

The Game of Hatred on A Multicultural Map: A Study of Shakespeare's Shylock

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ABSTRACT: *Shylock, in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, is presented as a Jewish character navigating a multicultural society characterized by ethnic and religious differences. The Venetian society in the play accepts inhabitants of different ethnicities and religious beliefs, but the line of acceptance is very thin. A clear picture of tension and obsessive hatred between the Christians and 'the Jew' is noted in Shakespeare's Venice. The Christians perceive Shylock primarily through his Jewish identity rather than his individuality. Shylock's given name is repeatedly replaced by the word 'Jew' and its cognates to depersonalize him. They defame him and his community; they dishonour his religion. He cries out loud for ethnic and religious compassion, but ends up being forcibly converted to Christianity. The humiliations received and the religious persecution invite the Jewish moneylender's monstrosity. He is formed and shaped by the social mistreatment of the cosmopolitan society. He starts playing the 'game of hatred' that his fellow Christians have started. The paper seeks to appraise Shakespeare's Shylock as an artefact of injustice by critically examining some of the noted speeches from the play. It aims to establish that the evil shown through Shylock is nothing but the reaction of othering him on a multicultural map of Venice.*

KEYWORDS: *Alterity, Hatred, Injustice, Intolerance, Other.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The world today is on its way to finding a more acceptable definition of the term 'multiculturalism'. The ping-pong term has come under fire several times and has been the cause of anxiety in several contexts in world history. The concept of this paradigm has undergone numerous changes, and the 21st Century tries to give it a new flavour. Caleb Rosado (1996), in his essay *Toward a Definition of Multiculturalism*, defines multiculturalism in the following way:

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A system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society. (p. 2)

The diversity in a society should be recognized, and ethnic/racial minorities should be treated with deference and compassion, which is the essence of multiculturalism. As Nye (2007) puts it, in a multicultural context, diversity should be respected, and values, ideas, and practices that differ from those of the dominant culture ought to be accepted (pp. 113–114). Multiculturalism is meant to encourage "tolerance toward others", as tolerating the presence of diverse groups adds to the beauty of a multicultural community (Heckmann, 1993, p. 245). Ethnic/racial intolerance disrupts multicultural education as it hinders the celebration with the 'other' and is a barrier to "unity in diversity" (Rosado, 1996, p. 4). Celebrating 'alterity' can tune the unity in diversity. In the 16th Century, Shakespeare's Venice embraced a multicultural, multi-ethnic society with all its hues and accepted the 'other'. Though surprising yet true, Venice comprised a population of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. However, Venice accepted the 'other' but could not celebrate with them. The Rialto functioned as the economic centre where diverse ethnic groups resided and engaged in trade. The influx of migrants into Venice during the sixteenth Century further strengthened its long-standing image of cultural pluralism. Although the city welcomed 'strangers' and 'outsiders' from across the globe, genuine tolerance was seldom extended. This multi-ethnic environment, along with the erosion of fixed social boundaries, generated considerable unease in Venice and England of the same period. A multicultural map was found, but it was never free from disputes and worries. The colours of a multicultural society produce black art that speaks of conflicts and tensions. Shakespeare's Venice in *The Merchant of Venice* gives a similar disturbing picture of disputes between the Jews and the Christians; traces of racial and religious intolerance are evident throughout.

The Merchant of Venice offers a tangible portrayal of how differing cultures and values come into conflict in the settings of Venice and Belmont, challenging the notion of 'unity in diversity'. In Shakespeare's plays, "the worlds he conjures expose the fractured complexities of multiculturalism" (Novy, 2013, p. 1-16). Such "fractured complexities" are prominently noted in *The Merchant of Venice*.

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In spite of the existence of multiple cultures, ethnicities and religions, "veiling or even denying one's actual beliefs and practices" formed the condition of Jewish life in contemporary heterogeneous Venice (Berek, 1998, p. 132). Jews had to veil or deny their views and beliefs to integrate with the Christians. Still, no such traces of integration were found in the community. Dehumanization and hatred are dominant in the play, which proves that even though the Christians and the Jews interact with each other, there is no kinship between them. The 'other' is always regarded as an 'outcast' in a multicultural society. However, modern views of multiculturalism enable us to look upon the 'other' not as a "potential predator, but as a profitable partner" (Rosado, 1996, p. 5). In the play, Antonio, the merchant, looks upon 'the Jew' as a "potential predator" in the guise of a "profitable partner" (Rosado, 1996, p. 5). He, along with the good Christians, tries to exploit Shylock ruthlessly. Shylock is the obvious 'other' who receives contempt and intolerance from the Christian majority in a culturally pluralistic environment, which leads to his disturbing social life. Shylock represents one of the clearest examples of the outsider figure in Shakespeare's works (Novy, 2013, p. 17). Shakespeare has pictured him as a significant outsider in the play. He experiences social alienation at its extreme. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that Christians and Jews do coexist in Shakespeare's society, but they lack harmony, and the chaos leads to the formation of beastly Jews. The paper aims to demonstrate that 'the Jew' in the play is a construct of a chaotic multicultural community where minorities are in no better position than 'outsiders'. It attempts to evaluate the character of Shylock by critically examining some of the noted speeches and selected scenes from the play.

