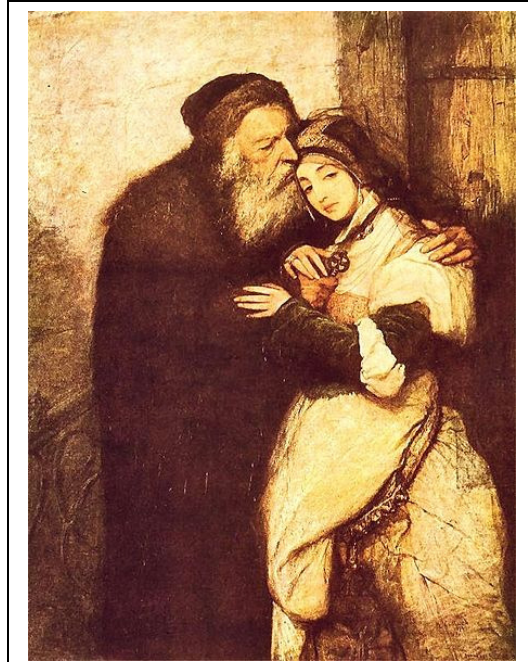


The Date of *The Merchant of Venice*: The Evidence for 1578

Ramon Jiménez

Among the many discussions of the dates of Shakespeare's plays by orthodox scholars, there is no variation from the claim that *The Merchant of Venice* was written between 1594 and its registration in 1598 by James Roberts as "a book of *The Merchant of Venice*, or otherwise called *The Jew of Venice*..." The quarto appeared two years later, bearing the title, *The Most Excellent History of the Merchant of Venice* (Chambers 1930, I, 368).

However, a reevaluation of the evidence demonstrates that a play with characters, plot and language similar to those in *The Merchant of Venice* was performed in 1579 and was, in fact, the Shakespeare play printed about twenty years later. The documentation presented here also demonstrates that the 17th Earl of Oxford wrote the play in about 1578, and that several later writers re-used the characters, language, and the basic plot in their own literary works. The evidence for both these conclusions has, for the most part, been ignored or dismissed by orthodox scholars who, instead, focus on the following alleged topical references in the play to events in the 1590s (with my comments included):



Shylock and Jessica

1. Dr. Roderigo Lopez, a Portuguese Jew who was physician to Queen Elizabeth, was accused of unlawful political intrigue on behalf of Don Antonio, a claimant to the throne of Portugal. He was tried, and then executed in June 1594. Some early Shakespeare scholars theorized that it was he who was the original of Shylock (Lee; Furness 399). But Dr. Lopez and Shylock have very little in common, except that they were Jews entangled in a legal system run by Christians; nor is there any resemblance between Don Antonio and Shakespeare's Antonio. Recent editors of the play discount a connection between Lopez and Shylock (Brown xxiv-xxv; Mahood 7; Drakakis 20-1).

2. Another alleged topical reference occurs in a discussion among Antonio and his two friends in the opening scene of the play. Salerio says:

I should not see the sandy hour-glass run
 But I should think of shallows and of flats,
 And see my wealthy *Andrew* [dock'd] in sand,
 Vailing her high top lower than her ribs
 To kiss her burial. I.i.25-9

The phrase “my wealthy Andrew dock'd in sand” has been explained as a reference to the Spanish galleon *San Andrés*, which was captured by an English fleet after running aground in Cádiz harbor in June 1596. The ship was brought to England the next year and renamed *St. Andrew* (Brown xxv-xxvii). But it is much more likely that Salerio is simply using a term that was common for a type of ship in sixteenth-century Italy, an “Andrea” or “Andrew.” This term came into use because of the practice of a prominent Genoese admiral, Andrea Doria (1466-1560), of assigning variations of his name to the ships he owned, e.g. *Andrea la Spume* (Andrew the Sea Foam), *Andrea l'Onde* (Andrew the Wave), etc. (Altrocchi 10). The word eventually came into general use in English as a slang term for a ship, and as a reference to the Royal Navy. The admiral's name has remained in use for Italian ships, and American, into the twentieth century.¹

3. A third alleged topical reference occasionally mentioned by editors are Portia's lines in III.ii.48-50:

Then music is
 Even as the flourish when true subjects bow
 To a new-crowned monarch;

The most recent Arden editor credits Edmund Malone with the observation that the passage “might allude to the coronation of Henry IV of France at Chartres on 27 February 1594; the coronation was before ‘true subjects’ because Rheims, where the ceremony ought to have taken place, was in the possession of rebels.” But he finds the notion unconvincing, and admits that “there is no certain evidence for the date of *The Merchant of Venice*” (Brown xxv).

