ultimate defeat.

Bassanio, however, (although not without the help of some angelic choir) makes the true Christian choice of the "simple life and poore", the choice of the leaden casket with its strenuous demand: "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." He alone among the suitors is able to penetrate the ornamental facade of false values, and by rejecting the fancy "engend'ed in the eyes", also rejects the superficial worth of gold and silver together with the corruption and vanity which they symbolize:

So may the outward shows be least themselves, -  
 The world is still deceiv'd with ornament -  
 . . . . .  
 Thus ornament is but the guiled shore  
 To a most dangerous sea: the beauteous scarf  
 Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word,  
 The seeming truth which cunning times put on  
 To entrap the wisest.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The scriptural reference that underlies this image, as Miss Lewalski has pointed out, is the 12th Psalm and its indictment of vanity and vain speaking: "'The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaketh proud things. . . . The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.'" (3; 6.)

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, II. ix. 63-69.

<sup>3</sup>Lewalski, p. 337.

<sup>4</sup>Merchant, III. II. 73-74; 97-101.

By avoiding the danger of those who choose by the view, he wins the Lady of Salvation, satisfying the prerequisite of atonement by willingly sacrificing all he has; for Mankind's redemption, as Shylock is made to realize in the trial scene, necessitates the abandonment of all worldly possessions "that they may be wedded to our blessed Lord Jesu Christ by humilitie and obeysance." And it is in this light that Shylock's forced conversion should be read. It is in this climactic confrontation between Judaism and Christianity, moreover, that the image of the Jew assumes an allegorical and symbolic significance far beyond his function in the Venetian money-market; for the Jewish figure, operating within the perspective of the Miracle and Morality background to the trial scene, assumes levels of meaning which wholly transcend the literary tradition of the "Jew-play", testifying to Shakespeare's genius in transforming an accepted dramatic genre of his time into something rich and strange.

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Shakespeare's earliest dramatic source for the trial scene with its conflict between the powers of Mercy and Justice is obviously traceable to the Last Judgment play of the medieval Mystery cycles, in which the Devils and Christ come to terms over the soul of fallen man. Satan, of course, is reluctant to part with his property, claiming that possession is nine-tenths of the law and that mankind's soul, by rights, is his:

Through mercy he should be thyne [says the Devil],  
 but myne through wretchednes and synne;  
 thyne through Passion that thou was in,  
 and myne through Tentation.  
 . . . . .  
 thou Righteous iudge therefore I pray,  
 Deem him to my Pryson.<sup>1</sup>

But Christ's mercy proves greater than mankind's sin, and the merciful of heart are redeemed from Satan's bondage; for in Christ's mercy lies the salvation even of the undeserving -

Ask mercy & pou sall have  
 And fra pe fende I sall pe saue,

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<sup>1</sup>"The Last Judgment," The Chester Cycle, re-edited for the Early English Text Society by Matthews (London: O.U.P., 1935), p. 146.

And fra his payns smert -<sup>1</sup>

and the religious lyrics of the Middle Ages frequently took the form of a prayer to Christ to mingle mercy with his judgment on the Day of Doom:

Lord, pou pat 3iuest me  
al pat langeþ to me  
dauid sone, pat mengest merci wip ri3t,  
haue merci on me!<sup>2</sup>

The familiar, almost formal tradition of the "Mercy" prayer and the theological issues it raises are inherent not only in the language of Shakespeare's trial in The Merchant of Venice, but in the entire dramatic framework of this Renaissance "Judgment scene". Its dramatic opposition of the Fiend's strict legal claim and Christ's redemptive powers, formed, moreover, the thematic basis of the medieval Processus Belial play - the "Devil's Lawsuit" - in which Satan appears in the court of Heaven, clamouring for the soul of man; and when God, the presiding judge of the scene, calls upon an advocate for man, Mary consents to undertake his defence - for although Christ is the embodiment of Mercy, His mother is its advocate, the intermediary (as it were) between mankind and his ultimate Salvation:

Marie, mayde and moder milde [sings the medieval poet],  
Milce and merci was of þe boren,  
To sauuen and fram helle schilde  
All þo pat weren forloren.<sup>3</sup>

The representative of mercy in medieval iconography is invariably the Virgin, the apparent prototype of the Daughter of God in the Parliament of Heaven plays and, it would appear, of Portia - her Renaissance

<sup>1</sup>"How Christ Spekes tyll Synfull Man of His Gret Mercy," lines 22-24; Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century, p.61.

<sup>2</sup>"Jesus Have Mercy on Me," lines 29-32; ibid., p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>"An Acrostic of the Angelic Salutation", lines 9-12; Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century, p. 230. Chaucer's Prioress's Tale draws upon precisely the same image:

"Thou goost biforn of thy banyngnytee,  
And getest us the lyght, of thy preyere,  
To gyden us unto thy Sone so deere." (478-480).

equivalent.<sup>1</sup>

The outline of the Processus Belial has been traced in an interesting article by J.D. Rea,<sup>2</sup> and the unmistakable parallel with the incidents of The Merchant of Venice would seem to suggest a pervasive dramatic tradition which survived into the 16th Century. This Lawsuit opens with Satan's conventional claim to mankind's soul in terms of the strict legality of his bond: "Domine ubi est iustitia tua?" he asks, secure in the knowledge that God stands for justice; but Mary hastens to indicate that mercy is as great an attribute of God as justice - a plea so forceful that Satan, fearful of losing his rights, produces a pair of scales and demands that portion of mankind which is his due to be sliced off, weighed and delivered. Satan, however, loses his suit and - like Shylock - retires defeated. Analogies with the trial scene in The Merchant of Venice are obvious. But even more significant is the identification of Shakespeare's protagonists with the ultimate sources of their moral principles - Portia with the Virgin, and Shylock with Satan.

The identification of the Devil and the Jew derives partly, as I have suggested, from the image of the Judas and the usurer. It also derives, however, from the image of the Jew as anti-Christ, condemned by Christ Himself:

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you will do.<sup>3</sup>

Given scriptural sanction, this association of the Jew with Satan persisted

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<sup>1</sup>It is a comparatively minor, but nonetheless interesting point that the Portia who appears on Antonio's behalf is a virgin. Even after Bassanio has won his suit, she declines to consummate their marriage until the trial is over -

"For never shall you lie by Portia's side  
With an unquiet soul.

.....  
My maid Nerissa, and myself meantime  
Will live as maids and widows; - come away!  
For you shall hence upon your wedding day." (III.ii. 304ff).

<sup>2</sup>J.D. Rea, "Shylock and the 'Processus Belial'", Philological Quarterly, VIII (Oct., 1929), pp. 311-12.

<sup>3</sup>John 8: 44.

throughout the Middle Ages, finding frequent expression in nearly every play in which the Jew appeared. Solanio's taunt as Shylock walks onstage in the third act typifies the prevalence of this association throughout

The Merchant:

Let me say "amen" betimes, lest the devil cross my prayer,  
for here he comes in the likeness of a Jew.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the "merry devil", Launcelot Gobbo's traditional morality function of poking fun at his devilish master is perpetuated in the servant-Jew relationship, making the analogy still more explicit:

. . . - to be rul'd by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master, who (God bless the mark) is a kind of devil; and to run away from the Jew I should be rul'd by the fiend, who (saving your reverence) is the devil himself: certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation, and in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience, to offer to counsel me to stay with the Jew.<sup>2</sup>

But the Satanic imagery clustering about Shylock becomes most organically meaningful in the trial-scene, the multitude of collocations serving to establish him even more firmly in his archetypal role as anti-Christ, tenaciously insisting on his bond and his rightful claim to a portion of Antonio. Portia's intention, moreover, of

. . . purchasing the semblance of my soul  
From out the state of hellish cruelty!<sup>3</sup>

and Bassanio's anxious entreaties for her to

Wrest once the law to your authority, -  
To do a great right, do a little wrong, -  
And curb this cruel devil of his will,<sup>4</sup>

place Shylock unequivocally within the established mythical framework of the Christian scheme of salvation as that evil power of which Christ is the antithesis.

The actual form and structure of the trial scene, as I have tried to indicate, derives essentially from the dramatic tradition of the Miracle and Morality play; but the forensic argument of the scene -

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, III. I. 19-20.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, II. II. 21-28.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, III. IV. 21-22.

<sup>4</sup>Merchant, IV. I. 211-213.

that great debate between the advocate of Justice and that of Mercy - derives less from a dramatic source than from an established narrative and poetic tradition of the Middle Ages, a tradition which pervaded the literature of Western Christendom from the religious lyrics of the 14th Century to the 17th Century sermon. The text which formed the thematic basis of this debate was that passage from the 85th Psalm, which gave rise to the familiar allegory of God's four argumentative daughters:

Mercy and Truth are met together; Righteousness and Peace  
have kissed each other.<sup>1</sup>

These four abstractions, before the final kiss of reconciliation, served as a means of dramatizing in morality fashion the central conflict of the Doomsday play - the opposing claims of justice and mercy, so crucial to the theology of Christian Salvation; and the medieval poet wrote - almost as a set poetic piece - of this fundamental opposition:

How Mercy passep strengp & ri3t,  
Mony a wyse seo we may;  
God ordeyned Mercy most of miht,  
To beo aboue his werkes ay.  
Whon deore Ihesu schal be diht  
To demen vs at doomes-day,  
Vr sunne wol beo so much in siht,  
We schul not wite what we schul say;  
Ful fersliche Ri3t wol vs affray,  
And blame vs for vr mis-lyuing:  
Pen dar non prese for vs to pray,  
But Mercy pat passep alle ping.<sup>2</sup>

The most famous narrative account of this confrontation occurs, of course, in Langland's Piers Plowman where the Daughters of God assemble in Hell to discuss the significance of the gleam that precedes Christ's 'harrowing'. Mercy -

a make thyng with-alle  
A ful benygne buirde - and boxome of speche -<sup>3</sup>

is joined by her sister, Peace; and the latter explains to the others their joint office in the redemptive scheme:

<sup>1</sup>Psalm 85 : 10.

<sup>2</sup>'Mercy Passes All Things', lines 25-36; Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>All the quotations from Piers Plowman in this Chapter derive from Passus XVIII in the B Text, quoted by Boris Ford in his edition of The Age of Chaucer (Pelican Guide to English Literature; Penguin Books Ltd., 1961), 1, 338.

Love, that is my lemman, • suche letres me sente,  
 That Mercy, my sustre, and I • mankynde shulde save;  
 And that god hath forgiven • and graunted me, Pees,  
 and Mercy,  
 To be mannes meynpournour<sup>1</sup> • for evere-more after.<sup>2</sup>

Whereupon Justice, seconded by Truth, scoffs at this declaration:

I, Rightwysnesse, • recorde thus with treuth  
 That her<sup>3</sup> payne be perpetual • and no preyere hem helpe.  
 For-thi late hem chewe as thei chose • and chide we  
 nought susyres,  
 For it is boteltes bale • the bite that thei eten.<sup>4</sup>

The conflict, however, is resolved by Christ's paradoxical declaration, "I may do mercy thow rightwysnesse"; and the traditional reconciliation takes place - Mercy with Truth, Justice with Peace, the Old Law with the New:

Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi; iusticie et pax  
 osculate sunt.<sup>5</sup>

This debate among God's Daughters over the destiny of mankind's soul eventually assumed dramatic form within the morality framework of the "Parliament of Heaven" play - a popular genre evolving from the episode in the Ludus Coventriae, through a gradual secularization in the Castle of Perseverance and Mankind. The Respublica play of 1553 shows the persistence of this tradition even in the more politically orientated drama of the Tudor morality, the argument among the Daughters now veering towards the sociological and concerning itself with the salvation of the state rather the soul of man - as the Prologue indicates:

Verity, the daughter of sage Old Father Time,  
 Sheweth all as it is, be it virtue or crime;  
 Then doth Justice, all such as commonwealth oppress -  
 Tempered with mercy - endeavour to suppress;

<sup>1</sup>"meynpournour": guarantor, surety.

<sup>2</sup>Piers Plowman, lines 186-89, p. 341.

<sup>3</sup>"her": mankind's

<sup>4</sup>Piers Plowman, lines 203-206, p. 341.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., line 437, p. 349.

With whom, anon, is linked tranquillity and peace,  
The commonweal's joy and perpetual increase.<sup>1</sup>

But the essentially theological background to the entire issue was retained and preserved by the preachers of the 16th and 17th centuries; and Lancelot Andrewes' Christmas sermon of 1616 indicates the continued appeal of this type of medieval allegory to the Renaissance sensibility. For the text he had chosen to wring was that same verse of the 85th Psalm in which the allegorical "Daughters of God" are reconciled - those four attributes of God's undivided essence which, says the preacher, fell apart with the fall of Adam and were re-integrated harmoniously in Christ - a re-integration upon which the redemption of mankind depends:

For meet they must, and that in other terms, or it will go wrong with us; our salvation lies a bleeding all this while. The plea hangs, and we stand as the prisoner at the bar, and know not what shall become of us. For though two be for us, there are two against us, as strong and more stiff than they. So that much depends upon this second meeting, upon the composing or taking up this difference. For these must be at peace between themselves, before they be at peace with us, or we with God. And this is sure; we shall never meet in heaven, if they meet no more.<sup>2</sup>

But the reconciliation of these contrarieties, the tempering of Justice with Mercy, is seemingly impossible; for being attributes of God, they are equally and absolutely unimpeachable in the moral principles they assert; and, consequently, some form of rational debate is necessary for an amicable solution to the conflict. This is the basic issue in the Parliament of Heaven, where Justice and Truth oppose man's claim to spiritual salvation while Mercy and Peace defend it.

