
This is the **published version** of the bachelor thesis:

Clemente García, Alba; Coral Escolà, Jordi, dir. "There's no mercy for me in heaven" : Converting Jews in William Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice". 2020. 33 pag. (836 Grau en Estudis d'Anglès i Espanyol)

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/231957>

under the terms of the  license



Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona

**“There’s no mercy for me in heaven”: Converting Jews
in William Shakespeare’s “The Merchant of Venice”**

Treball de Fi de Grau/ BA dissertation

Author: Alba Clemente García

Supervisor: Jordi Coral Escolà

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i de Germanística

Grau d’Estudis d’Anglès i Espanyol

June 2020

CONTENTS

0. Introduction	1
1. The Establishment of the Contract.....	4
1.1. Shylock's Advantage.....	4
1.2. Justification of the Deal	7
2. Jessica's Departure.....	10
2.1. Jessica's Repudiation of her Jewish Identity and Heritage.....	10
2.2. Lancelot's Guidance	12
3. The Trial	13
3.1 Shylock's Legalism.....	13
3.2. Antonio's Premise: The Jew's Conversion into a Christian.....	16
4. The Resolution	19
4.1. Jessica's Transgressive Romance.....	19
4.2. The Taming of Conversion.....	21
5. Conclusions and Further Research	22
Works Cited.....	24

Acknowledgements

To begin with, I would like to thank my tutor, Dr. Jordi Coral, for helping me and guiding me throughout the process. I am really grateful for his advice and all that he has taught me in his classes and in the process of this TFG.

I would also want to thank my family for all the support they have given me, specially my brother, who kept encouraging me.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my friends, with their help I was able to complete this TFG. I will always be so grateful for having them in my life.

Abstract

William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is known for the famous love story which concludes in a happy ending for all the characters, yet it also depicts a deep-rooted conflict between Jews and Christians. This conflict is resolved through two conversions which are carried out in distinct means. The first one, forced at the end of the trial scene, belongs to Shylock whereas the second one corresponds to Jessica. Contrary to her father's, Jessica's conversion seems to be of her own accord by marrying a Christian named Lorenzo.

Yet the Jew's conversion at the end of the play is not as fair as it appears to be. There are several stances in the play in which Shylock expresses the mistreatment he had to endure because of his faith. Subsequently, Christianity is presented as a path which would grant them both salvation and the acceptance of the citizens of Venice. However, this acceptance will never occur. Despite her willingness to behave like a Christian, Jessica does not seem as delighted as it expected in her final scene with Lorenzo in which she finds herself alienated from the rest of the Christians.

This TFG argues that both conversions predicted in the earlier acts of the play bring along an exchange of roles regarding the Jews and the Christians. Therefore, the establishment of the contract, the trial and its aftermath will be the key moments in the play in which this change is most noticeable.

Keywords: *The Merchant of Venice*, William Shakespeare, Shylock, Jessica, Salvation, Conversion, Judaism, Christianity, Second Coming of Jesus, Renaissance Literature

0. Introduction

Although Christianity is presented in the play as the right path that leads to salvation, the issue of conversion in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* shows that this remained very problematic in practice. There were different methods the Jews would go through in pursuit of salvation, hence the two contrasting experiences of Jessica and Shylock. Jessica settles for marrying a Christian, whereas her father is forced by the Gentiles in the name of justice.

The controversy with the English Jews came to a head in 1290, when King Edward expelled them. According to James Saphiro (1996), due to the Spanish Inquisition's acts, a new question began to spread throughout the English population: what did really mean to be Christian. As a result of this self-doubt, Christian expectations were divided and Protestantism emerged. In order to define Christianity, its followers started by defending what was not Christianity. The Jews were regarded as false Christians and the idea of conversion began to spread. It generated a crisis of religious identity: "This demand was met in part by the idea of the stubborn Jew whose conversion not only revealed the truths of Christianity in general, but also, many sects hoped the rightness of their own particular beliefs" (1996: 134). In the play, this controversy is clearly shown in the debate that Antonio and Shylock have when they are discussing about the contract. As a mean to justify himself and his previous actions, Antonio will defend the righteousness of Christianity.

England's detachment from Catholicism begins to take form during the 1530s, when Henry VIII was still ruling the country. His desire to divorce Catherine of Aragon propelled him to "replace papal authority over the Church of England with his own" (1996: 134). After his death, the process of Reformation advanced although the Catholic beliefs from the prior years had not disappeared. It was not until Queen Elizabeth rose to

the throne that this issue was stabilized by abolishing Catholic Mass. However, her acts did not resolve the differences between the distinct English Christians. Saphiro claims that it was within that time in which the interest in the conversion of Jews began to take form.

The conversion's intellectual and theological seeds were planted during the 1540s and 1550s due to Paul's declaration in Romans: "[it] led millenarian interpreters to conclude that the conversion of Jews was a necessary antecedent to Christ's Second Coming; and above all, by the prophecies of Daniel, whose obscure chronologies were cited as confirmation that Jesus Christ truly was the messiah the Jews had long awaited" (1996: 132). The Gentile's mission was to restore the Jews back to Christianity. In the play, this belief will be portrayed in Antonio and Portia, who will accomplish this mission at the end of the trial by demanding Shylock's conversion in exchange of his mercy. Nevertheless, it will be mainly Portia disguised as the Doctor of Laws who will carry out this process during the trial scene.