Even if these references were found to be genuinely topical, that is, intended to refer to events in the 1590s, they would be insufficient to date the composition of the play to that time. Revisions and additions to the text at any point up to its publication date, whether by Shakespeare or another, cannot be ruled out.

Nearly all scholars agree on the four principal sources of the play, each of which was available before 1580. These include the thirteenth-century collection of anecdotes *Gesta Romanorum*; the thirteenth-century poem *Cursor Mundi*; the fourteenth-century collection of stories, *Il Pecorone*, by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino; and the fifteenth century collection of fifty stories, *Il Novellino* by Masuccio of Salerno. All the plot elements of the play are contained in one or more of these four sources. Different versions of the *Gesta Romanorum* and *Cursor Mundi* were available in Latin or English before the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. *Il Novellino* was published in 1476 and *Il Pecorone* in 1558. Neither

had been translated into English when *The Merchant of Venice* was published, in 1600 (Bullough I, 449, 456).

Lastly, orthodox scholars cite five literary works of the 1580s and 1590s as minor or probable sources of the play. I will discuss each of these in its own section below. But before any of them were written, there were four references in the late 1570s and early 1580s to a play or a story that can be identified with *The Merchant of Venice*. Orthodox scholars ignore or dismiss these as references to a source play, an *Ur Merchant of Venice*, now lost, on which they claim Shakespeare based his own play fifteen years later.

Early Merchant References

The earliest reference to the *Merchant of Venice* story is in the well-known passage in Stephen Gosson's tract *The School of Abuse*, registered in July 1579 and published in the same year. Its subtitle is ". . . a pleasant invective against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters and such like Caterpillars of a Commonwealth." As a former actor and playwright, Gosson chastises himself for his previous "folly," and then proceeds to a general condemnation of all places of entertainment and all that happens there, both on and off the stage. He acknowledges that some plays are not offensive, and cites several that are "without rebuke."

Two of these plays, *The Jew* and *Ptolome*, were performed at The Bull in Bishopsgate, an inn with a yard in which plays could be seen by a crowd of spectators. He describes *The Jew* as "representing the greediness of worldly choosers and bloody minds of usurers" (Chambers 1923, IV, 203-205). It is fair to say that the phrase "worldly choosers" characterize the three suitors who must choose the correct casket to earn the hand of Portia. Shakespeare uses the words "choose" and "chooseth" more than forty times in connection with the "three caskets story." "Bloody minds of usurers" describes Shylock, who wants to cut a pound of flesh from Antonio. Combined with the play's title, these are suggestive references to details in the play we now call *The Merchant of Venice*.

It is less well-known that several other passages in *The School of Abuse* can be associated with *The Merchant of Venice*. In Act II, as Shylock is about to leave his house to meet Bassanio, his former servant Launcelot Gobbo attempts to inform Jessica when to meet Lorenzo and his friends, who will be disguised as masquers. Shylock is alarmed at the prospect of masquers. He counsels his daughter to avoid the sights and sounds of playmaking in the streets during his absence, and to stay away from the windows, his house's "ears" (*italics added*):

What, are there masques? Hear you me, Jessica:
 Lock up *my doors*; and when you *hear the drum*
 And the *vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife*,
 Clamber not you up to the *casements* then,
 Nor thrust your head into the public street
 To gaze on Christian fools with *varnish'd faces*,
 But *stop my house's ears*, I mean *my casements*;
 Let not the sound of shallow fopp'ry enter
 My *sober* house. II.v.28-36²

In the next act, Gobbo commiserates with Jessica about the difficulty she endures as Shylock's daughter. He mentions the "bastard hope" that he may not be her real father. She replies that in that case she would be a victim of her mother's sin. Gobbo answers:

Truly then I fear you are damn'd both by father
and mother: thus when I shun *Scylla* (your father),
I fall into *Charybdis*, your mother. III.v.15-17

The same type of warning appears at the end of *The School of Abuse*, where Gosson adds a few pages of advice "To the Gentlewomen of London," urging them to avoid plays and theaters (italics added):

When you are grieved, pass the time with your neighbors in *sober* conference . . .
If your grief be such that you may not disclose it, and your sorrow so great that you loath to utter it, *look for no salve at plays or theatres*, lest that *laboring to shun Scylla you light on Charybdis*...

You need not go abroad to be tempted; you shall be enticed at *your own windows*. . .
And if you perceive yourselves in any danger at *your own doors*, either allured by courtesy in the day, or *assaulted with music in the night*, close up your eyes, *stop your ears*, tie up your tongues; when they speak, answer not... (Kinney 117-18).