The Jewish population represented just one among numerous immigrant groups residing in Venice. The Venetian Ghettos were their residential area, though, in the play, Shakespeare positions them in the heart of the city; despite being centrally placed, they were excluded from the mainstream community. The multicultural Venice allowed the blending of cultures, but it was not at all easy for the minority group to gel with the majority, retaining their 'original' identity. In 1290, the Jewish population was expelled from England, but their stereotypes remained. As there was no 'real' Jew in Shakespeare's England, their stereotypes became real images of Jews, no matter how perverse they were. Examining them, it became clear that they could be charged with almost any imaginable offence and condemned without consideration (Felsenstein, 1990, p. 18). They were portrayed as individuals with the vital potential to do all sorts of evil.

However, Shakespeare's Shylock is cast in a different light. Although the Christian majority tries to accuse 'the Jew' of every conceivable crime, and the most heinous of them is his insistence on Antonio's flesh as repayment, there seems to be another shade of the outsider that is hidden underneath. The definite article 'the' is used to identify Shylock as an 'alienated member' of the cosmopolitan metropolis, and it separates him from the 'virtuous Christians'. Shylock's flaws are starkly juxtaposed against the perceived moral qualities of the Christian opponents. The Christians are portrayed as the embodiments of fine qualities: merciful, kind, and faithful. On the contrary, Jews are the forces of darkness with no human qualities. The fact is that the Jew's vices are, to a great extent, the result of the majority's prejudice against him. He is pictured as a victim of prejudice in the play. Shakespeare implies that if the Jew appears as a villain, it is largely the result of the way the surrounding Christian community has defined and treated him. The criticism examines the societal condition of Shakespeare's Venice in *The Merchant of Venice*, which invited revengeful reactions from 'the Jew' and started the 'game of hatred'.

2. THE MERCHANT OF VENICE: A CRITICAL REVISION

The play engages with a wide array of questions tied to faith and ethnic difference. The spirit of multicultural tolerance reflected in Venetian society within the play, however, does not extend to the Jewish community. The social pariah is treated with indifference. Bernard Beck (2010), in his essay *The Taming of the Jew: The Merchant of Venice Is No Laughing Matter*, states, "every inequality in human society implies a demand for justice" (p. 30). The inequalities are meant to be addressed and brought into the light of justice. In the play, Shylock longs for justice, being an 'unequal minority', but he cannot openly demand it. However, in the 'pound of flesh' scene, he shows his audacity by demanding justice in a Venetian court, and he pays high for that in the end. The narrative of Shakespeare's romantic comedy, originally titled *The Jew of Venice*, revolves chiefly around the bond between Antonio and Shylock concerning a monetary loan. The story in the play revolves around the flesh-bond transaction between the two significant figures, and the strongest evidence of the Jew's molestation is marked in the trial scene. But there are traces of random bullying throughout the entire drama that do justify Shylock's rancour towards the Christians. The analysis explores the mistreatment of 'the Jew' and his prejudicial behaviour in the multicultural setting by examining key speeches and selected scenes from the play, while also offering reinterpretations of certain characters.