The case in Andrewes' sermon is opened by Truth who pleads the unalterable and irrefutable decree of God, the Word which is binding on all mankind:

Deus erat Verbum; what is God but His Word? and His word was - as to Adam, . . . "the soul that sinneth that soul shall die." God may not falsify His word; His word is the truth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Respublica", Prologue; Lost Tudor Plays 1460-1566, p. 180.  
See also Honor Matthews, Part II, Chap. 3: "The Parliament of Heaven."

<sup>2</sup>Andrewes, Sermons of the Nativity, Sermon IX, Vol. I, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

The unalterable Law of the Venetian court operates, in Shakespeare's play, in much the same fashion - a secular, almost commercialized equivalent of the word of God; and Portia acknowledges its absolute legality:

. . . there is no power in Venice  
Can alter a decree established:  
'Twill be recorded for a precedent,  
And many an error by the same example  
Will rush into the state.<sup>1</sup>

Shylock, therefore, confident of the stringency of Venetian law, insists upon the just provisions of his bond entitling him to a pound of Christian flesh; and his rigorous claim recalls the Doomsday plea of Righteousness "to render each his own, to every one that is his due"<sup>2</sup>:

The pound of flesh (which I demand of him)  
Is dearly bought, 'tis mine and I will have it:  
If you deny me, fie upon your law!  
There is no force in the decrees of Venice:  
I stand for judgment, - answer, shall I have it?<sup>3</sup>

It reads almost as an indication of his allegorical function in the scene: "I stand for judgment"; and the form of Justice he represents is that unrelenting rigidity of the Old Law which demands retaliation for wrongs suffered and revenge upon the enemy:

And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life,  
eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,  
burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.<sup>4</sup>

The Old Testament ethic of vengeance, however, is replaced in the Gospels by the ethic of forgiveness; and the "Jewish" insistence upon rigorous justice gives way to "Christian" standards of mercy:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and  
a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not  
evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek,  
turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at  
the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, IV, i. 214-218.

<sup>2</sup>Andrewes, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, IV, i. 99-103.

<sup>4</sup>Deuteronomy: 19: 21; Exodus 21: 24-25.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew 5: 38-40.

These are the opposing moral attitudes which condition the behaviour of God's four daughters, for two of them seem unmistakably "Jewish" and two seem "Christian", while their ethical equivalents in The Merchant of Venice argue from the same conflicting points of view:

Bassanio: Do all men kill the thing they do not love?  
 Shylock: Hates any man the thing he would not kill?  
 Bassanio: Every offence is not a hate at first!  
 Shylock: What! wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice?  
 Antonio: I pray you, think you question with the Jew, -  
 . . . . .  
 You may as well do anything most hard  
 As seek to soften that - than which what's harder? -  
 His Jewish heart!<sup>1</sup>

The hardness of the Jewish heart, the harshness of Jewish Justice, and the inflexible law of the Old Testament are all subsumed by Shylock - the embodiment of God's two most relentless daughters; and even in the 17th Century sermon this association of the Jew with the ethical concepts of Justice and Truth seems fairly commonplace. Thus Andrewes:

The Jews, they represent Truth; to them it belongeth properly. For Truth was where were eloquia Dei, "the oracles of God"; and they were with the Jews. The Gentiles they claim by Mercy; that is their virtue. Where was Mercy but where was Misery? And, where was misery but with them that "lay in darkness in the shadow of death"? And that was the Gentiles' case before this orta est. But when the "partition wall was broken down" and the two met in one, then also in a sense Mercy and Truth met together. So these two, And so the other two likewise. For Righteousness she was where the Law was - for that the rule of Righteousness where the Covenant of the Old Testament was, "Do this and live," the very voice of Justice. But Peace was where Christ was, in the Gospel. ipse et Pax nostra, for "He is our Peace"; Peace and Peacemaker both, Qui fecit utrumque unum, That hath made the Law and the Gospel, the Old Testament and the New, to be bound together now both in one volume.<sup>2</sup>

Shylock is indisputably the representative of Justice and Truth. Right is on his side, and Portia at no stage questions the legality or validity of his bond:

Portia: Of a strange nature is the suit you follow,  
 Yet in such rule, that the Venetian law  
 Cannot impugn you as you do proceed.  
 You stand within his danger, do you not?  
 Antonio: Ay, so he says.  
 Portia: Do you confess the bond?  
 Antonio: I do.

<sup>1</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 66-70; 78-80.

<sup>2</sup>Andrewes, p. 189.

Portia: Then must the Jew be merciful.  
 Shylock: On what compulsion must I? tell me that.<sup>1</sup>

The inexorable, undeniable demands of strict Justice can be countered only by Mercy, and the great debate begins with Portia as its advocate. Her long convoluting plea on Antonio's behalf, suffused with the spirit of the Gospels and punctuated with the basic tenets of Christian theology, appeals firstly to the purely aesthetic loveliness of mercy as a charitable virtue and to the reciprocal blessings it confers - that mercy which emanates of its own accord from the human heart, independent of compulsion:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,  
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
 Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest,  
 It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.<sup>2</sup>

Inherent in the verse are the unmistakable scriptural overtones which pervade the entire speech, an echo of Ecclesiasticus -

The mercy of God is beautiful in the time of affliction,  
 as a cloud of rain in the time of drought.<sup>3</sup>

And then, as if conscious of the morality tradition behind her plea and her own allegorical role as a "daughter of God", an attribute of his undivided essence, she gives explicit utterance to the latent theological issues of the trial:

But mercy is above this scepter'd sway,  
 It is enthroned in the heart of kings,  
 It is an attribute of God himself.<sup>4</sup>

Up to this point, however, she has been appealing primarily to the pity that underlies compassionate human mercy; but Shylock is clearly beyond the reaches of compassion -

A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch,  
 Uncapable of pity, void, and empty  
 From any dram of mercy -<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 173-179.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 180-183.

<sup>3</sup>Ecclesiasticus 35:26.

<sup>4</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 189-191.

<sup>5</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 4-6.

and as Portia's appeal to the Jew gains momentum, so the nature of the mercy for which she pleads changes from pure compassion and pity to that form of mercy which seeks only to mitigate the severity of justice without abrogating it entirely:

And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice.<sup>1</sup>

The plea changes, in short, from the medieval concept of "misericordia" (a charitable form of pity aroused by the misery of others) to "clementia" (which tempers and alleviates strict justice);<sup>2</sup> for, as Lancelot Andrewes indicates:

How loose a thing is mercy, if it be quite devoid of justice?  
We call it foolish pity. And how harsh a thing is justice,  
if it be utterly without all temper of mercy.<sup>3</sup>

The nature of the mercy meted out in the Doomsday play is precisely of this nature - "clementia" rather than "misericordia", the tempering of justice with mercy rather than unqualified pity; for the Christ of the Last Judgment is not the Lamb but the Tiger, the righteous Judge who metes out mercy to the merciful but strict justice to those who have violated the deeds of mercy:

Lo, you men that wicked have bene,  
what Sathan sayeth you heare and seene;  
righteous Dome may you not fleene,  
for grace is put away.

when tyme of grace was enduringe,  
to seeke it you had no lykinge;  
therefore must I for any thinge  
doe righteousness to day.<sup>4</sup>

Justice is mankind's due, and mercy can be raised as a mitigating factor on Doomsday only if the accused himself has practised it. This doctrine is the very essence of Portia's plea; and those critics who conscientiously deny the Christian nature of the mercy ultimately shown to Shylock, or regard the trial as a parody of Christianity, do so only in defiance of

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 192-193.

<sup>2</sup>See M.D.H. Parker, The Slave of Life, pp. 51-74, for a discussion of the various concepts of "mercy" in Shakespearean drama.

<sup>3</sup>Andrewes, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup>"The Last Judgment", stanza 77; The Chester Plays, p. 449.

the text and its theological structure - for Shylock is persistently warned of the consequences of his obduracy, of the penalty for violating the deeds of mercy, in much the same way that Christ reasons with the sinners:

. . . therefore Jew [says Portia],  
 Though justice be thy plea, consider this,  
 That 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. I have spoken thus much  
 To mitigate the justice of thy plea,  
 Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice  
 Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there.<sup>1</sup>

Shylock's own self-righteousness, however, his fanatical adherence to the letter of the law and his unrelenting sense of justice have made him incapable of either charity or mercy - a Pharisaical complacency clearly shown in his conversation with the Duke:

Duke: How shalt thou hope for mercy rend'ring none?  
 Shylock: What judgment shall I dread doing no wrong?<sup>2</sup>

It is this very Pharisaism combined with his myopic pursuit of justice that puts Shylock himself beyond the pale of mercy, and he stands in the gravest danger of being subjected to the same standards of absolute justice which he confidently presumes to attain. From this point on it is the Jew's soul that is in danger rather than the Christian's life (for Portia already possesses the means of saving Antonio), and every opportunity is given Shylock for that display of mercy essential to his own salvation. But Shylock remains unmoved by the implications of Portia's plea, condemning himself with a cry that ominously re-echoes the shout of the Jewish mob at the crucifixion:

My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,  
 The penalty and forfeit of my bond.<sup>3</sup>

Portia, however, withholds the legal "quibble" that can crush him, still offering Shylock a chance of escaping his justified deserts by mitigating the rigour of his demands:

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 193-201.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 88-89.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 202-203. cf. Matthew 27:25.

Portia: Shylock there's thrice thy money off'ered thee.  
 Shylock: An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven, -  
 Shall I lay perjury upon my soul?<sup>1</sup>

The first chance of showing mercy is rejected. Once again the offer is repeated - and rejected:

Portia: . . . be merciful,  
 Take thrice thy money, bid me tear the bond.  
 Shylock: When it is paid, according to the tenour,  
 . . . . .  
 I charge you by the law,  
 Whereof you are a well-deserving pillar,  
 Proceed to judgment: by my soul I swear,  
 There is no power in the tongue of man  
 To alter me, - I stay here on my bond.<sup>2</sup>

His claim cannot be denied; the scales are brought, the knife whetted, Antonio bares his breast - and then the third and last opportunity of charity is offered:

Portia: Have by some surgeon Shylock on your charge,  
 To stop his wounds, lest he do bleed to death.  
 Shylock: Is it so nominated in the bond?  
 Portia: It is not so express'd, but what of that?  
 'Twere good you do so much for charity.  
 Shylock: I cannot find it, 'tis not in the bond.<sup>3</sup>

Charity is rejected in favour of the word of Law. The knife is raised; the Christ-figure is about to pay the debt of mankind; and the archetypal Jewish crime is on the point of perpetration when Portia's famous legal reservation intervenes.

Nemesis follows with astonishing rapidity - not the Grecian form, but the Christian equivalent of Doomsday's righteousness, when measure is meted out for measure, and the judger judged by his own standards of justice:

For as thou urgest justice [says Portia], be assur'd  
 Thou shalt have justice more than thou desir'st.<sup>4</sup>

The tables are turned against Shylock - not by any deviation from justice, but by its strictest enforcement; and as Shylock had denied Antonio, he is in turn denied the option of accepting three times the

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 223-225.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 229-231; 234-38.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 253-258.

<sup>4</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 311-312.

price of the debt, denied his principal, denied everything but the impossible fulfilment of his bond:

The Jew shall have all justice, - soft no haste!  
He shall have nothing but the penalty.<sup>1</sup>

The screw of justice twists tighter and tighter until Shylock's claim crumbles to nothing; and only then does he learn that strict adherence to the letter of the law carries its own destruction with it, that he who follows after righteousness must inevitably find himself incapable of it. Not only does Shylock gain nothing under the Law, but - charged with conspiring against the life of a Venetian - stands in danger of losing both his life and property into the bargain, the penalty of those who seek to justify themselves by law, that "curse" (as Miss Lewalski points out) against which St. Paul admonishes the Galatians:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.<sup>2</sup>

Doubly ironic in the swift reversal that befalls him is the fact that the lawyer, hailed by Shylock as "a Daniel come to judgment",<sup>3</sup> pronounces not against his debtor, but himself: half his goods is forfeit to Antonio, the other half confiscated by the state, and his life becomes dependent on the mercy of the Duke. The figure of Shylock on his knees before the Duke, humbly begging mitigation of the law against his life - the representative of Justice prostrate at the feet of Mercy - ultimately symbolizes the triumph of the New Dispensation

<sup>1</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 316-317.

<sup>2</sup>Galatians 3: 10-11.