Additionally, the two distinct conversions in the play are not accomplished in the same way, irrespective of the gender of the converted person. Jewish women converted through marriage, like Jessica's case, who desires to marry Lorenzo since she is first presented in the play. Christianity presents itself as a path that would permit her to be happy and free from her father. Despite her willingness when it comes to being a Christian, she does not seem very delighted with the outcome in her final scene with Lorenzo.

Aside from Jessica, Shylock's case is quite different. Contrary to female Jews, in literature "male Jewish converts are invariably old and impotent, condemned to remain unwed and at the periphery of the Christian community" (1996: 132). They are usually depicted as the villains of the story and their conversion is forced, as it happens to

Shylock. For instance, Shylock is characterized by looking out only for his own interests and often compared to the Devil. At the same time, he also serves as the perfect antithesis of Antonio, the sacrificial character in the play who embodies Christian hospitality.

Antonio's and Shylock's hatred towards each other ends up representing the contrast between Christianity and Judaism, in other words, the New Law and the Old Law. Thus, Shylock's persistence on the justice of the law counterbalances Portia's statement in which she is offering herself to Bassanio, as she declares, she stands for sacrifice (3.2.57). From the Christian's point of view, love will overcome anything. According to Steven Marx (2000), their opposition contrasts law and works versus love and faith which mark essentially the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Notwithstanding, the law that Shylock keeps defending will be the one betraying him in the end. The justice that he seeks during the whole play will condemn him to death, yet the Christian's proposal will spare his life.

Shylock's outcome seems to bring happiness to others as it is shown in the last act. His conversion comes along with the relinquish of his wealth, which becomes eventually, Lorenzo's and Jessica's property. The forced conversion is followed by a financial windfall, which is linked at the same time with St Paul's metaphor for the equivalent victory (Stevens, 2000). This fact seems to prove Antonio's rightfulness in his acts although his actions make him contradict his beliefs. Antonio ends up behaving like his adversary. The Christian takes revenge on Shylock by converting him and distributing all of his fortune whereas Shylock is apparently the only one who perishes.

Despite the fact that the ending of the play appeals to be merry for all the characters, Jessica does not seem as delighted as the others in her final scene with Lorenzo. They both allude to literary lovers in order to imply their true feelings. Moreover, her father's conversion does not delight her as much as it appears to be. There are several stances in

the play in which Shylock states the discrimination he had to endure just because of his faith and that mistreatment has deeply influenced Jessica.

My purpose is to show that, despite the comedic conventions, the resolution of the conflict of conversion in Acts IV and V is deeply disturbing. Both conversions are required in order to reach the happy ending necessary to the Christians. Moreover, they bring along a profound transformation regarding Jews and Christians. Antonio, who is supposedly a good Gentile role model, does not act as such when he encounters Shylock, whereas the latter who apparently embodies the Devil, ends up being the character that suffers the most in the play.

1. The Establishment of the Contract

1.1. Shylock's Advantage

Shylock's and Antonio's first encounter presents the main conflict between Christians and Jews in the play. According to Kaplan, thirteenth-century England gave rise to the concept of a Jewish physical identity, which could be linked to a modern definition of race constructed for instance, both in class and religious terms (2008: 2). Jews were regarded as inferior and it was believed that through conversion their appeal to others would change. Their conversion was necessary in order to fulfil St Paul's prophecy regarding Christ's Second Coming, but it "was also the object of intense suspicion, as converts were assumed to continue to practice Judaism privately, distinguishing their real beliefs behind a façade of Christian obedience and piety" (Hirschfield, 2006: 62). Even if the conversion was successful, former Jews were still suspected on. Ideas about their false Christianity were still being spread, and consequently, the concept regarding their inferiority did not cease.

Financially, these discrepancies can also be seen in their encounter. Meanwhile the Christians gain money through the wares sold at markets or naval commerce, such as Antonio's case, Jews obtain profit through usury. It is expected from Antonio being a merchant, to be confident when it comes to financial dealings, yet he "is not a sharp opportunistic capitalist but a gentle figure of melancholy and sadness" (Holderness, 2010: 58). Contrary to him, Shylock as an usurer confidently lends money charged with interest. His practices are not approved by the Christian, and they constitute another reason for his hatred. As a cause of usury being portrayed in the Old Testament, Antonio regards it as immoral and detestable (Holderness, 2010: 71). Despite his humbleness, Antonio embodies the risk-taking merchant who takes the deal without any regret. Contrary to him, Shylock is an usurer who thinks about his deals carefully and who later on, will doubt about the Christian's purpose.

Theologically, the Jews' existence was regarded as inferior and sinful. They were treated by subjects of servitude and their subordination was justified because of their responsibility for Jesus's death (Kaplan, 2008: 11). For that same reason, they were depicted with an unmistakable physical appearance: "with red or black curly hair, large noses, dark skin, and the infamous *foetor judaicus*, the bad smell that identified them as Jews" (Adelman, 2003: 10). Related to this issue, Salerio actually comments on the physical distinction of Shylock and Jessica. According to the Christian, there is more difference between them than between jet and ivory (3.1.34 – 35). It was estimated that the Jewish woman was whiter both in flesh and blood than the Jewish man (Kaplan, 2008: 20). Jessica who converts willingly will be considered whiter than Shylock for that same reason. Moreover, Shylock's appearance will constitute another reason for the Christians to link him with the Devil.