2.1. Analysis of Key Speeches and Selected Scenes

2.1.1. Othered in Trade and Family: Shylock's Place in a Hypocritical Venetian Society

Antonio has discriminated against Shylock for his way of usury. In those days, Jews' primary profession was money-lending, which gave them legitimized status, and in that way, they contributed to the merchant economy. Shylock is no exception in the play. As a moneylender, his job is to give loans at high rates of interest. Antonio can not take it lightheartedly, being a Christian and henceforth religiously abuses him for it; Shylock speaks of his abuse, "Signior Antonio, many a time and oft/ In the Rialto you have rated me/ About my moneys and my usances" (1.3.116-118, p. 35). The phrase "many a time and oft" makes clear that Antonio's attacks on the Jewish faith are far from unprecedented (1.3.116-118, p. 35). If his motive is rooted in religion, derived from the New Testament's prohibition against lending money at excessive interest, he should comply with other Christian injunctions too, like 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. Antonio does not seem to give his neighbour recognition, let alone love. Because of Shylock's cultural difference, Bassanio and Antonio turn to him with a petition for financial support. As the ethnic other, Shylock understands that in his society, moral worth is measured not by personal ethics but by financial standing (Lupton, 2001, p. 484). To be tagged as a good human being, one needs to have adequate money. Hence, he puts his maximum effort into taking care of his financial credit, as it can bring him a bit of merit, which he craves as an outsider.

Nevertheless, not only is 'the outsider' concerned with money, but the other prominent characters in the play also give the same impression. They are also money-minded and snobbish. Antonio criticizes Shylock's money obsession, yet the opening scene clearly reveals that money holds immense significance for the Christians as well: "had [they] such venture forth as Antonio has, their minds would continually turn upon it, even in church, be it noted" (1.1.15, p. 7). Even in church, they would not hesitate to contemplate money. Bassanio shares the same spirit. The nominally Christian tries to woo a lady "richly left" and "fair" (1.1.168-171, p. 17). He wishes to marry a lady with a legacy. His financial dependence on Antonio gives an unpleasant picture of the former and marks the significance of money in his life. Hence, it is not justified on Antonio's part to discriminate against Shylock for his obsession with money and interest-charging money lending, especially when he tries to settle the basic disagreement of principle between them by relating his case to Jacob's shrewdness; he mentions: "mark what Jacob did" (1.3.85, p. 33).

He tries to find common ground to prove his naivety, but even then, Antonio treats him no better and abuses him, saying that a "devil" recites scriptures for his devious ends (1.3.107, p. 33). If Shylock is a devil, Antonio and his fellow Christians are equally devilish in their treatment of Jews. Norman Nathan (1948) puts it correctly: "It is disturbing to discover that no Christian in the play is demonstrably a good man compared with any of the Jewish characters" (p. 171). In the play, no Christians are presented as human beings with good souls compared to the devilish Jews. However, Shylock never ceases to be a devil in his fellow Christians' eyes, no matter how hard he tries. He is never accepted. Heinz Antor (2018) explains that living "in a multicultural environment" means encountering "otherness" as "part of everyday life", and in such an environment, "alterity can also lead to conflicts that need to be resolved peacefully through the workings of the law" (p. 107). In the multicultural setting of *The Merchant of Venice*, the Christian law treats Shylock as an outsider and his 'otherness' is never welcomed. As a result, the disputes continue to thrive. The cultures coexist, but they do not amalgamate. Hence, the multicultural map of Shakespeare's Venice witnesses the game of hatred, which the benevolent Christians start.

In the 'daughter and ducats' scene, Shylock is gauged again when he cries out: "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!" (2.8.15-16, p.81). His passion is termed as 'confused'. He is criticized for his loud display of concern for money. However, in the beginning, Bassanio is seen in the same light, exhibiting his anxiety and lamenting over his poor condition: "Tis not unknown to you, Antonio,/ How much I have disabled mine estate,/ By something showing a more swelling port/ Than my faint means would grant continuance" (1.1.129-132, p. 15). It is undeniable that Shylock expresses his grief for his ducats, but it is not unnatural; he is equally worried for his daughter and is shattered by the thought of Jessica's eloping with a 'Christian'. As Smith (1964) notes, Jessica is regarded as an equal by the Christians in Venice, while in Belmont, Portia and Nerissa accept her as one of their own (p. 197). To be accepted by the Christian community and welcomed by fellow Christians, his daughter others him. She loses her identity in order to assimilate into the pluralistic community. This, too, comes as a fatal blow. Shylock detested Antonio for practical reasons, but after his daughter's treachery, he became obsessed with the thought of revenge. However, his passion suffers misrepresentation; he knows that his daughter's action would only demean him more in the eyes of the Christian majority, and this particular thought makes him insane. The humiliation hits him hard. It comes as a direct attack on his race, especially when his Christian counterparts, instead of sympathizing, mock him.