<sup>3</sup>The name of "Daniel" which Shylock allocates to Portia is as significant as it is ironic. It is a compound of two Hebrew words  $\text{דָּן} \text{ דָּן}$  meaning "the Judge of God". Miss Lewalski, moreover, points out that according to Christian exegetes the Book of Daniel clearly foreshadows the Christian dispensation by explicitly denying all claims on God through righteousness, and humbly appealing for his mercy. (Daniel 9: 18). Moreover, the alias which Portia adopts as a disguise - "Balthasar" - is the very same name given to the prophet in the Book of Daniel. See Lewalski, p. 340. The Daniel figure sometimes occurs in the morality plays as well, symbolizing the merciful judge - as in "Nice Wanton" (1560), Old English Plays, ed. Dodsley-Hazlitt, Vol. II.

over the Old, a re-affirmation of the Christian ethic threatened with destruction by the "Jew"; and it is this "difference of spirit" which emanates from the Ducal sentence:

That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit  
I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it:  
For half thy wealth, it is Antonio's,  
The other half comes to the general state,  
Which humbleness may drive into a fine.<sup>1</sup>

Then Portia turns to the next dispenser of Christian charity, and puts the question: "What mercy can you render him Antonio?"<sup>2</sup> As far as the financial issue is concerned, Antonio generously disclaims his legal right to half of Shylock's property, investing it in favour of Jessica and Lorenzo. But then there follows that stipulation which has so disturbed the critics of the play,<sup>3</sup> inclining them to read it as an anti-Christian parody - the stipulation, namely, that Shylock shall presently become a convert to Christianity.

This insistence upon the Jew's conversion is Shakespeare's only major deviation from the narrative incidents in his source; and this deviation must surely be thematically significant within the general allegory of the play. But that Shakespeare intended this stipulation as an overwhelmingly ironic comment on the Christian abuse of mercy is inconceivable, for throughout the comedy there are constant reminders of Shylock's potential damnation as a Jew - an attitude re-inforced by Calvinist and Lutheran doctrines discountenancing all claims to salvation, except through Christ. His only hope lies in taking the path already taken by his daughter; and the silly chatter of Jessica and Launcelot over the issues of damnation and redemption disguises a matter of high seriousness under cover of levity:

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<sup>1</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 364-368.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, IV. i. 374.

<sup>3</sup>See, for instance, Tillyard's sceptical comments on Shylock's conversion in "The Trial Scene in 'The Merchant of Venice'", A Review of English Studies, II, No. 4 (Oct., 1961). He suggests an ironical contrast between Portia's ideals and the cruder understanding of Antonio.

Launcelot: Yes truly, for look you, the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children, therefore (I promise you), I fear you, - . . . for truly I think you are damn'd, - there is but one hope in it that can do you any good, and that is but a kind of bastard hope neither.

Jessica: And what hope is that I pray thee?

Launcelot: Marry, you may partly hope that your father got you not, that you are not the Jew's daughter.<sup>1</sup>

But Jessica makes the significant reply: "I shall be sav'd by my husband, - he hath made me a Christian!"<sup>2</sup> For the redemption of the Jew through the agency of the Gentile is integral to the whole doctrine of conversion; and the image of the apostate Jewess as the saviour of her father recurs in Shakespeare's comedy:

If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven ∫says Lorenzo∫,  
It will be for his gentle daughter's sake.<sup>3</sup>

The epithet "gentle", moreover, serves as an iterative image of salvation in the play - a pun, no doubt, on "Gentile" and a constant reminder of the Jew's damnation and the redemptive power of Christianity. By imposing Christianity on Shylock Antonio undertakes to save his Jewish soul and through his "mercy" offers him the only other means to salvation - even though the way of mercy might seem unduly harsh. And so, deprived of the wealth he had misused and the religion he had abused, Shylock is given the means of entering into a state of Christian grace to begin a new existence under a New Law;<sup>4</sup> and the Shylock who leaves the Ducal Court is not, as modern sensibility insists upon regarding him, a Jew wronged - but a Jew redeemed by Christian charity.

<sup>1</sup>Merchant, III. v. 1-10.

<sup>2</sup>Merchant, III. v. 17-18.

<sup>3</sup>Merchant, II. iv. 33-34.

<sup>4</sup>The stripping of Shylock for the good of his soul is perfectly consistent with Jewish conversion in Europe, during the 17th Century. Samuel Purchas, in his Pilgrimage, provides an account of such conversionary practices:

"When in their Baptisme they denie the Deuill and all his workes, they must renounce their right and propertie in all their goods and possessions; . . . presupposing (forsooth) that either the conuerted Iew, or his corrupt auncestors, haue scraped together such heapes of wealth by Vsurie, or Oppression, or some vnlawfull meanes or other. Therefore for the good of his soule, his body shall be left to begge or starue; while, with the leauing of his Iewish Superstition, he must likewise leaue all that he hath: and his new received religion must be a meanes to strip him of his riches, and to weane him from his well-beloued mammon, which that nation is naturally so farre in loue with." (Purchase his Pilgrimage, Book II, Part One, p. 185).

The Pauline doctrine of Jewish Conversion, moreover, was still part of the theological world-picture of the 16th and 17th Centuries - that doctrine which envisioned the conversion of the Jews, the reconciliation of Judaism and Christianity, as a necessary prerequisite for the final consummation of the Pauline promise of salvation:

For if the casting away of them be the reconciliation of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?<sup>1</sup>

And their conversion, in terms of Pauline theology, is seen essentially as an act of charity, a gift of God-like mercy to the unbelievers:

For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.<sup>2</sup>

When Portia calls upon Antonio to be merciful, this, it seems to me, is the essential quality of mercy manifested to the Jew - an extension of God's mercy, through the Christian, towards all infidels. Anti-Semitism is inconsistent with profound Christianity, and Shakespeare's seemingly gratuitous deviation from the incidents of II Padorone must surely be meaningful in some specifically Christian sense; for whether he was consciously aware of utilizing the tenets of Pauline theology or not, the doctrine of conversion seems still to have been sufficiently credited in Renaissance theological philosophy for Shakespeare to have felt it in the climate of the times. Richard Hooker, for example, in his Answer to the Letter of certain English Protestants makes an exceptionally good case for the Jews -

a people that hath been the well-spring of life to all nations; a people, the top of whose kindred sitteth at the right hand of God, and is the author of salvation unto all the world: -<sup>3</sup>

concluding with a paraphrase of Chapter 11 of St. Paul's letter to the Romans with its fervent hopes for the conversion of the Jews:

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<sup>1</sup>Romans 11:15.

<sup>2</sup>Romans 11:30-32.

<sup>3</sup>Hooker, ed. J. Keble, II, 587.

Hath God then clean cast off his people? Not his people eternally chosen. Be it far from us so to think. But is there no hope that the very nation itself shall recover what it now hath lost? Have they stumbled to the end they might fall? God forbid. Nay, their fall hath occasioned salvation to rise unto the Gentiles, and the Gentiles not unlikely to be a means of restoring salvation unto them again.<sup>1</sup>

Samuel Purchas in his Pilgrimage, moreover, speculates for the space of an entire chapter on "the hopes and hinderances of the Jewes Conuersion", and the opening decades of the 17th Century records his assurance that the conversion of the Jews -

(though it be yet tossed vpon surges of almost-desperate Seas, yet) hath anchoram sacram, a sure anchor to relye on, and a kind of obscure kenning of that wished-for Haven where it would be.<sup>2</sup>

This attitude toward the Jews gained an even surer anchor in the Puritan element of the 17th Century, and there was little doubt among the Millennial Philosophers of the Commonwealth that the haven of Jewish Converts ought, of Christian necessity, to be their own native England. It was this frame of mind that contributed in no small measure to the re-admission of the Jews in the mid-century.

The Pauline image of the Jew converted, the recipient of Christian mercy, was evidently one which gradually grew in prominence from the Renaissance - and Shylock's conversion, it seems to me, may in all probability be read to advantage in the light of Paul's theology. For The Merchant of Venice - despite the modern insistence upon viewing it as anti-Christian parody - remains a profoundly Christian play, concerned with asserting and re-asserting the basic values of Christianity not only against the values of the new Renaissance money-ethic, but against all values which oppose the theocentric humanist's conception of the Christian way of life. It is the Jew, in Shakespeare, who seems to symbolize these values in their most dangerous extremes, a warning (as I have suggested) to the rising Renaissance middle classes of the corruption latent in their economic and ethical morality, of the potential danger of their reversion to a pre-Christian code of behaviour;

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<sup>1</sup>Hooker, ed. J. Keble, II, 588.

<sup>2</sup>Purchas, Chap. XXI, p. 183.

but the Jew, in Shakespeare, serves also as a reminder of the grace available to those still capable of performing the "deeds of mercy" - an ambiguous image of man at once both condemned and yet redeemed. It is this central ambiguity that characterizes Shylock - an object, simultaneously, of charity and execration, an apotheosis of that dialectical frame of mind towards the Jew which conditions his emergence in the literature of Medieval and Renaissance England.

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The great popularity of Barabas and Shylock on the stage evidently ensured the continued popularity of the Jewish figure in the drama of the lesser Elizabethan lights - gentlemen seemingly content with cashing in on the box-office successes of Marlowe and Shakespeare by including incongruously irrelevant Jewish roles in their drama, if only to add colour to otherwise dreary plots. The Merchant of Venice, as might be expected, was ransacked for both narrative and verse; and the "Jew-plays" of the 17th Century are significant only in tracing the gradual degradation of the Jewish image from its Shakespearean zenith to the dramatic nadir which preceded the closing of the theatres.

Without the Christian sensibility of Shakespeare and devoid of the allegorical tradition within which he worked, three dramatists - John Day, William Rowley, and George Wilkins - produced an unblushing and execrably plagiarized version of Shylock in The Travails of the Three Brothers Sharley (1607). Zariph, the Jew in question, trades in precious stones and hankers after the Christian flesh of Sir Anthony Sherley his unfortunate debtor, soliloquizing in pseudo-Shylockian fashion:

A hundred thousand Duckats! sweete remembrance.  
 I'lle read it againe; a hundred thousand Duckats!  
 Sweeter still: who owes it? a Christian,  
 Canaans brood. Honnie to my ioyfull soul:  
 If this summe falle (my bond unsatisfied)  
 Hee's in the Jewes mercy; mercy! ha, ha!  
 The Lice of Egypt shall devoure them all  
 Ere I show mercy to a Christian.  
 . . . . .  
 Heaven grant he may want money to defray:  
 Oh how I'lle then imbrace my happinesse.

Sweet Gold, sweet Iewell! but the sweetest part  
Of a Jewes feast is a Christians heart.<sup>1</sup>

There is even a plagiarized version of the trial scene from The Merchant of Venice, Zarliph - like his Shakespearean co-religionist - resolutely rejecting his victim's plea for mercy:

Sir Anthony: Be mercifull -

Iew: Merciful, ha, ha!

Sir Anthony: No, not to mee, I scorne to aske it of thee,  
But to thine owne black soule be mercifull.  
Inhumane Dogge, that in midst of curtesie  
Dost yoke me in a Serpents arme, true seed  
Of that kisse-killing Judas, can thy black soule  
Have hope of pittie, being pittillesse?

Iew: Pray for thyself; I am saved already.<sup>2</sup>

This replica of Portia's mercy-speech, all but emptied of its Christian doctrine and wholly counteracted by Sir Anthony's commonplace Judas-Serpent-Canine execration, reads (and might have been intended) as a parody of Shakespeare's verse. It serves no thematic purpose whatsoever and seems, together with the Zarliph episodes, a purely arbitrary addition to a wretchedly constructed play.

The degeneration - after Barabas and Shylock - of the Jewish image on the Jacobean stage was further accelerated by the appearance, in the 1610s, of Robert Daborne's A Christian Turn'd Turk (1612) and Fletcher's Custom of the Country (1619). In the first of these appears a trio of Jewish degenerates - Benwash (a slave dealer and receiver of stolen goods), Rabshake (his servant) and Reuben (a brothel-keeper) - who, as stage-Jews, belie the great tradition that Marlowe and Shakespeare had established at the turn of the century. The play itself, as Dr. Cardozo suggests,

belongs to that class of libels on humanity at large and foreigners in particular by which playwrights had to rake up a living at the mercy of the rabble patronizing the common stages. One of the things it helps to show is that the Jew was an exotic to Elizabethan and Jacobean England.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Jacob L. Cardozo, The Contemporary Jew in the Elizabethan Drama (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1925), p. 150.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Cardozo, pp. 153-154.

<sup>3</sup>Cardozo, p. 168. A detailed summary of the play appears on pp. 156-168.

And "exotic" is the epithet that most accurately and succinctly sums up Zabulon, the Jewish pimp, in Fletcher's play. This Jew plays the pandar to a nymphomaniac and roams the streets of Lisbon procuring impecunious noblemen to serve his mistress's desires - a master of sexual ceremonies, hovering in the background and creating a Baudelarian atmosphere of cloying decadence and carnality. For most of the play he serves as an agent of corruption, circulating between his mistress's bedroom and the male-stews of Lisbon and providing a dramatic link between the various spheres of perversion in the action.<sup>1</sup> But no longer is the Jew's essential Jewishness a matter of significance; no longer are his racial and religious differences meaningful devices whereby the dramatist might criticize contemporary society; nor does he embody a set of values exposing or affirming the values of Christianity. Both Shylock and Barabas have been whittled down to ciphers, and the complex image of the Jew reduced to farcical simplicity.

Quite apart from the actual appearance of the Jew on the popular stage, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama is crammed with a host of incidental references to Jewish practices and customs - as, for instance, Ben Jonson's humorous demonstration of the "antipathy betweene. . . Iewes, and hogs flesh" in which he satirizes the hypocritical rejection of the Jews by the Puritans. Rabbi Zeal-of-the-land-busy in Bartholomew Fair (1614) makes this public declaration, piously rationalizing his appetite for pork:

In the way of comfort to the weake, I will goe, and eat. I will eate exceedingly, and prophesie; there may be a good vse made of it, too, now I thinke on't: by the publike eating of Swines flesh, to professe our hate, and loathing of Iudaisme, whereof the brethren stand taxed. I will therefore eate, yea, I will eate exceedingly.