Additionally, the Jewish community was also required to wear particular clothing or badge that distinguished them from the rest (Adelman, 2003: 10). This badge and particular clothing are both alluded in the play: “For suff’rance is the badge of all our tribe” (1.3.107) and “And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine” (1.3.109). Both allusions mark a difference between the two communities and the mistreatment that the Jews had to endure because of their faith. Furthermore, according to Adelman, the badge “serves to register not only the blood kinship of the Jews but more particularly their derivation from the tribes of Israel and hence their claim to a sacred nationhood based on that derivation” (2008: 93).

The Jews are regarded as a “sacred nation” by Shylock (1.3.45) and they are also addressed as his “tribe” (1.3.48). By doing so, the character “identifies Christian animosity as ethnic hatred; but the tribe is also ‘sacred’, so there is a religious dimension to the reciprocal dislike” (Holderness, 2010: 70). As Holderness argues, Shylock acknowledges the Christian’s hatred against him which is both racial and religious at the same time. Thereby, Shylock distances himself from Antonio by referring to himself as a member of this sacred nation.

Shylock’s monologue after the Christian’s proposal to dine with them portrays the hostility he has towards Antonio. In his discourse, he also “angrily voices a language of racial exclusiveness” (Holderness, 2010: 69). Money being Shylock’s main concern, makes the character establish relationships with others which consist in financial transactions (Holderness, 2010: 68). Shylock’s hatred for Antonio is theological, “I hate him because he is a Christian” (1.3.39), as well as financial, “He lends out money gratis” (1.3.40). Antonio lending money freely irritates Shylock because the Christian’s acts of kindness abate his chances of making more outcome through usury.

Despite the fact that the deal can grant Shylock a big amount of wealth, the Jew debates with himself whether or not he should lend them the three thousand ducats. He seems unsure, yet at the same time he recognizes the advantage he possesses: “How many months / Do you desire? Rest you fair, good signor, / Your worship was the last man in our mouths” (1.3.55 – 57). The Jew keeps mocking Antonio, because for once, he finds himself being in charge. After many instances, finally he is superior to the Christians. In addition, Shylock is not the one seeks out business with Antonio and Bassanio, the Christians are the ones who come to him with the monetary request (Holderness, 2010: 67). Seeing Shylock’s attitude, Antonio acknowledges that he would never take his bond, yet he affirms that he will make an exception this time for Bassanio: “I’ll break a custom” (1.3.61). By doing so, Antonio’s self-sacrificing attitude is portrayed. He is willing to sacrifice his beliefs in order to help his friend. Shylock upon seeing Antonio’s accordance with him, decides to take a step further in order to justify their bond.

1.2. Justification of the Deal

As a way to justify their bond and to defend usury as another form of business, Shylock resorts to the story of Jacob and Laban (1.3.68 – 87). Consequently, the tale also validates his possible gains through a charged interest. Shylock presents the tale with Laban and Jacob being compromised with the lambs, and keeping them is presented as an act of kindness. For the Jew, the “excess” of the lambs is comparable to the interest the usurer takes from loans (Holderness, 2010: 72). Shylock defends it as a way of becoming successful and he adds the following: “Fall parti-coloured lambs, and those were Jacob’s. / This was a way to thrive, and he was blest; / And thrift is blessing, if men steal it not.” (1.3. 85 – 87). Because Jacob was blessed, there was nothing wrong in his actions. This kind of thrift is not considered unholy, therefore, in the Jew’s eyes it is worthy. In addition, what Jacob did is not considered stealing. The story that Shylock

narrates defends usury, and at the same time, the Jew portrays it in a way that shows that it is not dishonourable.

In reverse, Antonio does not define Jacob's doings as blessing, but as "venture" (1.3.88). He rejects Shylock's assertion because Jacob's adventure entails risk, which is subjected to providence (Holderness, 2010: 72). In Shylock's eyes, Jacob is an usurer like him, meanwhile in Antonio's eyes, he behaves like a merchant taking risks. Holderness, resumes it in the following words: "Both opponents read the same scripture to produce different meanings justifying their respective commercial parties" (2010: 72). The same story is read in different ways regarding their interest. The Jews interpret the episode as a way of honouring usury, whereas the Christians see it as an opportunity to increase their mercantile businesses. This episode reinforces the idea that even though both characters are enemies, they do in fact, complement each other.

Antonio is aware of Shylock's intentions during the whole exchange and that is why he has the need to warn Bassanio: "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" (1.3.95). Antonio addresses the Jew as the Devil, and Shylock instead of defending his honour to the Christians, he returns to the deal. Nevertheless, Shylock once again seems hesitant with the deal. He lists everything he had to suffer because of Antonio, and now he finds himself in a position in which the Christians ask for his help. Shylock is aware that even if he is a "stranger cur" (1.3.115), he is the one with the upper hand. However, Antonio addresses him as a dog (1.3.124). The Christian "feels free to treat Shylock as a scorn because he does not see him as part of his moral community" (Kitch, 1997: 101).

Nevertheless, Antonio is aware that the Jew will never lend him the money he has requested with a forgiving attitude. Consequently, he asks Shylock not to lend him the money as a friend but as an enemy (Kitch, 1997: 100). For that reason, Shylock's extra charge is not related to money. In case Antonio did not pay off his debt, he demands an

“equal pound of your fair flesh to be cut off” (1.3.45 – 46). Even though the Jew is aware of the real value that a pound of flesh has compared to a lamb, he insists on it in order to close the deal.