The same scene reveals that Shylock is not inherently evil or completely without sentiments when he feels tortured by his "daughter's utter disregard of the sentimental value of the ring given to him by his wife" (Thompson 2). He is seen mourning the loss of his dead wife's token of love. He is baffled by his daughter's insensible attitude. He declares that not even "a wilderness of monkeys" (3.1.121, p. 101) could have tempted him to part with it. These lines convey that he is not morally dead, as presented by his Christian neighbours. Instead, he is a devoted husband whose world collapses when his daughter abandons him. Vasvi Gupta (2019) argues that *The Merchant of Venice* portrays Shylock as a product of injustice, shaped by a negligent society and wounded by his daughter's betrayal (p. 377). Shylock is the ultimate victim of prejudice in both Venetian society and his own family. Betrayed by his daughter and mistreated in trade because of his identity, his anger grows and fuels the ongoing cycle of hatred.

2.1.2. Racial Prejudice and the Construction of Shylock's Hatred

Speaking of their racial alterity, Shylock states, "For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe"; as Jews, suffering is a common thing and getting abused by Christians is also a common sight; it appears that they are no longer surprised to witness their distress (1.3.120, p. 35). Their 'tribe' has been tagged with 'evil'; the Jews are frequently perceived as subhuman, likened more to animals than to people (Felsenstein, 1990, p. 20). They are 'less than human', if not inhuman, and more like 'brute beasts'. This exemplifies racial alterity; their race is intolerably inferior to that of Antonio. Again, from Antonio, his description comes as "cut-throat dog" (1.3.121, p. 35); and subsequently portrayed as having desires that are "are wolfish, bloody, starv'd, ravenous" (4.1.140, p. 151). Indiscriminate throwing of such verbal abuses touches the raw nerve in Shylock and gradually makes him a villain. In William Hazlitt's words, Shylock is:

A decrepit old man, bent with age and ugly with mental deformity, grinning with deadly malice, with the venom of his heart congealed in the expression of his countenance, sullen, morose, gloomy, inflexible, brooding over one idea, that of his hatred, and fixed on one unalterable purpose, that of his revenge. (Bloom, 2008, p. 51)

He is never associated with any form of 'goodness'. His age makes him "ugly"; he is 'mentally deformed' and is capable only of brooding over the idea of revenge, but the crucial thought remains camouflaged that the "venom" in the Jew's heart is injected by his Christian neighbour when he spits on his dress, addresses him as evil, abuses his religious beliefs: "You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,/And spet upon my Jewish gaberdine," (1.3.121-122, p. 35).

These lines from Shylock's powerful speech strongly highlight the injustices imposed by the prevailing Christian society. Antonio's response, "I am as like to call thee so again, / To spet on thee again, to spurn thee too," casts him in a worse light and drives sympathy for the victim Jew (1.3.140-141, p. 35). Such a deep-rooted sense of hatred has caused the Jew to detest Antonio and all Christians from the core of his heart. Antonio believes that Shylock is unworthy of being treated as a human. Shylock has been receiving hatred for a long time in the Cosmopolitan Venice, and Antonio is not even willing to mend his relationship with him: "If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not / As to thy friends," he declares, "But lend it rather to thine enemy, / Who, if he breaks, thou mayst with better face / Exact the penalty" (1.3.142-147, p. 36-37). Antonio requests a loan from Shylock while regarding him as an adversary rather than an ally. He is ready to be penalized if he fails to keep the promise. Every inch of Shylock invites Antonio's hostility; they can never be associates, let alone friends. It becomes evident that the Christians have played a decisive role in shaping Shylock's character over time, influencing what he has become in the present..

Shylock's deep-seated hatred and long-drawn-out experience of 'otherness' are responsible for his villainy in the play, as he himself shares his mind: "If I can catch him once upon the hip/I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him" (1.3.46-47, p. 29). He is suggesting that he would take revenge, but at the same time, by using the word 'ancient', he refers to his past day's long-drawn-out, ruthless experiences with the merchant. This vengeful relationship between the Christians and Jews is undoubtedly "ancient". Antonio hates their "sacred nation" (1.3.48, p. 31), and "the problems he has are not only a personal matter between two economic rivals from different cultural backgrounds but also a matter of collective identity" (Antor, 2018, p. 110). Their conflict is racial and religious, too. He is fighting for his nation. Shylock's grudge is justified by his reference to his fellow Jews. He stoops low for the sake of his nation, the nation that has always been attacked and victimized by white Christians, carrying within him a heart full of hatred (Hales, 1894, p. 661). His heart has been struggling with the fiery feelings of hate for all these years, and Antonio's attack on his nation has only fanned the flames. Shylock laments the scorn Antonio has shown toward him and his people in the following passage:

To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge.
He hath disgraced me, and
hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses
mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted
my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies-
and what's his reason? I am a Jew (3.3.52-57, p. 97)

2.1.3. Religious Persecution and the Demand for Dignity: Shylock's Human Appeal

Cruelty begets cruelty. The pound of flesh that Shylock has demanded can only feed his revenge. He has been treated inhumanely for all these years; Antonio had enjoyed a sadistic pleasure when he found Shylock suffering losses; he teased him, scorned his nation, and insulted and hated his tribe from the beginning. Shylock must endure these cruelties as he is a 'Jew'. Antonio rightfully wrongs him because he is a 'Jew'. In the courtroom, Shylock seizes the opportunity to avenge his enemy. It is Shylock's turn now to contribute to this game of hatred. Pressures from society drive him toward reprisal and betrayal. His words are full of passion and fury but tainted with humaneness. In the 'trial scene,' Shakespeare grants him the most profoundly humanizing speech of the play:

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 if you wrong us, shall
we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will
resemble you in that. (3.1.57- 66, p. 97)

The lines shed light on the fact that Shylock had been battling so many emotions for so long. He questions whether Jews do not have eyes, hands, and organs if they do not have senses, affections, or passions. They are touched by the same winter and summer; they bleed when pricked, laugh at a tickle, and die from poison. If there is a resemblance everywhere, there should not be an exception in the law of revenge. He resentfully continues:

If a Jew wrong a Christian,
what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong
a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian
example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I
will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the
instruction. (3.1.67-72, p. 99)

The religious abuse invites Shylock's monstrosity. Shylock is humanized in the passage as he appeals for religious and ethnic compassion. His words come as a 'dignified' response to those tormenting him, a cry against all harm done. His attitude finds a clear expression in the line, "The villainy you teach me, I will execute" (3.1.70-71, p. 99).

He has made it clear that his villainy is forced upon him; he is designed 'evil' by his surroundings, and now he exerts his 'villainy' onto Christians who have taught him this lesson. They have called him a dog without any cause, and the dog has to show its "fangs": "Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause; But, since I am a dog, beware my fangs" (3.3.7–8, p. 125). They give the "dog" enough reasons to bite. He is both monstrous and incredibly human. Through the passage, the Christian audience is exposed to the Jew's perspective. With a defiant voice, he recalls the insults and injuries previously inflicted on him by Antonio: "He hath disgraced me and hindered me half a million" (3.1.53-54, p. 97). Antonio "laughed" at his misfortunes, "scorned" his people, and all these actions account for Shylock's reaction (3.1.54-55, p. 97). He suggests that the society he lives in is full of racism, and in that racist atmosphere, he speaks of a 'universal sameness'. Heinz Antor (2018) observes that beneath the differences of nationality and religion exists a basic shared humanity between groups such as Jews and Christians, which creates a sense of common identity within diversity (p. 114). He claims to be treated with dignity and respect irrespective of his origin and background, which is actually the spirit of multiculturalism. As Caleb Rosado (1996) explains, recognition must be accompanied by respect, which involves treating others with dignity, consideration, and empathy to protect their integrity, value, and social worth, and engaging with them in the manner they wish to be treated (p. 2). The Christians in the drama should expect to be treated the way they have treated the Jews. They have only accepted the Jews in their multicultural community, but the Jews are denied respect and courtesy. Degradation and torments at the hands of Christian Venetians become unbearable for the Jew; he wants to protect his integrity, as he knows it is threatened in that community. He wants to have recognition with respect.

2.1.4. The Illusion of Mercy: Shylock's Defeat in a Prejudiced Courtroom

In the 'trial scene', Shylock is devoid of mercy. Antonio protests against the waste of time on efforts made to change Shylock's mind: "You may as well do anything most hard/As seek to soften that-than which what's harder?-/His Jewish heart" (4.1.79-81, p. 145). He intends to say that, apparently, everything is possible but the softening of the Jewish heart. It can not be denied that his heart is hardened beyond any limit- if only he could feel the reason behind it. Shylock is not even willing to reason his decision as he knows it is his deep-seated hatred that is driving him crazy to have "a pound of this poor merchant's flesh" (4.1.24, p. 145): "So can I give no reason, nor I will not,/More than a lodged hate, and a certain loathing /I bear Antonio," (4.1.60-62, p. 145).