And John Little-Wit hastily responds:

Good, i'faith, I will eate heartily too, because I will be no Iew, I could neuer away with that stiffenecked generation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher, ed. Weber, Vol. II.

<sup>2</sup>"Bartholomew Fair," I.vi; The Works of Ben Jonson, ed. Herford-Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), VI, 39.

The joke was even more rumbustiously made in Every Man Out of His Humour (1599) with Carlo's eulogy upon a plate of pork:

O, it's the only nourishing meat in the world. No maruaille though that saucie, stubborne generation, the Iewes, were forbidden it: for what would they ha' done, well-pamper'd with fat porke, that durst murmure at their maker out of garlick, and onions. S'ligh, fed with it, the whorson strummell-patcht, goggle-ey'd Grumbledories, would ha' Gigantomachiz'd.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was circumcision any less risible a custom of the "fore-skinne clippers" of Old Jurie (as Nashe had called the Jews)<sup>2</sup> than their abhorrence of pork; and Marston, in The Insatiate Countess (1613), employs it in a pornographic quip: two Spanish gentlemen (each imagining himself to have been cuckolded by the other) engage in an exchange of vituperative abuse, one yelling at the other:

Would I had had the circumcising of thee Jew, I'd ha' cut short your Cukold-maker, I would ifaith, I would ifaith.<sup>3</sup>

At this stage, moreover, the word "Jew" had become a term of popular abuse, synonymous with villainy, blasphemy, mendacity, cupidity, depravity and the various other undesirable attributes which the English considered alien to their national characteristics. This was the sense in which the later Jacobean dramatists employed the word, a use symptomatic of the general deterioration of an image which Shakespeare and Marlowe had once employed as metaphors of subtle complexity and infinite significance.

The social image of the Jew on the Jacobean stage was suddenly cut dead by the closing of the theatres in 1642. It was an abrupt termination to a dramatic tradition that had endured from the time of the Mystery Cycles; and it was never revived again with the same boisterousness and colour. For the Jews, however, the shutting of the English playhouses proved highly advantageous; for during the thirteen years that elapsed between 1642 and the application of the Jews of Holland

<sup>1</sup>"Every Man Out of His Humour," V.v; The works of Ben Jonson, ed. Herford-Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), III, 580-81.

<sup>2</sup>Nashe, ed. McKerrow-Wilson, III, 307.

<sup>3</sup>"The Insatiate Countess," III.i; The Plays of John Marston, ed. H. Harvey Wood (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1934), III, 40.

for re-admission to England, they managed to escape the attention of a theatre-going public which accepted as part of its dramatic tradition the red-wigged, bottle-nosed villain with the anti-social propensities of the usurer. And when the theatres re-opened during the Restoration this tradition seemed dead and forgotten. Indeed, it was not until the 18th Century that the Jew returned to the stage, and by this time his portrayal had become conditioned by the humanitarian impulses of the age. A meritorious (although sentimental) attempt was made to atone for the Renaissance image of the Jew, Lessing and Cumberland creating in the personages of Nathan the Wise and Sheva possible alternatives to Barabas and Shylock. The Talmudic sage, the philanthropic Jew, and the honest Israelite seemed for the time to have ousted the tawny-bonneted gentleman who Judaized on the Elizabethan stage but who - for all their villainy - remain the infinitely greater literary creations.

Lastly, it is a very injurious method unto Philosophy, and a perpetual promotion of ignorance, in points of obscurity; nor open unto easy considerations, to fall upon a present refuge unto Miracles; or recurr unto immediate contrivance, from the insearchable hands of God. Thus in the conceit of the evil odor of the Jews, Christians without a further research into the verity of the thing, or inquiry into the cause, draw up a judgment upon them from the passion of their Saviour.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE, Pseudodoxia Epidemica.

## VI

### THE IMAGE OF THE JEW ATOMIZED UNDER A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MICROSCOPE

The image of the Jew in the seventeenth century, like the age which gave it birth, was caught in the centrifugal pull of two divided and distinguished worlds: the theocentric medieval world with its scientific superstructure firmly grounded upon superstition, and its concomitant image of the semi-mythical, monstrous, usurious Jew-villain of popular tradition; and the world of the scientific method, international trade, high finance, political parties and the so-called "new philosophy". It was an age in which the systematic rejection of the "vulgar" scientific errors of the Middle Ages and the revaluation of contemporary economic morality resulted, inevitably, in a modification of attitude towards the Jews; and having been anatomized and scrutinized like some biological phenomenon, they were ultimately considered capable of participating in the rapid development of the English commercial world. The re-entry of Jews into England after 1656 - whether in fact, legitimately sanctioned or not - was clearly consequent, however, upon the corrosion and ultimate breakdown of the composite image, current since time immemorial, of the Jew as usurer, capitalist, bogey and Christ-Killer; and this image crumbled, it seems to me, partly under the impact of the "new philosophy" and partly under the increasing pressure of rising Hebraic Puritanism. The radical economic theory, initiated by the Usury Bills of the sixteenth century and furthered by the Utopian philosophers, served primarily to undermine the long established concept of the Jew as extortionary moneyman; the scientific pragmatism of the age demolished the superstitious accretion of centuries

attaching to the monstrous Jewish devil; and the Hebraism of the Millennial Philosophers not only resuscitated the heroic image of the Old Testament warrior, but emphasized the potential redemption of the Jews by conversion rather than their damnable existence as the murderers of Christ. It is the ultimate obviation of these three dominant archetypes, effected by three dominating elements of seventeenth century thought that seems to condition the further evolution of the Jewish image in English literary history. And the period of the 1650s seems crucial to this essay.

No other moment of history could have been more propitious for the re-admission of the Jews to England than the mid-century. For, by that time, the economic contents of the English mind had been recast into a mould radically different from that of the Christian economists of the Renaissance; and Cromwell's policy for enhancing the prosperity of the Commonwealth by attracting Jewish capital to commercial centres predominated over the outmoded medieval objections to the damnable sin of usury and the taking of profit. It was the odium of the Middle Ages which had propagated the image of the Jew in Elizabethan drama as a usurious extortioner; but the philosopher-economists of the seventeenth century were to adopt a more progressive viewpoint, one which was gradually to metamorphoze the villainous Shylock into the dignified Rothschild figure of the following century, transmuting the despicable Jewish usurer into the great and respectable international merchant-financier. And when they returned to England, the Jews were not only welcomed as a necessary aid to finance, but, vindicated against the ancient medieval prejudices, were actually encouraged to engage in moneylending without the invariable resentment of the debtor classes.

Bacon, at the turn of the century, had already indicated a radical change in the drift of contemporary economic thought; and his essay On Usury obliged Jacobean society to take cognizance of the basic commercial needs of the age, and modify its economic morality accordingly. For the seventeenth century world of trade and finance had virtually obviated the Antonio-type merchant, and the ethics of Shylock became

those of an increasingly powerful commercial middle-class, one which found it necessary to rationalize the taking of interest and condone its own apparently "Jewish" activity. The image of the Jewish merchant was, indeed, to recur in the many political treatises intent on defining the ideal commonwealth - but he no longer appeared in the orange-tawney bonnet and fur-trimmed gaberdine of the usurer-play. He became, instead, a dignified and idealized representative of the new economic order which the continental Jews were to introduce into England on their re-admission; and the first indication of this changing image seems traceable to Bacon's New Atlantis (1626) where Joabin, the Jewish merchant of Bensalem -

a wise man, and learned, and of great policy, and excellently seen in the laws and customs of that nation -<sup>1</sup>

is made a spokesman for the super-morality of the Island. The treatise, however, terminates abruptly and Joabin is denied the opportunity of expounding upon the economic policies of Bensalem; but there is sufficient indication of Bacon's intentions to integrate the Ideal Jew within the social and economic framework of the ideal Christian society, granting him full religious freedom and the right to engage in every aspect of commercial activity.

The old arguments which the medieval preachers had employed to rationalize their hatred for the Jews were taken up once again by the seventeenth century economists - not as instruments of anti-Semitic propoganda, but as a means of justifying the business methods of the New Economy; and what had once been an image of contempt, with a little manipulation, became an image of commercial emulation. No longer was Jewish economic conduct decried as the lowest form of human activity. It was used, rather, as a means of rationalizing the business morality of Christian merchants in a world where usury was no longer a sin; and John Selden, whose Table Talk seems to epitomize the topical points-of-view in the late century, voices an opinion on this matter as well:

The Jews [he writes] were forbiddentto take Use one of another, but they were not forbidden to take it of other Nations. That being so, I see no reason, why I may not as well take Use for

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<sup>1</sup>The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. B. Montagu (London: Wm. Pickering, 1826), II, 102.

my Money as Rent for my House. 'Tis a vain thing to say,  
Money begets not Money; for that no doubt It does.<sup>1</sup>

As a race, moreover, the Jews came gradually to be regarded as the exemplars of financial progress, and the old prejudices against the cursed usurer were finally subordinated to a recognition of the utility value of the Jew as an instrument of modern economic prosperity:

Talk what you will of the Jews [said Selden], that they are cursed, they thrive where'er they come; they are able to oblige the Prince of their Country by lending him Money; none of them beg; they keep together; and for being hated, my life for yours, Christians hate one another as much.<sup>2</sup>

This, apparently, had been the general spirit in which the Jews were re-admitted. The wheel had come full circle. For what was once a source of economic embarrassment to Edward I, became a symbol of commercial advancement to Cromwell's England; and when Menasseh ben Israel, the Jewish merchant from Amsterdam, came to England to negotiate with Parliament on behalf of his people, he lost no opportunity of trading upon this changing economic image in order to bolster his religious and humanitarian arguments for the re-admission of the Jews:

. . . for thence [he wrote in his petition to the Lord Protector], I hope there will follow a great blessing from God upon them, and a very abundant trading unto and from all Parts of the World, not only without prejudice to the English Nation, but for their Profit, both in Importation and Exportation of Goods.<sup>3</sup>

At any other period of time it would have been clearly impossible for a Jew to seek re-admission to a Christian country by reviving an image encrusted with the economic odium of centuries. But even while Menasseh ben Israel was negotiating with Cromwell's government the traditional image was being revised - notably in James Harrington's favourable account of Jewish money-lending in his Utopian romance, The Commonwealth of Oceana (1656) - and the Jew re-entered the English commercial consciousness in an aspect very different from that in which he had been banished. This new image, moreover, underwent no significant mutations in an age which relied upon Jewish capital for the development of its

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<sup>1</sup>Table Talk, Being the Discourses of John Selden (1689) (Temple Classics edition; London: Dent, 1898), pp. 145-46.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 56.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted by Marcus Arkin, "The Economic Background to the Restoration of Anglo-Jewry", Jewish Affairs, Vol. X, No. 4 (April, 1955), p.24.

economic institutions - the stock-exchange, the banking system, and the important operations of international trade; and even the reaction against Cromwell's policies during the Restoration failed to alter the newly acquired commercial status of the Jew. If anything, it strengthened it. For Charles, during his exile, had received a great deal of financial assistance from the Jews of Holland and realized the particular advantage of retaining several wealthy Jewish moneylenders in the proximity of Whitehall. And when Catherine of Braganza, his bride-elect, arrived in England with a retinue of Jewish Stewards for the management of her dowry, it seemed no longer relevant that less than a century before, the personal Jewish attendant on the Queen had been convicted of attempting to poison her.

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The re-admission of the Jews to England was consequent not only upon a reconsideration of economic morality and the concomitant redefinition of the concept of the "Jew", but upon a radical re-ordering of the semi-mythical medieval image in terms of the "scientific method"; and from the clash between accepted religious dogma and the revolutionary "new philosophy" emerged the fundamentally un-mythical and commonplace figure of the Jew, stripped of his various magical properties and the unscientific superstitions of popular belief. For the "old" science (as Matthew Arnold might have said) had attached its emotions to certain facts, and the facts were now failing it; and the image of the Jewish bogey, along with many others based upon superstitious foundations, merely "crumbled out again to his Atomes",<sup>1</sup> disintegrated, and was scrutinized anew through the transforming glass of the scientific microscope.

The melancholy disillusion of the Jacobean confronted with the crumbling of his cherished conceptions was replaced, during the Commonwealth, by an intense desire for the establishment of a new era - a Messianic Age of progress in which science was to piece the fragmentary universe together again and build new images from the debris.

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<sup>1</sup>John Donne, "The First Anniversary", line 212.

And it was in this spirit that Sir Thomas Browne, the meditative literary scientist of the mid-century, burrowed among the atomies of the magical world of the old medieval science, lovingly resurrecting ancient superstitions, logically refuting them, and almost reluctantly setting them aside. The gryphon, the dragon, the salamander, and the phoenix are all subjected to minute scientific investigation in his Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Vulgar Errors (1646); and wedged between a chapter "Of Sneezing" and another "Of Pigmies" appears a similarly meticulous scientific analysis of that mysterious and mythical animal - the Jew. Indeed, this pseudo-philosophic treatise represents what is probably the first major impact of modernity upon the medieval image of popular belief.