Although Shylock is the one who seems in charge during the whole scene, Antonio does something unexpected towards the end. He makes an ironic reference to conversion: “Hie thee, gentle Jew. / The Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind” (1.3.174 – 175). Antonio must predict the Jew’s conversion because of Shylock’s attitude. The Jew does not feel merciful nor feels sympathy towards the Christians in any moment. Even though Antonio was earlier presented as a generous and merciful figure, a “contrary side of his personality emerges in his treatment of Shylock” (Kitch, 1997: 93 – 94). His generosity disappears, and instead a cruel Antonio takes form. As Shylock has stated before, Antonio has mistreated him in several ways and because of that, his hatred towards the Christian community has continued to grow. Meanwhile Antonio speaks to Bassanio patiently and using the language of love, he uses harsh adjectives and even treats him as the Devil when it comes to his exchanges with Shylock.

At the same time, because of their mutual hatred towards each other, Antonio needs to prove that he will not become like Shylock and succumb to his desires. As Kitch argues, one of the reasons why Antonio feels resentment towards Shylock is because the Jew is able to conduct his desires contrary to him (1997: 101). Yet their mutual hostility towards each other ends up becoming part of their identities. The Christian’s last words regarding Shylock’s conversion also serve as a foreshadowing in which he proves that Shylock’s dream to take revenge will not come true. As the story develops, Shylock will not become the villain but the victim.

2. Jessica's Departure

2.1. Jessica's Repudiation of her Jewish Identity and Heritage

Jessica's first appearance already implies her conversion at the end of the play. She feels sorry for her father because Lancelot will abandon him, yet she also suggests that the servant behaves like a "merry devil" (2.3.2). Moreover, that is not the only reference she states related to the Devil, she also admits that her house is hell. Similarly, Lancelot refers to her as the "Most beautiful pagan, most sweet Jew!" (3.2.10 – 11). Both characters allude to their connections to the devil since the beginning of their exchange. Lancelot's abandonment anticipates Jessica's and therefore, Lancelot himself considers it a conversion (Adelman, 2008: 43). However, Lancelot is not able to convert unless he has his father's blessing. By doing so, he is able to "make the transition from Jew to Christian" (Adelman, 2008: 41). After abandoning his master, Lancelot will be the one responsible to guide Jessica towards the path of Christianity.

In addition, Jessica defines her own attitude towards her father as a sin because she feels ashamed of herself for being both Jewish and her father's child (2.3.17). Jessica "fantasizes a radical separation from her father's blood and "country" as the price of inclusion in the social club to which her husband belongs, and as the only way to cast off her status as a Jew" (Adelman, 2008: 74 – 75). Even though she is committing a sin by abandoning and robbing her father, she prioritizes her desire to finally pursue salvation.

Ending the conflict between Christians and Jews ends up being Jessica's true desire. In order to do so, she must become a Christian and a loving wife (2.3.31). Even though Jessica needs her father's blessing as Lancelot had done before, she is aware that she will never obtain it. For that same reason, Lorenzo "is invoked not as the solution to the problem of Jessica's erotic desire but as the solution to the problem of being her father's daughter" (Adelman, 2008: 71). Jessica does define herself as Shylock's daughter

by blood, still she defends that her characters are different than his (2.3.18 – 19). In this case, Jessica seems to present herself as a sacrificing figure for the entire Jew's well-being.

Nevertheless, Lorenzo implies that Shylock would also sacrifice himself for Jessica: "If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven, / It will be for his gentle daughter's sake" (2.4.33 – 34). By doing so, Lorenzo discloses Shylock's true attitude. So far, the only possibility of Shylock converting to Christianity is only related to Jessica's well-being. The Jew is not portrayed as a cold parenting figure any longer because as Lorenzo states, he is willing to sacrifice himself in order to help his daughter. Although Shylock's main concern is his wealth, deep down he also cares about his daughter.

Lorenzo's allusion to Jessica being gentle, brings back once again the question regarding the conversion's aftermath. It is first presented when Antonio refers to it by calling Shylock a gentle Jew (1.2.173), yet "Antonio's formulation thus denies its initial premise: though a Jew might conceivably turn Christian, a Hebrew by definition cannot turn gentile" (Adelman, 2008: 78). Even if the Jew does convert to Christianity, he will not turn Gentile. Christians will not acknowledge him as a fellow Christian nor will admit that he changed his nature.

Consequently, by definition Jessica cannot convert because she is a Hebrew too. Christians are depicted as loving figures because they are indeed "gentle", yet Antonio spits on Shylock, and Jessica ends up robbing and abandoning her father in order to escape to Belmont (Kermode, 2001: 72). Moreover, Shylock despite being portrayed as an unforgiving figure who seems incapable of being gentle, still it is implied that he would convert for his daughter's well-being. Throughout the play, the Gentiles do not act exactly as it is expected and their true behaviour when they come in contact with the Jews can be morally questioned. Jessica who desires to save both communities will end up being

Lancelot's "torchbearer" (2.4.40). Moreover, she will steal her father's money knowing that is morally wrong. Yet the other Christians such as Antonio and Bassanio will enjoy the theft because it will act as a punishment for Shylock.

2.2. Lancelot's Guidance

After Jessica's departure, Lorenzo reveals to Graziano the reasons why he loves Jessica so much. She looks wise and fair in his eyes, yet the most prominent aspect that he conveys is that "she hath proved herself" to him (2.6.55). By the end of the play, Jessica as an outsider figure must be part of the Christian society. By disguising herself and stealing her father's patrimony, Jessica "enacts a shadowy version of Jacob's theft and therefore of the passing of the promise from Jew to Christian" (Adelman, 2008: 67). Once again, Jacob's theft is seen as a venture in the Christian's eyes, yet in Shylock's eyes now it is seen as a sign of betrayal. Because of this, his desire to revenge will grow significantly. Additionally, Lorenzo, who plays the role of the Christian lover and subsequently the husband, will be the one in charge to incorporate Jessica into that Christian community.