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The sense of hatred is deeply embedded in him; it is "lodged", and it has a deep connection to the Christian's racial prejudice. They have bitten him in the past, and he can not let it happen again; he remarks, "What! Would'st thou have serpent sting thee twice?" (4.1.70, p. 145). "Twice" is suggestive of his previous molestations (4.1.70, p. 145). Once it has happened, it should not happen again. When Portia arrives at the court, she questions, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.176, p. 153). Their appearances bear no distinction; rather, they resemble each other, which is why Portia needs to clarify their identities. Shakespeare wants to show that culturally they are blended in the multicultural atmosphere, but inwardly, they lack "the beauty of the human family" (Rosado, 1996, p. 9). The Jews and the Christians can never form a family in multi-ethnic Venice. The 'beauty of a family' is never taken into account by colourful Venice, despite being a melting pot of different cultures. That is why Portia, being an elite, addresses Shylock as "the Jew", and Shylock's response to the question implies that he is tired of this identity: he answers strongly, "Shylock is my name" (4.1.179, p. 153). He tries to self-assert his worth and establish his real identity, which has been lost in the stereotypical images of his race. The Duke is no different: "Go, one, and call the Jew into the court" (4.1.15, p. 141). The line reveals the mindset of the court. Within the play, "Shylock is referred to as simply 'the Jew' or addressed as 'Jew,' rather than by his proper name, thereby diminishing the sense of him as a person" (Bloom, 2008, p. 27). In this way, he is repeatedly reminded of his racial and religious alterity. He is seamlessly ridiculed and scorned for being a Jew and is slowly made a 'nobody' by his Christian adversaries. He loses his sense of belonging. Shylock's worth is locked in his name, and the Christians proudly possess the key to it. The Duke labels him as "A stony adversary,/an inhuman wretch" (4.1.4, p. 141). He stands unmoved at the Venetian court. The remarks show him to be highly prejudiced against Shylock. He is subjected to all sorts of insults from all the elite Christian Venetians, which push him to become an 'other' without mercy and compassion. The Duke threatens him with the burden of dual otherness:

And pluck commiseration of his state
From brassy bosoms, and rough hearts of flint
From stubborn Turks and Tartars never trained
To offices of tender courtesy,
We all expect a gentle answer, Jew (4.1.31-35, p. 143).

The Duke contends that a refusal to show mercy would render him even worse than the Turks, Venice's chief adversary.

The scene gives insight into the Jews' pathetic condition; their existence is continuously threatened. The courtroom marks another notable point, and that is, although Shylock initiates the case, he is treated as if he were the defendant, with the proceedings starting in his absence and his entrance occurring only after the court has convened (Bloom, 2008, p. 28). Like always, Shylock's existence is denied in the courtroom. They do not even feel the necessity of his presence as the prosecutor. They own the courtroom and perhaps the law, too.

Shylock reflects Antonio's attitude as well as that of the other Christians toward him in another passage:

What if my house be troubled with a rat
And I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats
To have it baned? What, are you answer'd yet?
Some men there are love not a gaping pig;
Some, that are mad if they behold a cat;
And others, when the bagpipe sings i' the nose,
Cannot contain their urine: for affection,
Mistress of passion, sways it to the mood
Of what it likes or loathes. Now, for your answer:
As there is no firm reason to be render'd,
Why he cannot abide a gaping pig;
Why he, a harmless necessary cat;
Why he, a woollen bagpipe, (4.1.45-57, p. 145)

He depicts himself as treated like vermin or likened to despised creatures such as 'a pig, cat, or bagpipe' (4.1.45-57, p. 145). He merely reflects to them what they have inflicted upon him. Yet they expect him to display kindness toward them, despite never having shown him any in the past or present (Bloom, 2008, p. 28). Kindness towards the Jews is not evidenced throughout the whole play; the play has only witnessed injuries. However, he unwraps the tormenting psychology of his response to their abuses. It is not his desire to be harsh rather, it comes as the consequence of the Christians' effect on him. He is being impacted and made savage. Shylock's chilling argument finds expression in another powerful passage:

You have among you many a purchased slave,
Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,
You use in abject and in slavish parts,
Because you bought them: shall I say to you,
Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?
Why sweat they under burthens? let their beds
Be made as soft as yours and let their palates
Be season'd with such viands? You will answer
'The slaves are ours' (4.1.91-99, p. 147)