The entire chapter "Of the Jews" is devoted to a minor and apparently insignificant error: "That Jews stink naturally, that is, that in their race and nation there is an evil savour"; but in Sir Thomas's refutation of this vulgar fallacy, made all the more sagacious by the measured cadence of his prose, lies a significantly greater issue - the ultimate exposure of the superstitious image of the Jew in its entirety, with a host of similarly ludicrous accretions which had gone unquestioned in the literature of England ever since the Conquest. This chapter of Pseudodoxia Epidemica, however, is not so much an early specimen of sympathetic racism than an indication of the natural-philosopher's rejection of ancient medieval scholasticism - that tendency to examine traditional authority according to the scientific tenets of observation, experiment, and verification, and to reject whatever failed to conform to reason or sense. The old scientists, it seems, had accepted as incontestable that the ill savour of the Jews was

a curse derived upon them by Christ, and stands as a badge or brand of a generation that crucified their Salvator. But [continues Sir Thomas] this is a conceit without all warrant; and an easie way to take off dispute in what point of obscurity soever.<sup>1</sup>

The "new" philosopher was prepared to endorse nothing without proof or "dispute"; and his semi-scientific rejection of Jewish putrescence is

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<sup>1</sup>The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Charles Sayle (London: Grant-Richards, 1904), II, 154.

conducted by Browne with a typical blend of apparent seriousness, an enthusiasm for the curious, and a wittily eclectic rationale..

But that an unseavoury odour is gentilitous or national unto the Jews [he begins], if rightly understood, we cannot well concede; nor will the information of reason or sense induce it.<sup>1</sup>

And having established these criteria of scientific investigation, he proceeds to atomise the superstition point by point:

For first, Upon consult of reason, there will be found no easie assurance to fasten a material or temperamental propriety upon any nation; there being scarce any condition (but what depends upon clime) which is not exhausted or obscured from the commixture of introvenient nations either by commerce or conquest; much more will it be difficult to make out this affection in the Jews; whose race however pretended to be pure, must needs have suffered inseparable commixtures with nations of all sorts; not only in regard of their proselytes, but their universal dispersion; some being posted from several parts of the earth, others quite lost, and swallowed up in those nations where they planted.<sup>2</sup>

Assuming then, that the Jews had been scattered over the earth and assimilated by other races, was it not possible to detect them by their distinctive aroma and distinguish them from the other members of the community? For, adds Browne ironically:

it is a matter very considerable, and could they be smelled out, would much advantage, not only the Church of Christ, but also the coffers of Princes.<sup>3</sup>

Why, moreover, had the assimilating nations, through intermarriage or fornication with the Jews, not acquired the same proverbial odour?

For it is evidently impossible, as Sir Thomas argues,

to establish this quality upon the Jews, unless we also transfer the same unto those whose generations are mixed, whose genealogies are Jewish, and naturally derived from them.<sup>4</sup>

And he immediately launches upon a defence of Judaic hygiene, formulating an image of the Jew whose religion imposes upon him a veritable ritual of cleanliness, not only upon his person but in his dietary and sexual habits as well:

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<sup>1</sup>The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Charles Sayle (London: Grant Richards, 1904) II, 148.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., pp. 148-49.

<sup>3</sup>ibid., p. 150.

<sup>4</sup>ibid.

As for their diet [he continues] whether in obedience unto the precepts of reason, or the injunctions of parsimony, therein they are very temperate; seldom offending in ebriety or excess of drink, nor erring in gulosity or superfluity of meats; whereby they prevent indigestion and crudities, and consequently putrescence of humours.<sup>1</sup>

As for their generations and conceptions (which are the purer from good diet), they become more pure and perfect by the strict observation of their Law; upon the injunctions whereof, they severely observe the times of Purification, and avoid all copulation, either in the uncleanness of themselves, or impurity of their Women. A Rule, I fear, not so well observed by Christians.<sup>2</sup>

A complete reversal of traditional attitudes seems discernible in this re-orientation of the Jewish image; for, after centuries of odium, the Jew was not only being cleansed but exhibited to the Christian as an object of admiration and emulation, rather than one of contempt and derision. Above all, actual contact with the continental Jews served primarily to re-inforce this favourable impression; and the charge against the evil odour of the Jews was ultimately vitiated by scientific observation and the proof of common-sense:

Lastly [writes Browne], Experience will convict us; for this offensive odor is no way discoverable in their Synagogues where many are, and by reason of their number could not be concealed: nor is the same discernible in commerce or conversation with such as are cleanly in Apparel, and decent in their Houses.<sup>3</sup>

Then, with a carefully calculated sarcastic witticism, he reduces this vulgar error to its final absurdity:

for unto converted Jews who are of the same seed [he points out], no Man Imputeth this unsavoury odor; as though Aromatized by their conversion, they lost their scent with their Religion, and smelt no longer then they savoured of the Jew.<sup>4</sup>

The conclusion finally arrived at by this mid-seventeenth century philosopher is that the charge against the Jews derives essentially from a naive rationalization of "the distasteful averseness of the Christian from the Jew<sup>5</sup>" and the acceptance of a metaphorical expression of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 151-52.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.,

corruption or guilt as a literal truth. Subjected to scientific scrutiny, however, this hypothesis is rejected as both fallible and insubstantial -

it being a dangerous point to annex a constant property unto any Nation, and much more this unto the Jew; since this quality is not verifiable by observation; since the grounds are feeble that should establish it; and, lastly, since if all were true, yet are the reasons alleadged for it, of no sufficiency to maintain it.<sup>1</sup>

This is the first attempt in the literature of the age to eliminate the indiscriminate labelling of races, the unfounded superimposition of national traits that have no validity in fact;<sup>2</sup> and if Sir Thomas Browne is not always strictly scientific, his pragmatic reasoning and ironic wit nevertheless constitute incipient indications of a questioning and re-thinking frame of mind that was to predispose a once prejudicial society in favour of Jewish re-admission to England. Time was at its period for the European Jews of the 1650s. The Middle Ages had witnessed their expulsion from a country in which they were economically redundant; the Renaissance was in too ambivalent a state of mind to view the Jews dispassionately; but the iron of liberalistic, scientific and economic philosophy was hot in the mid-seventeenth century, and Menasseh ben Israel struck it accordingly.

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The seventeenth century, it seems, had achieved an equilibrium of scientific reason and religious faith; but while its intellectual pragmatism had been conditioned to accept the Jews, its emotions were frequently antagonistic towards them. This dichotomy is evident even in the writings of the naturalist-philosophers who, in the very act of giving the lie to vulgar medieval superstitions, were yet incapable of casting off the deeply ingrained prejudices against the Jews; and while

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> As Burton, for instance, tends to do; "The Austrian lip, and those Indians' flat noses are propogated, the Bavarian chin, and goggle eyes among the Jews, as Buxtorfius observes." The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. A.R. Shilleto (London: Geo. Bell, 1893), I, 242.

the economic and scientific mind was geared to tolerate the Jew, the Christian heart was often chary of committing itself. Seventeenth century Man -

that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live not onley like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds<sup>1</sup> -

seemed able, indeed, to think from within the philosophic framework of two completely separate systems of belief; and this sensibility, in turn, managed to preserve the duality of the Jewish image without either myth disrupting or destroying the other.

Something of this ambivalence is evident in Burton's compendium of contemporary thought, The Anatomy of Melancholy (1621); and his discussion of the Jews illustrates that combination of contradictory impulses - tolerance and intolerance, acceptance and rejection - so characteristic of the early decades of the century.

The Jews [he begins] stick together like so many burrs, but as for the rest whom they call Gentiles, they do hate and abhor, they cannot endure that their Messias should be a common Saviour to us all, and rather as Luther writes, then they that now scoff at them, curse them, persecute and revile them, shall be coheirs and brethren with them, or have any part of fellowship with their Messias, they would crucify their Messias ten times over, and God himself, his Angels, and all his creatures, if it were possible, though they endure a thousand hells for it. Such is their malice towards us.<sup>2</sup>

There emerges from the passage an implied criticism of religious intolerance among both religious groups - the condemnation of an exaggerated form of Jewish anti-Christianity, and the acknowledgment of anti-Semitic forms of persecution, revulsion and derision among the Christian communities. It is significant, moreover, that the anti-Jewish Luther should provide Burton with his basic source rather than the religious humanists of his own age; but the Lutheran and contemporary images co-incided in one important aspect of the Jew - his religious obstinacy, his tenacious adherence to Judaism, so "that no persuasion, no terror, no persecution, can divert them."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Browne, "Religio Medici"; The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, I, 51.

<sup>2</sup>Burton, III, 400-401.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 430.

The Jews [he continues] at this day are so incomprehensibly proud and churlish, saith Luther, that soli salvati, soli domini terrarum salutari volunt. (They alone wish to be saved, they alone wish to be hailed as saviours of the world.) And, as Buxtorfius adds, so ignorant and self-willed withal, that amongst their most understanding Rabbins you shall find naught but gross dotage, horrible hardness of heart, and stupend obstinacy, in all their actions, opinions, conversations: and yet so zealous withal, that no man living can be more, and indicate themselves for the elect people of GOD.<sup>1</sup>

In the Religio Medici (1643) which appeared a few decades later, Sir Thomas Browne was to utter a similar complaint against the headstrong, moody race - far too proud for a people in misfortune - stubbornly and unreasonably resisting the summons to Christian fellowship. In a tone of incredulity, inconsistent with the measured commonsensical approach of Pseudodoxia Epidemica, he berates the Jews for their interpretation of the Old Testament and their defection from the New:

And truly [he remarks], it is beyond wonder, how that contemptible and degenerate issue of Jacob, once so devoted to Ethnick Superstition, and so easily seduced to the Idolatry of their Neighbours, should now in such an obstinate and peremptory belief adhere unto their own Doctrine, expect impossibilities, and in the face and eye of the Church, persist without the least hope of Conversion. This is a vice in them, that were a vertue in us; for obstinacy in a bad Cause is but constancy in a good.<sup>2</sup>

The specious fragment of rationalization which concludes this outburst betrays the "other" side of the philosopher's intellect - for no statement could be less scientific and no question more illogically begged. What he comes to realize, however, is that the indomitable nature of Jewish obduracy necessitates a form of religious tolerance as the only possible alternative to persecution and bloodshed, and that conversion enforced by violence is fundamentally sacrilegious:

The Jew is obstinate in all fortunes; the persecution of fifteen hundred years hath but confirmed them in their Error: they have already endured whatsoever may be inflicted, and have suffered, in a bad cause, even to the condemnation of their enemies. Persecution is a bad and indirect way to plant Religion. It hath been the unhappy method of angry Devotions, not only to confirm honest Religion, but wicked Heresies, and extravagant Opinions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 401-402.

<sup>2</sup>Browne, I, 39.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

Although the opening decades of the age seemed to initiate a series of bitter conflicts between the Puritan and Anglican factions, intensified by religious fanaticism and persecution, the century ended with the Toleration Act and a humanistic respect for the liberty of conscience and belief. Sir Thomas Browne was primarily concerned, in the Religio Medici, with the consolidation of this change in personal religious attitudes, and his sympathetic tolerance derives essentially from that general state of mind which Robert Burton had recorded a few decades earlier. Burton's points of view, once again, are less his own than a subsumption of the opinions "in the air" of the 1620's; and the tolerant racism of the century is particularly evident in his treatment of the Jews, indicating that change in religious sensibility which was to make Jewish re-admission to England a possibility. He begins by emphasising, as Browne was later to do, the general need for a recognition of the indomitable nature of the Jew.

They are generally so refractory, self-conceited, obstinate, so firmly addicted to that religion in which they have been bred and brought up [he writes], that no persuasion, no terror, no persecution can divert them. The consideration of which hath induced many Commonwealths to suffer them to enjoy their consciences as they will themselves. A toleration of Jews is in most provinces of Europe.

And, he goes on to say -

some are of opinion that no man ought to be compelled for conscience sake, but let him be of what religion he will, he may be saved, as Cornelius was formerly accepted, Jew, Turk, Anabaptists, &c. If he be an honest man, live soberly and civilly in his profession, . . . serve his own God, with that fear and reverence he ought.<sup>1</sup>

These were to be the new criteria of social and religious acceptance; and the Jews, who under the feudal system of the Middle Ages had been denied even the basic rights of existence, were now to be regarded in the transforming light of humanistic tolerance.

It was Milton in his Latin "Treatise on Christian Doctrine" (1658-1660) who first expressed the humanist's denial of a "perpetual decree"<sup>2</sup> against the Jews, or the finality of God's rejection of his

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<sup>1</sup>Burton, III, 430.