Notwithstanding, Jessica is assured that her conversion will be after her elopement, yet Lancelot reveals to her that it does not exactly work like that. The former servant unfolds the truth to her: "The sins of the father / are to be laid upon the children" (3.5. 1 – 2). Meaning that, her father's sins are to become her sins too. As a result of Jessica also being damned, Lancelot instructs her to marry a Christian. Marriage is the only way in which she can be saved. Consequently, Jessica herself "seems to assume that her conversion will be an unproblematic consequence of her marriage" (Adelman, 2008: 70).

Jessica tries to define herself as her mother's daughter (3.5.12) hoping that in that way she will not be damned. However, Lancelot quickly dismisses the idea by admitting

that her mother was also a sinner like her father: “I fear you are damned both by / father and mother” (3.5.13 – 14). Subsequently, Jessica decides to define herself as a Christian’s wife. She proclaims that the one who will save her will be Lorenzo, her husband, as he had already converted her into a Christian (3.5.17 – 18). Her husband is the one who had the power to make her a Christian (Adelman, 2003: 7). Even though it is the Church the one who is responsible for one’s conversion, in this case it is the husband who transforms her.

Despite Jessica’s optimism, the play demonstrates that conversion is by far, more complicated in practice than in theory. As it was stated earlier before, even if the conversion was successful, former Jews were still being suspected on. In addition, they were not welcome at all in the Christian community and the popular belief regarding their social inferiority did not cease. For instance, even though Jessica persistently defends that her conversion was successful and that she is a converted Christian, the others keep on regarding her a Jew because of her blood lineage (Adelman, 2008: 74 – 75). In the Christians’ eyes, blood lineage is more important than religion. Jessica distances herself from her father by stating that their beliefs and characters are different, in the Christian’s eyes she will always be a Jew’s daughter and thereby, she will always be damned.

3. The Trial

3.1 Shylock’s Legalism

At the beginning of the court scene, Shylock is associated once again with the Devil. For that reason, him showing any kind of mercy towards Antonio is unexpected. The Christians expect a “gentle answer” from him (4.1.32) and Shylock agrees to do so by swearing on Sabbath. Despite knowing his nature, Antonio expects Shylock to behave like a Christian. As the Christians are now the victims, they expect the Jew to act in a

gentler way. The Duke by commenting so, he “has already invalidated what he seems to ask for” (Hirschfield, 2008: 73). As it has been stated before, Shylock is incapable of being both gentle and Jew at the same time. Hitherto, the only possible way for Antonio to be saved is by Shylock showing mercy towards him seeing that the Law cannot be modified. In the Christian’s eyes, because of his Jewish heart (4.1.79), Shylock will never be benevolent towards anyone, specially towards Antonio who has mistreated him for a long time.

During the trial, the Jew does not say that he hates Antonio. Instead, he declares that he bears the Christian, yet he acknowledges that Antonio did not act according to the contract and as a result of that, Shylock lost three thousand ducats (4.1.57 – 61). Owing to Antonio had not been faithful to the contract, Shylock demonstrates that he is legally right. Even though the Law seems to be on the Jew’s side, the Duke still hopes that Shylock will relent on the issue. Therefore, Bassanio tries to cancel the deal by offering Shylock more money in exchange of Antonio’s pardon (4.1.83). For once, Shylock “is placed in a position where he is able to expose Christian hypocrisy, and to confer dignity on Judaic culture and tradition” (Holderness, 2010: 81). Instead of agreeing and taking the money, Shylock refuses because he knows that no one can help Antonio. Moreover, if the Duke favoured the Christian, it would be demonstrated that in Venice there was not real justice.

Confronted with Shylock’s reaction, the Duke implies once again that Shylock is incapable of forgiving Antonio because he lacks mercy: “How shat thou hope for mercy, rend’ring none?” (4.1.87). Hence, he implies that Shylock will soon stand a last judgement in which his actions will be judged due to his lack of mercy towards Antonio. Shylock responds by stating that in view of the fact that he did nothing wrong, he shall not dread any judgement (4.1.88).

Moreover, the Jew accuses the Christians of acting the same way as he does. As well as Shylock bought the pound of flesh with the three thousand ducats, the Christians also had bought slaves before (4.1.89 – 99). With this last statement, the Jew realizes that he could emerge victorious from the legal process. Additionally, he could show himself morally superior to his enemy Antonio because at court, all of them were being treated equally by the Venetian Law (Holderness, 2010: 83). Even though he is a stranger, an outsider of the Christian community, the Law does not disregard him yet. In addition, by referring to the Christian's investment in slave, Shylock also exhibits that there is not that much difference in the way that Christians and Jews behave.

Throughout the first part of the trial, before Portia arrives, Antonio keeps giving up on his life. He presents himself like a Christ-like figure, sacrificing himself for Bassanio's sake. The Christian agrees that he is doomed, and is willing to accept this destiny, which leads to his death. Antonio is placed as the avatar of Hospitality, which at the same time, reclaims the gentlemanly virtue of hospitality in a mercantile society (Adelman, 2008: 15). Furthermore, as a last request, the Christian employs Bassanio to live and to write the words on his gravestone: "You cannot better be employed, Bassanio, / Than to live still and write mine epitaph" (4.1.116 – 117). Antonio has resigned to his fate and accepts to die in the Jew's hands.