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He condemns the Christian practice of slavery. He tries to exert that the Christians enjoy every bit of liberty in their actions, no matter how brutish they are, but he can not do so as he is tagged with the name 'a Jew' and all his actions are regarded as shameful and 'evil'. Here, Shylock highlights slavery as a central contradiction within the contractual system, where the absolute right to property strips individuals of self-ownership and reduces them to mere labour, exposing the structural falsehood underlying claims of universal freedom (Lupton, 2001, p. 486). He invokes the legal basis of his demand and adds that the Christians do not bother to show humane attitudes to the 'other'; human history depicts that they have robbed people of their identity, trapped "freedom" of the world and yet have no feeling of guilt or shame. History depicts them as guilty of 'legalized cruelty'. They 'legalize' their brutal behaviours, and here, too, they give their exertion of cruelty over the Jews the same 'legalized' look. Shylock strongly hits their 'taming' tendency in this sarcastic passage, which instantly casts them in a negative light and brings out their sheer hypocrisy. They buy the slaves to civilize them, but they cannot let them marry their heirs. They ask for mercy but have never presented themselves as merciful towards the Jews. Portia speaks, "The quality of mercy is not strain'd,/ It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven," (4.1.190-191, p. 155). But she is the one who fights and ensures that the cruelty and penalty are exacted upon Shylock and no such 'gentle rain' showers upon him; she inflicts needless suffering, seeks to enforce Christian doctrine upon a non-Christian and finally rejoices in his downfall. Her words threaten him:

if thou tak'st more
Or less than a just pound, be it but so much
As makes it light or heavy in the substance,
Or the division of the twentieth part
Of one poor scruple, nay if the scale do turn
But in the estimation of a hair,
Thou diest and all thy goods are confiscate.
(4.1.340-356, p. 165)

The cruel fact that the Christians do not preach what they teach is ironically put forward through her. The legal quibble is designed to cause Shylock endless suffering. She threatens that if the amount of flesh does not weigh one pound exactly, Shylock will have to die, and all his goods will be seized. She skillfully reverses the situation and makes little effort to display mercy, except in choosing to spare his life - an act that serves mainly to cast the Christians in a favourable light. Portia declares: "For as thou urgest justice be assur'd/ Thou shalt have justice more than thou desir'st" (4.1.329-330, p. 163).

Shylock shall have more justice than he deserves. This raises the issue of whether such actions can truly be considered justice, much less mercy. Her purpose appears to be a rigid adherence to the letter of the law while pressing its harshest consequences in an openly vengeful spirit. Their resolve is fixed on claiming their pound of flesh. The line reflects that Shylock is gradually headed towards their trap. They plan to exploit Shylock in the worst possible manner and exact the severest penalty from him. The Venetian court can not do justice to Shylock. He is 'othered' in every possible way, and fair judgment alienates him. The trial room seems to ensure justice for Antonio even if that costs a 'little immorality'. After Antonio acknowledges his inability to honour the bond, Bassanio urges the Duke to overturn the dictates of the law, which he interprets as "a little wrong" undertaken "to do a great right" (4.1.224, p. 157). If Shylock had made such a plea, it could prove fatal; the context of the trial room strongly suggests that he is disfavoured at every stage.

After a lengthy war of words, when Shylock agrees to their proposal to pay the bond thrice, it is again Portia who retaliates: "He shall have nothing but the penalty" (4.1.336, p. 165). Shylock pleads for pity: "Give me my principal, and let me go" (4.1.350, p. 165). But all his pleas are ignored, and he receives the worst of all treatments. Shylock's otherness-his identity as a non-Christian-ultimately determines his fate, as is evident in Portia's speech:

It is enacted in the laws of Venice
If it be proved against an alien
That by direct or indirect attempts
He seek the life of any citizen
The party' gainstv the which he doth contrive
Shall sieze one half his goods; the other half
Comes to the privy coffer of the state,
And the offender's life lies in the mercy
Of the Duke only, 'gainst all other voice-
In which predicament I say thou stand'st,
Down, therefore, and beg mercy of the Duke. (4.1.363-378, p.
167)

She speaks of a rule which is applied to 'aliens' only: Shylock is explicitly identified as an 'alien' rather than a 'citizen' (Lupton, 2001, p. 484). Hence, Shylock is 'othered' publicly. Christians have avenged him, but "Christian revenge must be comic; it must be seen not as revenge but mercy" (Rosenshield, 2002, p. 46). Under the guise of mercy, the Christian merchant requests two things to accomplish his revenge.