<sup>2</sup>"A Treatise on Christian Doctrine", trans. C.R. Sumner; The Prose Works of John Milton (London: Bell, 1891), IV, 71.

people; for grace had suddenly become available to all mankind, and even the incorrigible Jew was granted an accredited place in the Christian theology of the mid-century. Thus Milton:

St. Paul therefore asserts the right of God to impart whatever grace he chooses even to the undeserving, V. 14, 15. and concludes - "so then it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, (not even of Jacob, who had openly confessed himself undeserving, nor of the Jews who followed after the laws of righteousness) but of God that sheweth mercy," V.16. Thus St. Paul establishes the right of God with respect to any election whatever, even of the undeserving.<sup>1</sup>

The toleration of the Jews seems, indeed, to have been integral to the Miltonic form of Puritanism with its intense desire to accomplish the Pauline prophecy of ultimate salvation in the Commonwealth, its determination to create a second Israel in England; and a constant identification of the ancient Hebrews and the contemporary English, the land of Israel and that of England, was established in the allegorical cast of Puritan thought, persisting even into the Restoration. Cromwell had seen himself as a hero of Biblical antiquity; his soldiers sang the Songs of David as they put the 'Philistines' to rout and freed the country of the Stuart Government's "Egyptian bondage"; the Root-and-Branch visionaries endeavoured to make the Jewish Sabbath the British Sabbath; and some sects even advocated the adoption in England of the Levitical legislation - that same "life under the law" which the commentators of the Middle Ages had so forcibly denounced.<sup>2</sup>

This allegorical identification constituted an integral aspect of the heightened self-awareness of a nation gearing itself to a dedicated Messianic destiny and confident of its spiritual and intellectual regeneration in a great new era. The mid-century was permeated with this Millennial Philosophy - the belief that Cromwell's government was the Fifth Empire destined to herald in the Messianic Age, a belief which accorded well with the prognostications of the Jewish Cabbalists. But the Puritans maintained, and the Lord Protector supported their view

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Vide A.M. Hyamson, A History of the Jews in England (London: Methuen, 1928), Chap. XVI: "English Elements in the Re-settlement."

for political reasons of his own, that the Millenium could not dawn until the Jews had been re-admitted to England and converted. Statesmen began to re-formulate their Jewish Policy under the pressura of "divine reasons";<sup>1</sup> and the pulpit re-inforced their politkal arguments by constantly preaching the Christian duty of welcoming the Jews to the New Israel, and reviving the teachings of St. Paul on the doctrine of Conversion:

For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?<sup>2</sup>

This was the expectation of the new regime - a national rebirth, a spiritual regeneration in which England came to symbolize the Pauline olive-tree onto which the Jewish scion was to be regrafted. Once again, the imaginative mind seized upon St. Paul's attitude towards the Jews, and once again the Jews became the subject of devotional poetry as they had been in the fourteenth century; but the gulf of time separating the two ages had resulted in a complete reversal of literary treatment as the image of the Christ-killer gave way to that of a contemporary Messiah.

The first poetic expression of this new image appears in the religious lyrics of George Herbert; and his poem "The Jews", included in The Temple (1633), develops from an utterance of sympathetic racism to a passionate prayer for the regeneration of Israel:

Poore nation, whose sweet sap and juice  
Our cyens have purloin'd and left you drie;  
Whose streams we got by the Apostles' sluice,  
And use in baptisme, while ye pine and die;  
Who by not keeping once became a debter,  
And now by keeping lose the letter; -

Oh that my prayers - mine alas!  
Oh that some angel might a trumpet sound,  
At which the Church, falling upon her face,  
Should crie so loud untill the trump were drown'd,

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<sup>1</sup>"It seems to me there are divine reasons, . . . for their admission. . . . Where wee both pray for theyre conversion, and believe it shall be, I know not why we should deny the means." Major General Whalley in a letter to Mr. Secretary Thurloe. Quoted by T. Lelyveld, Shylock on the Stage, p. 12, fn. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Romans 11:15.

And by that crie, of her deare Lord obtain  
That your sweet sap might come again!<sup>1</sup>

The first stanza is a poetic synthesis of the basic ideas contained in Romans 11, infused with a peculiarly humanistic tone of compassion which is Herbert's own. The imagery, of course, derives directly from the Pauline symbol of the olive-tree and its metaphor of grafting - a symbol of the Judaic root-religion and its Christian scion, with the implied suggestion of the Christian's absorption of the misused nourishment of the Jew. The second stanza takes the form of a fervent plea for the realization of St. Paul's vision of ultimate salvation - the burgeoning of the olive-tree by a re-grafting of the Jewish scion on to the original stock, and the nourishment of both religions by the same sap. The imagery, moreover, seems to prophesy a momentous incident in the history of Christianity, a great new era heralded by angelic trumpets; and the image of the Church prostrate at the feet of God, crying for the re-vitalization of Judaism, is sufficient indication of the increasingly effective humanistic refashioning of an ancient and detested religious symbol. For the fearful delcide had begun to recede in the poetic consciousness of the people, and the image came to be conditioned by a spirit of sympathy which made the re-admission of the Jews something of a theological necessity to seventeenth century England.

It was with something very like prophetic insight that Henry Vaughan, in 1654, predicted the re-entry of the Jews to the New Israel in a poem from his Sillex Scintillans. Like Herbert, he called this poem "The Jews":

When the fair year  
Of your Deliverer comes,  
And that long frost which now benums  
Your hearts shall thaw; when angels here  
Shall yet to man appear,  
And familiarly confer  
Beneath the oke and juniper;  
When the bright Dove,  
Which now these many, many springs  
Hath kept above,  
Shall with spread wings  
Descend, and living waters flow  
To make drie dust, and dead trees grow;

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<sup>1</sup>"The Jews", from The Temple (1633); The Poetical Works of George Herbert, ed. A.B. Grosart (London: Geo. Bell, 1876), pp. 193 f.

O then that I  
 Might live, and see the olive bear  
 Her proper branches! which now lie  
     Scattered each where,  
 And, without root and sap, decay,  
 Cast by the husbandman away.  
     And sure it is not far!<sup>1</sup>

Again, the Messianic prophecy, the image of a paradisaical existence, and the theme of Judaic revitalization. Again, the now familiar symbol of the olive tree with its re-grafting metaphor, figuring the conversion of the Jews to Christianity and a re-combination of the two faiths in a single religious amalgam. For Henry Vaughan, as for many of his contemporaries sharing the same Christian convictions and sensitive to the drift in political and economic attitudes, the Millenium was manifestly near at hand. Everything seemed to indicate it:

So by all signs  
 Our fulness too is now come in;  
     And the same sun which here declines  
 And sets, will few hours hence begin  
 To rise on you again, and look  
 Towards old Mamre and Eshcol's brook.<sup>2</sup>

This image of a national and religious "fulness", of an imminent historical rebirth, and the dawn of some crucial moment in Time, seems to have pervaded the consciousness of the mid-century philosopher. And when, in the year following the publication of Vaughan's poem, the legal right of the Jews to re-enter England was finally established, it seemed indeed that the expected Millenium had actually materialized.

But the Millenium was clearly open to a variety of interpretations - and not all of them derived from Vaughan's Messianic vision. For Cromwell and his government, the Millenium was less a religious than an economic concept; and if they regarded Jewish re-admission as a means of securing "life from the dead", it was the commercial life of England and not the spiritual with which they were essentially concerned. The Lord Protector, in fact, had little sympathy with the Millenial and Conversionist beliefs, except as a means of furthering his political ends; and Menasseh ben Israel's Humble Addresses on behalf of the Jewish

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Vaughan, Sacred Poems and Pious Ejaculations (London: Geo. Bell, 1883), pp. 178 f.

<sup>2</sup>Vaughan, p. 178.

Nation (1655) appealed not to the religious and sentimental aspects of re-admission, but to the economic and political expediency of the matter.<sup>1</sup> This Humble Address, moreover, had been given optimistic re-assurance by the favourable attitudes of the mid-century pamphleteers who were still disposed to regard Jewish policy in the light of contemporary religion,<sup>2</sup> and whose arguments for re-admission derived mainly from the Millennial philosophers. But when the basis of ben Israel's appeal was seen to rest upon economic rather than religious issues, when the hoped-for Millennium was suddenly revealed as an age of commercial fruition rather than the burgeoning of the Christian faith, a resentful reaction set in. The religious faction was indignant, and the merchant classes were openly hostile to the threat of competition. The spate of pamphlets on the Jewish Question promptly redoubled - but their direction had altered. Toleration had turned into attack.

One of the fiercest and most influential opponents of ben Israel's cause was William Prynne - the famous publicist, whose Short Demurrer to The Jewes Long Discontinued Remitter into England (1655) was directly occasioned by the Whitehall Conference on the Jewish issue, and written while it was in session. This bitter political pamphlet, raking up all the ancient charges against the Jews and emphasising the reasons for

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<sup>1</sup>See p. 150

<sup>2</sup>Edward Nicholas, for instance, in his Apology for the honorable nation of the Jews and all the Sons of Israel (1648) pleads that "for the glory of God, the comfort of those afflicted people, the love of my own sweet native country of England, and the freeing of my own conscience in the day of account, we show ourselves compassionate and helpers of the afflicted Jews." Quoted by M.F. Modder, The Jew in the Literature of England (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 32. There was also Thomas Barlowe's Case of the Lawfulness of the Toleration of the Jews (1654): "there lies a heavy and sacred obligation upon Christians. . . to endeavour the conversion of the Jews, which certainly cannot be by banishing them from all Christian commonwealths." Quoted by Modder, pp. 34-35.

their banishment,<sup>1</sup> had been distributed among the unruly crowds in the Conference Chamber; and Cromwell was obliged to employ the utmost diplomatic tact in his resolution of so controversial a matter as Jewish naturalization. How he succeeded in doing so is amusingly reported by an eighteenth century anecdotist - Joseph Spence - who illustrates, above all, the way in which the image of the Jew could be manipulated by an astute politician and moulded to suit his particular ends. Turning first to the clergy, he revived the argument so frequently employed by the Conversionists in emphasising the sacred obligation of the Church to receive the Jews.

He desired to know [continues Spence], whether it was not every Christian man's duty to forward that good end all he could? Then he flourished a good deal on the religion prevailing in this nation, the only place in the world where religion was taught in its full purity; was it not then our duty in particular, to encourage them to settle here, where alone they could be taught the truth; and not to exclude them from the sight, and leave them among idolaters? This silenced the clergy.<sup>2</sup>

Then he turned to the merchantmen, and with the same specious ingenuity sought to persuade them that the Jews constituted no threat whatsoever to their prosperity or trade:

"'Tis true," says Cromwell, "they are the meanest and most despised of all people." - He then fell into abusing the Jews most heartily, and after he had said everything that was contemptive and low of them: "Can you really be afraid," said he, "that this mean despised people should be able to prevail in trade and credit over the merchants of England, the noblest and most esteemed merchants of the whole world!" - Thus he went on, till he had silenced them too; and so was at liberty to grant what he desired to the Jews.<sup>3</sup>

Cromwell had, in fact, resurrected two traditional Jewish images, in neither of which he really believed. The "converted Jew" merely served to pacify the religious faction; and his description of the beggared Jewish businessman was in direct contradiction to his motives for Jewish re-admission. But these politically mendacious arguments seemed to have succeeded; for one important consequence of the negotiations was

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<sup>1</sup>"The Jewes had been formerly great clippers and forgers of money, and had crucified three or four children in England at least, which were the principal causes of their banishment." Prynne, quoted by Hodder, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Rosenberg, Appendix IV: "Readmission of the Jews to England", p. 318.

<sup>3</sup>ibid.

the recognition of the Jews' legitimate right to return to England - which they did, in the year following the Whitehall Conference.

The climax to the long Jewish struggle for re-admission, however, was merely the anti-climax to the great expectations of Christianity. For the idealistic image into which the Jew had been transformed was belied by the inescapable reality of his presence; and the Messianic myth crumbled as the cherished possibility of the Jews' conversion dwindled into a witty Metaphysical speculation - an image, like Marvell's, of some hyperbolically remote occurrence in the all-too-distant future:

I would  
Love you ten years before the Flood;

(he sings to his coy mistress, withholding her favours for what seems to be an eternity),

And you should if you please refuse  
Till the Conversion of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

There was perhaps more validity than extravagance in Marvell's conceit. For, contrary to the desires of Puritan theology, the Jews remained tenacious adherents to their ancient faith, unsympathetic to the doctrines of St. Paul, and quite as obstinate in their religion as Sir Thomas Browne had sceptically foreseen.

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From the mid-century onwards, the literary image of the Jew was evidently conditioned by two independent factors: contemporary realism, and the Puritan revival of Old Testament Hebraism. Actual observation of the Jews, however, hardly succeeded in dispelling that aura of mystery and inscrutability surrounding this strange nation which, for four hundred years, had been a comparatively unknown social element in England. The London Synagogue became a place of fascinating curiosity, a place like the circus or the madhouse or the theatre, to which one repaired for novel entertainment. And the incredulity of Samuel Pepys, in his famous account of a Jewish service, most probably reflected something of the intense disappointment of the earlier Millennial idealists

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<sup>1</sup>Marvell, "To his Coy Mistress", from Miscellaneous Poems (pub. 1681).

and Conversionists. It was certainly not the image they had expected:

. . . after dinner my wife and I, by Mr. Rawlinson's conduct, to the Jewish Synagogue. . . . Their service all in a singing way, and in Hebrew. And anon their Laws that they take out of the press are carried by several men, four or five several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that everyone desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing. And in the end they had a prayer for the King, which they pronounced his name in Portugall; but the prayer, like the rest, in Hebrew. But Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more: and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.<sup>1</sup>

What Pepys had witnessed, as his earlier description of the ceremonial indicates, was the Joyous Simhat Torah celebrations - a festival more traditional than religious and characterized by a spirit of gaiety, marking the reading of the last portion of the Torah and celebrating the new beginning. The diarist, who neither understood nor appreciated the service, left the synagogue 'with my mind strongly disturbed with them' - and, perhaps, not without reason. For the Jews remained something of an enigma to later seventeenth century society - aliens in a Christian community who resisted assimilation and succeeded in preserving their 'mysterious' identity. Far more fathomable and far less disturbing was the familiar image of the Old Testament Jew which the theological re-orientation of the Puritan regime had firmly re-established in the social imagination. If the real-life Jew was a rather disillusioning anti-climax to the religious sensibility, recourse could always be had to the heroic image of the warrior-Jew, that prophetic figure of almost superhuman stature which the Hebraic impulse of the age had served to resuscitate.