As a result of Antonio's last plea, Bassanio gets angry and compares Shylock's desires with those of an animal: "for thy desires / Are wolfish, bloody, starved, and ravenous" (4.1.136 – 137). The Christians see Shylock as an unhuman beast whereas Shylock sees himself as an avenger who is finally granted justice. The Law will serve the punishment that Antonio deserves for abusing him. Even though Bassanio tries to make Shylock unseal the bond, the Jew states that Bassanio is only offending his own lungs by

speaking so loud (4.1.138 – 140). Additionally, Shylock's repeated statement "I stand here for law" (4.1.141) will once again set a distance between the Jews and the Christians.

Revenge, being essential in Shylock's eyes, usually contrasts with Justice, yet in this case it appears not to do so. Justice absorbs the function of revenge and declares the bond to be right in the eyes of the Law. In the view of the fact that Shylock refuses to compel to mercifulness, the Duke is forced to request the Doctor's help, which will end up being Portia disguised as a man. Portia will be the one to enlighten Shylock about his wrongdoings. She will turn the tables so that Antonio will be acquitted.

3.2. Antonio's Premise: The Jew's Conversion into a Christian

Portia's arrival at the court scene marks a statement about Jews and Christians: "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.171). By questioning so, she implies that both characters are indistinguishable and that they are equal in the tribunal of Venetian justice (Holderness, 2010: 57). The Christian feigns to not know Antonio and moreover, she will pretend to be on Shylock's side. Subsequently, she advises Shylock to be merciful towards Antonio (4.1.179), yet once again the Jew refuses to do so. In the Christian's eyes, to show mercy equals forgiving someone. In this case, showing benevolence to Antonio would mean at the same time to forget all his past actions. Shylock, as the former victim, is asked to condone his aggressor.

To the Christians, mercy must come like the "gentle rain from heaven" (4.1.182). Moreover, they pray for it, and that same prayer teaches them the "deeds of mercy" (4.1.199). In this respect, Holderness studies Portia's attitude and states the following: "[she] seems to cite the opposition between Judaism and Christianity as religious respectively of justice and mercy" (Holderness, 2010: 82). Meaning that, Portia associates Christianity with being merciful and Judaism with being fair. Contrary to the Jews in the play, Christians constantly rely on faith and grace. Therefore, they seek for mercy instead

of justice. For instance, Antonio follows the logic of love. Because he loves Bassanio, he risks his life so that the other feels grateful towards him. Antonio keeps resenting himself in a humble way under the façade of the victim.

Seeing Antonio's attitude, Shylock craves for the law (4.1.203). The Jew desires to win the trial because as Portia states: "Lawfully, the Jew is right" (4.1.228). Notwithstanding, there is a turn of events in the eyes of the Venetian Law. The original contract states that there must be a pound of flesh, yet blood is not included (4.1.303 – 304). The laws of Venice expound that even by one drop of Christian blood, the lands and goods from the aggressor will be confiscated and therefore, they will be owned by the state of Venice (4.1.306 – 309). Portia, being the Doctor of Laws, must display how Shylock is lawfully mistaken in order to save Antonio.

The Jew finally becomes aware that he will not be able to win the trial seeing Portia's comment. Hence, Shylock decides to take upon Bassanio's offer and requests for the ducats in exchange of Antonio's amnesty. Because he has overlooked the opportunity to win the trial by accepting the ducats, Portia "has no choice but to proceed to give him 'law', the 'justice', he asks for" (Holderness, 2010: 84). Furthermore, she encourages the Jew to cut Antonio so that he will be punished (4.1.331, 339). The law that Shylock was so keen on sets a distance between him and the others once again. Since he tried to hurt a Venetian Christian, the Jew must be punished. Consequently, the bond is not allowed anymore. It is finally proven that under the Venetian Law, Jews and Christians do not undergo the same process.

As long as Shylock continues to be a Jew, he will never be considered a Venetian citizen. Instead, he is considered an alien, an outsider. Therefore, following the laws of Venice, if an alien ever indirectly or directly attempted to murder any citizen, he or she would give the half of his property to the victim and the other half to the state (4.1.343

– 350). Additionally, his or her life will lie “in the mercy of the Duke only” (4.1.351 – 352). Portia saves the day not only by citing the absence of blood in the contract and the law that protects citizens, but she also cites the law which distinguishes racially both Jessica and Shylock (Adelman, 2003: 23). Because of their Jewish blood, meaning their Jewish nature, they do not deserve any mercy. Even though the Christians kept persisting on the idea that Shylock had to forgive Antonio, they do not doubt about the Jew’s punishment. Instead of forgiving his deeds, they state that Shylock shall have nothing but penalty. Mercy and forgiveness are supposed to be Christian qualities, yet when it comes to Shylock’s judgement, none of them appear.