He is compelled to plead for mercy, yet such mercy, obtained through supplication, hardly resembles the unforced mercy that "droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven" (4.1.384). The mercy does not come mercifully; instead, he suffers tremendous humiliation in the name of mercy. The law mandates his death and the forfeiture of his property, yet he is granted life as an act of so-called Christian mercy. However, this is not an act of Christian nobility but a strategic move in the conflicts between the two religious identities. This is confirmed when Antonio proposes to let Shylock keep his fortune on two conditions: that he gives his wealth to his daughter and son-in-law, and that he himself "presently become a Christian" (4.1.384). The second condition comes as a fatal blow. The 'otherness' is at stake now; the 'mercy' becomes 'punishment'. According to Stoll (1911), Shylock faces the most severe punishment among all versions of the pound of flesh narratives, including the one in *Il Pecorone*, which inspired the play (pp. 239–240). The burden of the penalty is more than what he could bear. Shylock would have never wanted this act of kindness. He is forced to lose his identity and become a nominal Christian; this act brutally exposes the hollowness of the Christians' attitude towards their religion, questioning the 'greatness' and 'kindness' that Christians are attributed with. Shylock leaves as a broken man. His utter dissatisfaction with the trial room decision finds expression in his words:

I pray you give me leave to go from hence.
I am not well. Send the deed after me,
And I will sign it (4.1.412-414, p. 169).

He says, "I am not well"(4.1.412-414, p. 169), but no one in the room seems to pay any heed to his 'unwell' condition. They place themselves as God before him, and hence, he "prays" for his departure from the dreadful scene. Soon, he is forgotten and is not even mentioned after the end of the trial room scene; he becomes a faded image amidst the crowd of Christians. He is 'ghettoized' in Shakespeare's Venice. His 'tale of agony' ends here, though the story moves forward to give it a merry ending.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Danish critic George Brandes notes that Shakespeare presents Shylock with a paradoxical mix of "right in the wrong" and "humanity in inhumanity" (Bloom, 2008, p. 53). Shylock appears to be the 'right' in the tremendous 'wrong', the 'human' in the 'inhuman' Venice. He is the incarnation of a persecuted race in the play; he is the 'wrong' who has been greatly wronged almost every day by his Christian neighbours.

He is that devil who has received devilish treatments because of his racial and religious alterity and has given back the same. He is excluded from the multicultural Christian community, where diversity and difference should have been embraced. The Jew in the play is not tolerated as he is not a part of the 'majority culture'. His outsider status promotes his outrageous personality. However, his 'inhumanity' has bold shades of 'humanity', which helps in sympathizing with the bold spirit. He is the most ill-used. The habit of contemplating daily insults and injuries has hardened him to a great extent, but he is not without a heart beneath his Jewish gabardine. He bleeds when wounded; he suffers from the same instruments, and he recovers through the same remedies. He has all the human emotions, yet he is also a victim of crude religious zealots and false Christian fanaticism - a human being deeply corrupted and degraded by these forces, yet still a creation of God, damaged by humanity (Hales, 1894, p. 658). The religionists persecute him, and the Christians demean him, yet he remains a fellow being fashioned by God but distorted by man. His condition leaves him scarred. Across the play, he continually appeals for acknowledgment of the humanity he holds in common with the Christians, and the unsettling reality that surfaces is that his desire for revenge stems from his suffering. Throughout the play, he is depicted as imploring acknowledgment of the humanity they have in common, and the unsettling reality that arises is that his thirst for vengeance springs from his suffering. It is Antonio's heartless attitude and unchecked prejudice against him that have made him insane and led him to go for his heart. The wrongs he has met could make him 'wild', but he is not seen to behave wildly. His hatred is not without restraint, and his deeds remain consistent with his principles. It is the Christians who make fun of his ideals and instil in him 'passionate hatred', which makes him a monster. The controversial figure is shaped by intentionally blending human traits with stereotypical Jewish characteristics within a single character (Krane, 1976, p. 10). Shylock is portrayed as a typical Jew with human qualities, which actually builds the altercation. He represents 'the jew' of history and reflects the antipathies of Shakespeare's day. He is 'locked' into his role as an outsider in the multicultural landscape of Venice, and when Antonio's conduct toward him is judged impartially, his pursuit of revenge emerges less as excess than as the outcome of sustained persecution. We can blame the Antonios of Venice for Shylock's vengefulness. They have othered him, isolated him in the multicultural Venice. After re-picturizing some events from the play and probing into certain characters, it can be concluded that Shylock's revenge, if not justifiable, is understandable. In cosmopolitan Venice, he is accepted for commercial reasons; however, his neighbours do not embrace him. He is victimized and made a non-entity. Hence, he only tries to finish what the Venetians have started: the game of hatred.

4. REFERENCES

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