Samson Agonistes (1671), a work of the century's most illustrious Hebraic humanist, derives essentially from this tradition; for despite the perfect neo-classicism of the poem's dramatic form, it is the spirit

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<sup>1</sup>The Diary of Samuel Pepys, ed. H.B. Wheatley (London: Geo. Bell, 1928), III, 303. This passage is dated October 14th, 1663.

of the Hebrew poet rather than the Greek which characterizes Milton's tragic theodicy. The God of Samson Agonistes is not the God of Sophocles; and there is nothing of Oedipus's vehement agnosticism in the Job-like probing of divine destiny and human responsibility:

Yet stay [cries Samson], let me not rashly call in doubt  
 Divine Prediction; what if all foretold  
 Had been fulfill'd but through mine own default;  
 Whom have I to complain of but my self?  
 . . . . .  
 I must not quarrel with the will  
 Of highest dispensation, which herein  
 Haply had ends above my reach to know.<sup>1</sup>

This Miltonic theology, with its Christo-Judaic structure, is strangely inconsistent with the Hellenic classicism of the play. But the themes of classical mythology had clearly proved inadequate to the poet's essentially Hebraic justification of the ways of God to men; and no Sophoclean or Euripidean tragic hero could possibly have served as Milton's philosophic mouthpiece. It was Samson, the blind warrior of the Old Testament, and not the Grecian seer Teiresias through whom the sightless poet chose to rationalize his theology.

The central figure himself, in the poignant contrast between present misery and past glory, calls to mind the great potential of the Jewish image, the heroic possibilities inherent in the Hebraic warrior-tradition of the Bible:

Can this be hee,  
 That Heroic, that Renownd,  
 Irresistible Samson? whom unarmd  
 No strength of man, or fiercest wild beastaecould withstand;  
 Who tore the Lion, as the Lion tears the Kid,  
 Ran on embattled Armies clad in Iron,  
 And weaponless himself,  
 Made arms ridiculous. . .  
 . . . . .  
 The bold Ascalonite  
 Fled from his Lion ramp, old Warriors turnd  
 Thir plated backs under his heel;  
 Or grovling soild their crested helmets in the dust.  
 Then with what trivial weapon came to hand,  
 The Jaw of a dead Ass, his sword of bone,  
 A thousand fore-skins fell, the flower of Palestin  
 In Ramath-lechi famous to this day.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Poetical Works of John Milton, ed. H. Darbishire (London: O.U.P., 1958), p. 348.

"Samson Agonistes", lines 43-46; 60-62.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 350; lines 124-31; 138-45.



at his necessary inactivity. Milton's acute sense of personal dedication as England's prophet seems, indeed, to have led inevitably to his identification with the blind deliverer of Israel; and through the persona of Samson he scrutinized and eventually came to terms with an intellectual and spiritual crisis of his own. Patience and endurance no longer provide a satisfactory solution to the problem, as they did in the sonnet. For the God of Samson Agonistes is one who exacts day-labour even from the blind; and the "talent", lodged uselessly in a dark world, is suddenly illuminated in all its former power, rising Phoenix-like from the dead ashes of despair, triumphing over mortality:

But hee though blind of sight,  
 Despis'd and thought extinguisht quite,  
 With inward eyes illuminated  
 His fierie vertue rous'd  
 From under ashes into sudden flame,  
 . . . . .  
 So vertue giv'ne for lost,  
 Deprest, and overthrow'n, as seemd,  
 Like that self-begott'n bird  
 In the Arabian woods embost,  
 . . . . .  
 Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most  
 When most unactive deemd,  
 And though her body die, her fame survives,  
 A secular bird ages of lives.<sup>1</sup>

It is also the resurrection of an ancient Hebraic image - an image given new life and significance through the religious sensibility of a seventeenth century humanist intent upon expressing through it his intensely personal ideas and aspirations. The faith of the Israelite becomes for Milton the "objective correlative" of his own probing into the ways of God, and the symbol of the Old Testament warrior becomes uniquely meaningful through his technique of identification. This is the anagnorisis of the heroic Jew in the literature of England.

The wheel of Jewish fortune had come full circle and seemed at its temporary zenith in the third quarter of the seventeenth century. For a powerful combination of religious, economic, scientific and intellectual circumstances served to produce an image of the Jew which was inconceivable before and which could not be repeated. An awareness of the ancient grandeur of the Jews and God's former favours to his

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 389; lines 1687-691; 1697-700; 1704-707.



APPENDIX A

THE LOPEZ AFFAIR:  
THE IMAGE OF THE  
JEW AS POISONER

Mendoza: Canst thou impoyson? Canst thou impoyson?  
Malevole: Excellently, no Jew, Potecary, or Politician  
better.

JOHN MARSTON, The Malcontent.<sup>1</sup>

An important factor conditioning the emergence and development of the Jewish image in the last decade of the 16th century involved an infamous incident in which the Queen's personal physician - a Portuguese Jew - was arraigned and convicted of plotting to poison her: the notorious "Lopez affair" which ramified far afield in Elizabethan drama, and brought the image of the poisoning Jewish doctor vividly before the English public. Even before his notoriety this Dr. Lopez was a fairly well-known personality upon the English medical scene - at any rate, well-known enough for Marlowe to have mentioned him in The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus: "Doctor Fustian quotha?" says an incredulous Horse-courser, "mass, Doctor Lopus was never such a doctor."<sup>2</sup> And his trial apparently proved one of the great sensations of the closing decades of Elizabeth's reign.

Lopez<sup>3</sup> had been captured and transported to England by Sir Francis Drake on one of his anti-Spanish forays, and his knowledge of medicine soon resulted in his appointment as the first house-physician at St. Bartholomew's Hospital and his becoming London's leading society doctor. In 1575 his name appeared at the head of Stowe's list of London specialists, and several years later he assumed the office of

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<sup>1</sup>Marston, "The Malcontent", V.iii; The Plays of John Marston, ed. H. Harvey Wood (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1934), I, 207.

<sup>2</sup>Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, scene xi.

<sup>3</sup>The chief sources dealing with the life and trial of Lopez are: A.M. Hyamson, A History of the Jews in England (London: Methuen, 1928). Sir Sidney Lee, "Elizabethan England and the Jews," Transactions of the New Shakespeare Society, 1887-1892. Sir Sidney Lee, "The Original Shylock," Gentleman's Magazine, CCXLVI (1880). G.B. Harrison, An Elizabethan Journal (London: Constable and Co., 1928).

personal consultant to the Queen - an intimacy which inevitably drew him into the dangerous vortex of Elizabethan politics, bringing him into conflict with the current court-favourite, the impetuous Earl of Essex. The first cause for friction - as, indeed, each subsequent cause - derived largely from an unwitting blow dealt by the doctor to Essex's dangerously sensitive pride.

The Earl, at the time, was agitating for a series of aggressive operations against Spain, and saw in Lopez a likely source of foreign intelligence. At first the doctor was unwilling to participate in political activity; but, persuaded by the Queen, he undertook the business and derived what information was necessary from his contacts in Spain and Portugal. However -

as soon as ever Lopez received any intelligence, he went instantly to the Queen to acquaint her therewith; and afterwards he went to the Earl of Essex and acquainted him. Then did the Earl of Essex come to the Court and acquaint her with the same: and the Queen knowing it before did but laugh at the Earl of Essex. And so it fell out several times, whereby the Earl saw himself utterly disappointed, for though he had gotten an intelligencer yet he proved not to be his but went in immediately to the Queen. This hath bred very ill blood between the Earl and Lopez.<sup>1</sup>

Before very long, however, the ill blood bred between them gave rise to a matter for revenge.

Essex, for what seems to have been purposes of anti-Spanish propoganda, had welcomed to England a claimant to the throne of Portugal - a certain Don Antonio who had suffered the grossest indignities at the hand of Philip II; but unable to express his indignation in any language but his own, an interpreter was sought for the Don and once again Lopez was drawn into affairs of state. One intimacy with the Portuguese Prince, however, led to another, eventually culminating in a foolishly tactless breach of professional etiquette by the doctor:

In the last vacation, Dr. Lopez went to vist Don Antonio and Antonio Perez; and making merry with them, Lopez began to inveigh against the Earl of Essex, telling them some secrecies, how he had cured him and of what diseases, with some other things that did disparage his honour. But as soon as Lopez was gone, they went instantly to the Earl and, to ingratiate themselves into his favour, acquainted him with all. Whereupon the Earl was so much incensed that he resolved to be revenged.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, pp. 280-81.

<sup>2</sup>ibid.

From this moment, indeed, the circumstances of the affair became almost as involved as the plot of a typical Elizabethan tragedy of revenge.

Philip of Spain, still eager to liquidate any claimant to the throne of which he himself had taken possession, instructed agents in England to commission a likely instrument for Spanish treachery; and once again Lopez allowed himself to be inveigled into the plot - hinting, with customary lack of tact, that "Antonio should die the first illness that befell him."<sup>1</sup> By undertaking this political murder, then, Lopez automatically became a "secret instrument" of Spain and consequently a traitor to the English Court - a point insisted upon at the trial.<sup>2</sup> Nor did it seem improbable that, once having allied himself with Philip II, Lopez should attempt to assassinate the Queen herself. He had, indeed, been commissioned on several occasions to do so, but resolutely refused, having received too many favours from Elizabeth to engineer her death. As fortune would have it, however, a letter addressed to one of the Spanish agents fell into the hands of Essex; and as the offender was lodging at the time with Lopez, suspicion fell upon the doctor as well. Here was the opportunity for revenge which Essex had long been expecting and, eager to implicate his enemy, obtained permission to examine Lopez's private papers. A commission of three was appointed to the task - the Lord Treasurer, Sir Robert Cecil, and the Earl himself - and, once again, Essex's pride received a shock:

After the first hearing Sir Robert Cecil posted to the Court before the Earl, and related to the Queen that there was no matter of malice, for in the poor man's home were found no kind of writings or intelligences of which he was accused, or otherwise that hold might be taken of him.

And when, a few minutes later, Essex arrived with his report, the Queen -

being prepossessed of the matter by the others, took him up, calling him a rash and temerarious youth to enter into a matter against the poor man, which he could not prove and

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<sup>1</sup>Ferrara de Gama's Confession, State Papers Domestic, ccxlvii.70. Quoted by Harrison, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup>"Lopez, outwardly pretending to favour Don Antonio, was a secret instrument for the King of Spain, and carried his actions therein more covertly under pretext of service for Don Antonio. . . These services were so acceptable to the King of Spain that he sent Lopez a Jewel." Sir Edward Coke, Solicitor General. State Papers Domestic, ccxlvii. 97, 102, 103. Quoted by Harrison, p. 290.

whose innocenca she knew well enough; but malice against Dr. Lopez, and no other, hatched all this matter, which displeaseth her much, and more for that her honour is interested therein.

These words of the Queen's so angered the Earl of Essex that he went back to his chamber, with great fury casting open the chamber door before him, and so passed into his cabinet where he kept himself shut in for an hour.<sup>1</sup>

The Earl, in fact, kept to his room for two days - emerging only to take advantage of a rumour that Lopez "like a Jew. . . had burned all his papers a little before."<sup>2</sup> Still smarting from his rebuff from the Queen, Essex peremptorily arrested those who were already implicated beyond denial, and under threat of torture they returned the answers he wished to obtain. So plausible a story was thereupon concocted that the doctor found himself trapped without the slightest chance of extrication; and Don Antonio, before leaving for France, confirmed the charges of treason levelled against Lopez. So, scarcely a week after his first accusation, London was agog with the news that Dr. Lopez

is committed to the Tower, the Earl of Essex having so busied himself with the examinations for several days past that he scarce had leisure even to eat.<sup>3</sup>

The examinations yielded results. Lopez to avoid the rack was obliged to confess his knowledge of the double plot, whereupon Essex extracted the last drop of corroborative evidence from the doctor's alleged accomplices; and armed with various confessions and letters, he obtained a commission from the Queen to preside at the trial.

On the 28th February, 1594, Dr. Lopez was arraigned at the Guildhall, and public feeling rose high against him. All London attended the trial, among them Thomas Nashe who, in his Lenten Stuffe (1599), remarks on the golden-tongued oratory of counsel prosecuting the wretched doctor:

. . . from some of them I auowe I have heard as excellent things flowe, as euer I obserued in Tully or Demosthenes. Those that were present at the arraignment of Lopus (to insist in no other particular) hereof I am sure will beare me record.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Birch's Memoirs, i. 149-150; Bishop Godfrey Goodman, The Court of James I, 1839, i. 149. Quoted by Harrison, pp. 279-80.

<sup>2</sup>The Merchant of Venice, New Variorum Edition ed. Furness (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1888), Appendix: Jews in England, p. 398.

<sup>3</sup>Birch's Memoirs, i. 152. Quoted by Harrison, p. 283.

<sup>4</sup>The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. McKerrow-Wilson, III, pp. 215-16.

Sir Edward Coke, the Solicitor General, in fine Ciceronian style lashed out at Lopez, laying particular stress on his Jewishness and invoking the emotive images of Christ-killer and Judas. It made little or no difference that Lopez, on his arrival in England, had been converted to Christianity.