Antonio finally decides to intervene in the trial by demanding two things from Shylock in exchange of sparing his life. First, he must become a Christian (4.1.383). And secondly, when the Jew dies, all of his possessions must be entrusted to Lorenzo and his recently converted Christian daughter (4.1.385 – 386). By demanding these two things, the Christian makes the Jew’s forced conversion a “triumph of community over the destructive literalism of the law” (Kitch, 2008: 152). Antonio, who tries to present himself as Shylock’s saviour, illustrates the superiority of Christian community over the Venetian law. As Beauchamp argues, the Christian’s “stipulation that Shylock converts to Christianity stands as the greatest act of kindness that he could have possibly rendered his tormentor. Antonio saves Shylock from eternal damnation” (2001: 55). The Christian acts as a Christ-like figure around Bassanio specially. And in his eyes, converting Shylock is a great act of mercy that should be followed. By doing that act of kindness, he is able to save Shylock’s life and prevent him from damnation.

Despite his gentle nature, as it was stated before, Antonio does not hesitate to bring money into the issue when it comes to Shylock’s conversion. Even though the Jew agrees with his punishment by affirming that he is content (4.1.389), he leaves the stage

feeling unwell (4.1.392). Shylock's conversion actually feels more like a confiscation of the Jew's wealth, instead of a conversion at all. Rather than talking about his sins for being a Jew, the Christians immediately engage themselves with the question on who will keep Shylock's property. Antonio's proposal is supported and encouraged by the others in the room because it is seen as an act of mercy and forgiveness.

4. The Resolution

4.1. Jessica's Transgressive Romance

The final act of the play takes place in Belmont, the city of love. It opens with a typical romantic ambience, in which the two lovers are looking at the stars, yet the discourse between Lorenzo and Jessica does not exactly imply happiness. As Conti argues, in Belmont everything is not as well as it appears (2017: 178). The references they allude to in Act 5 portray an ending that is not necessarily pleasant for both Christians and former Jews. Even though both conversions were accomplished, Jessica will prove that her final settlement does not make her as delighted as the other Christians.

According to Conti, the repeated refrain "In such a night" that opens the scene, echoes the formula "this is the night" from the Exultet, the hymn that opens the Easter Vigil liturgy. This liturgy is celebrated by the Christians to honour the Resurrection of Jesus (2017: 183). Moreover, he argues that this allusion might mean that none of the characters have forgotten about Shylock because his and Jessica's conversions have been the last acts in order to grant the Second Coming of Jesus (2017: 183 – 184). By referring to this echo so many times, it reinforces the idea of the conversion's triumph, yet Jessica will later allude to Shylock in her last words.

The refrain is accompanied by the mention of literary characters such as Thisbe, Dido and Medea, who appear together in *The Legend of Good Women* by Geoffrey Chaucer. Nevertheless, Lorenzo's allusion to Troilus and Cressida (5.1.4 – 6) and Jessica's reference to Medea later on (5.1.13 – 14) portray the obstacles to a romantic closure (Kitch, 2008: 154). All of these literary lovers that they mention in their playful banter are related to a betrayal in love and the transgression of a bond. In addition, Kaplan in his research notes that all of these relationships end tragically. By doing so, they "suggest that Jessica and Lorenzo are still religiously and ethnically divergent and that their love will have a similar fate" (Kaplan, 2008: 27 – 28). Even though Jessica has finally converted and has finally become Lorenzo's wife, still she is not accepted as a fellow Christian. In the Christian's eyes, her father's blood has not vanished despite the fact that he has also converted. Therefore, they still think that both, she and Shylock may return to Judaism behind their backs.

The exchange between the lovers proves that they are not as happy as one would expect them to be. This is clearly shown in Lorenzo's hint that Jessica stole her father's money: "In such a night did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew / And with an unthrift love did run from Venice to Belmont" (5.1.15 – 16). Both of them think about the elopement and their marriage as an act of theft, a sin. By stealing from her father, Jessica and Lorenzo were able to run from Venice to Belmont together. Consequently, their happiness is at the expense of Shylock's misery.

Conversely, Jessica does not hesitate to imply that he also committed a sin, he lied: "Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well / Stealing her soul with many vows of faith / And ne'er a true one" (5.1.17 – 19). In these lines, Jessica implies that Lorenzo's love towards her was never true. Her statement arises the suspicion that maybe what Lorenzo was after was not really Jessica but Shylock's property. Even though their

exchange is supposed to be playful, both characters cannot help but allude to the reality they are living.

Yet their continuous implications about their love do not end there. Lorenzo insinuates that Jessica angrily just slandered their love in her last statement. Nevertheless, he also expresses that in the end she would forgive him (5.1.20 – 22). Subsequently, she replies by stating “I would outnight you, did nobody come” (5.1.23), meaning that she would abandon him and prevent him from obtaining Shylock’s property supposing no one came by to interrupt them. Yet Stefano approaches them and Jessica does not say anything else. His arrival prevents Jessica from speaking up about Lorenzo’s true feelings and intentions.

4.2. The Taming of Conversion

After Stefano’s arrival, some musicians welcomed by Lorenzo enter the scene. He requests them to play some music yet Jessica responds by saying “I am never merry when I hear music” (5.1.69). The atmosphere is supposed to be a happy one considering that all the Christians are celebrating the triumph of both conversions and overall, the triumph of love. This final act starts at night and ends in the morning, indicating the start of a new day and at the same time, the start of a new period in which Christianity places itself over Judaism.

Nonetheless, Jessica’s last words echo with Shylock’s in the earlier acts, when he states his hatred towards music. In her exchange with Lorenzo, she demonstrates that she is beginning to regret her actions because they have led to her and her father’s misery. Additionally, her final line “functions both to register her alienation from the merry company at Belmont and to align her with her father’s melancholy and musicless house” (Adelman, 2008: 76 – 77). Contrary to the Christians in Belmont, she is not happy with her and her father’s outcome, therefore, she is not in the mood to celebrate anything. She

feels alienated like her father from the rest of the characters because they still set a distance between the two communities. Even though they claim that they have changed, the Christians do not treat them as if that outcome had really occurred. Following the literary lovers that she and her husband alluded previously, the repercussions of her actions have made her unhappy.

Afterwards, Lorenzo seeing her wife's behaviour states that music will put Jessica in a contemplative attitude. Because of the "hot condition of their blood" (5.1.74), the Jews', they behave like beasts. Yet when they both hear music "Their savage eyes turned to a modest gaze / By the sweet power of music" (5.1.78 – 79). The Jews are treated as "savages", and music is the one that changes their attitude towards a one that is humbler. Lorenzo implies that "either music is inherently within a person or is not, but those who lack music in their souls are threats to society at large" (Kitch, 2008: 154). Even though Jessica proved herself to be an example to follow, she is still doubted about her beliefs. She transformed into a successful converted who admitted that Judaism was inferior to Christianity and therefore, the Old Law should be replaced by the New Law. Marriage was the door that opened her path to salvation, yet to the other Christians she is treated like a beast that can only be tamed through music.

5. Conclusions and Further Research

Despite the fact that Shylock's and Jessica's conversions had been predicted since the first act, their outcome does not guarantee their acceptance towards Christianity. Shylock is forced to convert because it is the only route that would permit him to keep living. Contrary to him, Jessica, who was pleased to convert, is treated as an outsider by the rest of the Christians. Both of their final lines allude to the disconformity which they have been obliged to accept because of their faith.

Antonio's and Shylock's first meeting already foreshadows the Jew's outcome. Moreover, Antonio's behaviour towards the Jew proves that the issue of Jewish inferiority is significant in the play. The Jew's "tribe" and "sacred nation" will constitute important factors that will set a distance between the two Venetian communities. Moreover, they will also be pointed at repeatedly by the Christians as aspects that they must eradicate.

The trial presents the idea of justice and mercy contrasted with law and punishment. Shylock who starts the trial being "lawfully right" will end up judged and almost sentenced to death if it was not for Antonio's request. Contrary to him, Antonio, who presents himself as a Christ-like figure in front of Bassanio and the other Christians, will end up confiscating the Jew's wealth. In addition, he will distribute it among the other Christians. The act of kindness he presents to others resolves to an appropriation of someone's property in the name of justice.

Contrary to Shylock, Jessica is ashamed of her tribe and her sacred nation. This suggests that she constantly feels distressed about her Jewish nature and heritage. Therefore, after being converted she will proclaim that her belief in Christianity is a true one, yet Antonio and the others do not regard her as such:

Because her conversion is contingent on her marriage, the play carefully does not distinguish a moment after which Jessica is definitely converted, an omission that allows her for a chronic tension between Jessica and the others, in which she persistently regards her conversion to Christianity as complete, and they persistently regard her as a Jew. If the crucial distinction for her is religious, the crucial distinction for them is of blood lineage (Adelman, 2008: 74 – 75)

Despite her resolution when it comes to converting, in the end Jessica will end up being treated inferiorly just as her father had been previously. Her references to mythical lovers alongside Lorenzo's include a transgression of bonds similar to those in the play. These transgressions are also related to the tragic outcome of a pair of lovers. Consequently, Jessica implies that Lorenzo's devotion towards her was never a true one.

Conversion was treated as a path to Christianity and therefore, it was considered that it would also lead to eternal salvation. Yet blood lineage will constitute an important factor when it comes to the aftermath of these conversions. Their Jewish nature will remain in the Christian's minds and it will establish a reason for them to put a distance between converts and the other Christians. Therefore, there will be no mercy in heaven for both former Jews because of their Jewish heritage.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Shakespeare, William. (Ed. by Jay L. Halio). *The Merchant of Venice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008

Secondary Sources

Adelman, Janet. "Her Father's Blood: Race, Conversion and Nation in *The Merchant of Venice*". *Representations*, 81, 2008: 4 – 30

———. *Blood Relations : Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008

Beauchamp, Gorman. "Shylock's Conversion". *Humanitas*, 24, 1/2, July 2001: 55 – 92

Conti, Brooke. "Shylock Celebrates Easter". Jonathan Baldo, Isabel Karremann and Richard Wilson (eds.). *Forms of Faith: Literary Form and Religious Conflict in Early Modern England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017, 21 – 38

Hirschfeld, Heather. "We All Expect a Gentle Answer, Jew: *The Merchant of Venice* and the Psychotheology of Conversion". *ELH*, 73, 1, 2006: 61 – 81

Holderness, Graham. *Shakespeare and Venice*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014

- Kaplan, Lindsay M. "Jessica's Mother: Medieval Constructions of Jewish Race and Gender in *The Merchant of Venice*". *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58, 1, Spring 2008: 1 – 30
- Kermode, Frank. *Shakespeare's Language*. London: Penguin Books, 2001
- Kitch, Aaron. "Shylock's Sacred Nation". *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 59 (2), 2008: 131 – 155
- Lewalski, Barbara K. "Biblical Allusion and Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*". *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 13, 3, Summer 1962: 327 – 343
- Marx, Steven. *Shakespeare and the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000
- Paris, Bernard J. "The Merchant of Venice." *Imagined Human Beings: A Psychological Approach to Character and Conflict in Literature*, 1997: 93-104
- Saphiro, James. *Shakespeare and the Jews*. New York: Columbia Press, 1996