This Lopez [declared Coke], a perjured murdering traitor and Jewish Doctor, worse than Judas himself, undertook the poisoning, which was a plot more wicked, dangerous, and detestable than all the former.<sup>1</sup>

He went on to describe the Spanish conspiracy; how Lopez had "hoped to do one great service to the King, and a remedy for Christendom, which was to poison the Queen"; how he had sold her, in true Judas fashion, for a sum of 50,000 crowns; and -

All these charges being plainly and fully proved by witnesses, by the intercepted letters, and by the confessions of Lopez himself to the great satisfaction of the judge, jury and hearers, he is found guilty in the highest degree and judgment passed on him with universal applause.<sup>2</sup>

The only one who failed to share in this general satisfaction was the Queen who declined to sign Lopez's death warrant for nearly four months after his conviction. It was not until one of Essex's partisans had been raised to the Bench as Lord Chief Justice that the Queen, by his persuasion, was induced to proceed with execution of the sentence.

On the 7th June, 1594, Lopez and the two other conspirators were conveyed from the Tower of London - and after a lengthy legal rigmarole and much travelling through the city were eventually laid upon hurdles, taken over the bridge up to Leadenhall, and so to Tyburn. It proved an admirable opportunity for Jew-baiting, especially when -

at the gallows Lopez declared that he loved the Queen as he loved Jesus Christ, which coming from a man of Jewish profession moved no small laughter in the standers-by.<sup>3</sup>

This irony was bound to evoke public mirth, and as the bolt fell there were loud cries of "Jew" from the mob.

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted by G.B. Harrison, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup>State Papers Domestic, ccxlvii. 97, 102, 103. Quoted by Harrison, pp. 289-91.

<sup>3</sup>Stow, Annals; Camden, Elizabeth. Quoted by Harrison, pp. 303-304.

The caterers for public amusement obviously took advantage of the popular sentiments aroused by the trial; and the Jew of Malta, whose poisonous propensities anticipated the Jew of London's by a five year period, was revived with pointed topicality. It was performed, indeed, at least four times between Lopez's trial and execution, and was entered for printing less than a month before his death - serving, no doubt, as effective anti-Semitic propoganda for the masses. After his death the play ran for nearly three months, and Menslowe records no less than ten representations from June to the end of the year.<sup>1</sup>

In August of the same year - two months after the Lopez affair - appeared a play called The Venetian Comedy, which is generally accepted to be title under which The Merchant of Venice was first performed.<sup>2</sup> Sir Sidney Lee even goes so far as to suggest that Dr. Lopez provided the model for Shakespeare's villain, detecting an apparent allusion to the physician in the trial-scene:

. . .thy currish spirit [says Gratiano to Shylock]  
 Govern'd a wolf, who hang'd for human slaughter -  
 Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,  
 And whilst thou layest in thy unhallowed dam,  
 Infus'd itself in thee.<sup>3</sup>

There may be a pun concealed in "wolf" - lupus in Latin, lobos in Spanish - which identifies the image with Dr. Lopez. But here the similarity begins and ends. Shylock clearly derives from the long-standing tradition of the Jewish usurer which has no affinity whatsoever with the poisoning Jewish physician.

The Lopez scandal, however, must surely have inflamed the race-hatred of earlier times; and the desire to profit from it seems to have prompted the writing of some sadistic Jew-baiting literature. Nashe's Unfortunate Traveller - printed in the year of Lopez's execution - appears to have catered for precisely this taste for the lurid and

<sup>1</sup>See Harrison's entries, pp. 284, 297, 302, 304, 306, 307, 310, 311, 322, 328, 338.

<sup>2</sup>Vide M. J. Landa, The Jew in Drama, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup>The Merchant of Venice, IV. i. 133-37. Also see Sir Sidney Lee, "The Original Shylock," Gentleman's Magazine (Feb. 1880), pp. 185-200.

anti-Semitic. In a two-penny-coloured passage from this early picaresque novel he describes the death by slow torture of a Jew called Zadoch - a passage probably inspired by the drawing and quartering of Lopez, although the grotesquely savage extremes to which Jew-baiting is taken clearly derives from that flair for the hyperbolic which characterizes Nashe's pamphleteering:

To the execution place was he brought, where first and foremost he was stript, then on a sharp yron stake fastened in ye ground he had his fundament pitcht, which stake ran vp along into the bodie like a spit; vnder his arme-holes two of lyke sort; a great bon-fire they made round about him, wherewith his flesh roasted, not burnd: and euer as with the heate his skinne blistred, the fire was drawn aside, and they basted him with a mixture of Aqua fortis, allum water, and Mercury sublimatum, which smarted to the very soul of him, and searcht him to the marrowe. Then dyd they scourge his backe partes so blistred and basted, with burning whips of red hot wler: his head they nointed ouer with pitch and tar, and so inflamed it. To his priuile members they tied streaming fire-workes: the skinne from the crest of his shoulder, as also from his elbowes, his huckle bones, his knees, his ankles, they pluckt and gnawed off with sparkilling pincers: his breast and belly with seale skins they grated ouer, which as fast as they grated and rawed, one stood ouer & laued with smiths syndry water & Aqua vitae: his nailes they halfe raised vp, and then vnder-propt them with sharpe prickes, like a Tailors shop window halfe open on a holy dale: euery one of his fingers they rent vp to the wrist: his toes they brake off by the rootes, and let them still heng by a little skinne. In conclusion, they had a small oyle fire, such as men blow light bubbles of glasse with, and beginning at his feete, they let him lingringly burne vp lim by lim, till his hearte was consumed, and then he died.<sup>1</sup>

The Lopez affair was not soon forgotten. No less than five official accounts of the Jew's treason (one by Bacon, then in the service of Essex) with many semi-official pamphlets kept the facts of the case in the public mind; and even after the death of Elizabeth it was remembered as one of the major political crises of her reign. An illustrated sheet entitled Popish Plots and Treasons appeared early in the reign of James I - a piece of anti-Roman Catholic propoganda, intimating that Lopez was an accomplice of the Pope; and the thirteenth print-engraving depicts the Jewish doctor compounding to poison the Queen. The inscription reads as follows:

But now a private horrid Treason view  
Hatcht by the Pope, the Devil, and a Jew;  
Lopez a Doctor must by Polson do  
What all their Plots have fail'd in hitherto;

<sup>1</sup>The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. McKerrow-Wilson, II, 315-16.

What will you give me then, the Judas cries:  
Full fifty thousand crowns, t'other replies.  
 'Tis done - but hold, the wretch shall miss his hope,  
 The Treason's known and the Reward's the Rope.<sup>1</sup>

The bout of anti-Semitism which the trial produced in England seemed secondary only to the detestation nourished throughout Elizabeth's reign against the far more immediate threat of Roman Catholicism; and prejudiced in more than equal measure against the Pope, the dramatists lost no time in incriminating him as well in the plot against the Queen. Indeed, the Lopez-figure in Thomas Dekker's Whore of Babylon (1607) is infinitely less offensive than the purple 'whore' of the title, the Pope himself.

The intention of this dramatic allegory, as Dekker's prologue indicates, is to contrast the "Greatnes, Magnanimity, Constancy, Clemency, and the other Incomparable Heroical vertues of our late Queene" with the "Inueterate malice, Treasons, Machinations, Vnderminings, and continual bloody stratagems of that Purple whore of Roome";<sup>2</sup> and the action is centred in the Pope's plot to poison Titania, the Faerie Queene, alias Queen Elizabeth. To this end, the Empress of Babylon ("vnder whom is figured Rome") engages a certain Dr. Ropus to undertake the crime - an agent of the Devil.

File to the Court [says the Empress to Ropus],  
 He that first sings a Dirge tun'de to the death  
 Of that my onely foe the Faerie Queene,  
 Shalbe my loue, and (clad in purple) ride  
 Vpon that scarlet-coloured beast that beares  
 Seuen Kingdomes on seuen heads.<sup>3</sup>

And Dr. Ropus obsequiously replies:

What physicke can, I dare, onely to grow  
 (But as I merit shall) vp in your eye.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Sir Sidney Lee, "Elizabethan England and the Jews", p. 162.

<sup>2</sup>The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: U.P., 1955), II, 497.

<sup>3</sup>The Whore of Babylon, III. i, lines 168-172.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., III. i, lines 176-77.

However, just as Ropus is about to administer his poisonous brew to Titania he is stopped by a courtier called Fidell - the allegorical equivalent of the Earl of Essex - who exposes his treachery:

The damned'st treason! Dog: you whorsen dog;  
 O blessed mayd: let not the toad come neere her:  
 What's this? If't be his brewing, touch it not -  
 For 'tis a drench to kill the strongest Deuill,  
 That's Druncke all day with brimstone.

Heepe halters on him: call the Guard: out polecat:  
 He smels, thy conscience stinks, Doctor goe purge  
 Thy soule, for 'tis diseas'd. Away with Ropus.<sup>1</sup>

And like his prototype, he is dragged away to execution. This dramatization of the Lopez treason, however, seems deliberately to subordinate the Jewish aspects of the crime to the pervasive prejudice against Rome; and Dekker avoids confusing the religious issues by levelling his indictment against the Papists rather than the Jews.<sup>2</sup> Ropus is nowhere abused for his implicit Jewishness, and only the well-known theme and well-worn associations betray the doctor's nationality.

There are, indeed, few plays in which the poisoning physician is essentially and unequivocally Jewish. Greene and Lodge probably initiated the dramatic role of the poisoning Jew in the year of Lopez's execution with a play of theirs called Selimus (1594), in which the crown Prince of Turkey engages the services of a certain Dr. Abraham to poison the king, his father. But little plot and even less verse is expended upon the doctor, and Abraham's contribution to the development of this image is minimal.<sup>3</sup> Coupled with the notoriety of Lopez's crime, however, Greene and Lodge's Jew seems to have established a dramatic stage-convention which obliged all subsequent Elizabethan and Jacobean poisoners to engage in their noxious activities masquerading as a Jewish quack. In Massinger's The Duke of Milan (1623), for instance,

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., IV. ii, lines 106-10; 122-24.

<sup>2</sup>Feeling against the Roman Catholics evidently ran far higher than that against the Jews, the Reverend Samuel Purchas even considering the Jew "more truly-Christian than the Papist." (Purchas, p.185. Also pp. 137, 184.) In his treatise on the Jewish faith, moreover, Purchas launches a vituperative attack against Roman Catholicism, citing it as an obvious deterrent to the Conversion of the Jews. His diatribe no doubt reflects the prevailing attitude of his age.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Goffe dramatized a similar incident in The Raging Turk (1627) where the role of the poisoning physician devolved upon a Jew called Hamon. See Cardozo, The Contemporary Jew in the Elizabethan Drama, p. 196.

the Machiavellian Francisco executes his vengeance on Sforza disguised  
 in the trappings of the poisoning Jew.<sup>1</sup> But the most villainous  
 combination of Barabas's "policy" and the particular talents of  
 Dr. Lopez occurs in Webster's melodrama, The Devil's Law-Case (1622).  
 In this play, the Machiavellian Romelio, intent on murdering the ailing  
 Contarino, prances onstage disguised as a Jewish physician:

Enter Romelio in the habit of a Jew.

Rom: Excellently well habited! - why me thinks,  
 That I could play with mine owne shadow now,  
 And be a rare Italienated Jew;  
 To have as many severall changes of faces,  
 As I have seene carv'd upon one Cherrystone;  
 To winde about a man like rotten Ivis,  
 Eate into him like Quicksilver, poyson a friend  
 With pulling but a loose haire from's beard, or give a  
drench,  
 He should linger of't nine yeeres, and nere complaine,  
 But in the Spring and Fall, and so the cause  
 Imputed to disease naturall; for sleight villanies,  
 As to coyne money, corrupt Ladies Honours,  
 Betray a Towne to 'th Turke, or make a Bonafire  
 A'th Christian Navy, I could settle to't,  
 As if I had eate a Politician;  
 And digested him to nothing but pure blood.<sup>2</sup>

Barabas's political achievements are invoked only to be dismissed, and  
 even Dr. Lopez is out-Lopezed by this Machiavel. Romelio then introduces  
 himself to Contarino's surgeons as a Jewish doctor from Rome, bribing  
 them "upon my Jewisme" to allow him access to the dying man; and once  
 inside the sick-room he executes his vengeance by stabbing Contarino -  
 incidentally, and by a curious stroke of fortune, performing the very  
 operation necessary to save his life. Making his escape, however, the  
 surgeons seize hold of him - whereupon he discards his disguise:

Romelio: Hold, I turne Christian.

Second

Surgeon: Nay prethas bee a Jew still;  
 I would not have a Christian be guiltie  
 Of such a villainous act as this is.<sup>3</sup>

Again the customary conflict of roles and the attempt to attribute all  
 social evil to some non-Christian source. In fact the second surgeon's  
 attitude was precisely that adopted by the English towards Lopez - that

<sup>1</sup>The Plays of Philip Massinger, ed. W. Gifford (London: Bulmer, 1805),  
 Vol. I.

<sup>2</sup>The Complete Works of John Webster, ed. F.L. Lucas (London: Chatto  
 and Windus, 1927), Vol. II. "The Devil's Law-Case," III. II, lines  
 1-16.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., III. II. 124-27.

resolute determination to regard him not as a Christian by voluntary conversion, but as a Jew; that unwillingness at the trial to acknowledge his villainy as an instance of Christian guilt, if guilt at all.

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