"It is as if Shylock has been reading Gosson," writes one Shakespeare scholar (Ross 37). In view of the phrases Gosson uses to describe the play, it seems far more likely that it is *he* who has been listening to Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Gosson uses the same image and the same words and phrases as Shakespeare—in the same context of warning a woman against actors and playmaking.³

Another document from the same year, 1579, is a letter from Edmund Spenser to Gabriel Harvey. It is undated, but written in response to a letter from Harvey in 1579. Spenser and Harvey had become good friends at Oxford a decade earlier, and both lived in London at this time. At the end of his letter, Spenser signs off by describing himself as "He that is fast bound unto thee in more obligations than any merchant in Italy to any Jew there." Edward Scott, the archivist for the Sloane manuscript collection at the British Museum, discovered this unpublished letter in 1881. He offered the opinion that "Spenser and Harvey had lately together paid a visit to the Bull, had enjoyed the representation of this piece 'The Jew,' and it made such an impression on their minds that their correspondence at this time is full of allusions to it."⁴

Thus, there are two references in 1579 to a play called *The Jew* that was seen at the Bull, in which there were "worldly choosers," "usurers" with "bloody minds," a merchant, a Jew, an "obligation," and that contained several words and phrases that also appeared in Gosson's *The School of Abuse*. Orthodox scholars uniformly assert that these are references to a "lost play" by an unknown author.

A third reference is found in the *Documents Relating to the Office of Revels*, where it is recorded that at Whitehall Palace on the Candlemas following Christmas of 1579 (Feb. 2, 1580), the Lord Chamberlain's Men performed a play, no longer extant, called *The History of Portio and Demorantes* (Feuillerat 321). In 1930 Eva Turner Clark conjectured that this was a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, also a "history," the name *Portio* being a misreading of *Portia*, and *Demorantes* referring to merchants (191-2). This claim has been rejected by Stratfordians and questioned by Oxfordians, but never satisfactorily rebutted. In the light of the additional evidence about *The Merchant of Venice*, it is quite possible that the title of the play performed for the Queen was *Portia and the Merchants*. In 1580 the Lord Chamberlain's Men was actually the playing company of Thomas Radcliffe, 3rd Earl of Sussex, a staunch ally and friend of Edward de Vere (Ward 78, 265-6).

Finally, a note written about this time on a manuscript by the clergyman and author Stephen Bateman might refer to the same play. In 1947 Bateman's biographer reported that she had found on a manuscript he owned an annotation in his handwriting, which read as follows:

The note of a Jew wch for the interest of his money required a *li* of the mans flesh to whome he lent the money, the bonde forfeit and yet the Jew went wthoute his purpose / the parti notwithstanding condemn'd by Lawe / the question whether he could cut the flesh wthoute spilling of blood...⁵

This annotation contains all the basic elements of the "pound of flesh" story in *The Merchant of Venice*, and almost certainly refers to the play we now know by that name. Bateman was the author of a treatise against usury published in 1575 and was chaplain to Henry Carey, first Baron Hunsdon, in the early 1580s (*ODNB*). During this same period, Hunsdon maintained a company of players that became the Lord Chamberlain's Men when he was appointed to that office in 1585 (Chambers 1923, II, 192). Stephen Bateman died in 1584.

In addition to these early references to an actual play, there were published during the next fifteen years five different literary works that contain elements of *The Merchant of Venice* story.

Anthony Munday's *Zelauto*

Anthony Munday's *Zelauto*, one of the earliest and most innovative English novels, was published in 1580, probably before the author's twentieth birthday. Munday was a precocious and prolific jack-of-all-letters, who produced more than seventy works of all kinds, long and short, sacred and profane, over a writing career spanning more than fifty years. Born in 1560, he started out as an actor, even before he became an apprentice to the printer John Allde at age sixteen, and then a servant of the Earl of Oxford in 1578. Within a few months Munday departed for Italy and eventually entered the newly-established English College in Rome for training as a priest, but left after less than four months.

In the year following his return to England in the summer of 1579, Munday worked on *Zelauto*, a Euphuistic and fragmentary novel in three parts, narrated by a young man—

Zelauto, son of the Duke, or Doge, of Venice, and an obvious depiction of Munday himself. After taking leave of his father and family in Venice, Zelauto travels to Naples and then has a variety of unlikely adventures in several countries, including Spain, England, and Persia. On his way home he encounters a reclusive knight in a cave in Sicily and the two of them tell each other several stories. It is the third story, set in Verona, that we find five characters involved in a familiar plot:

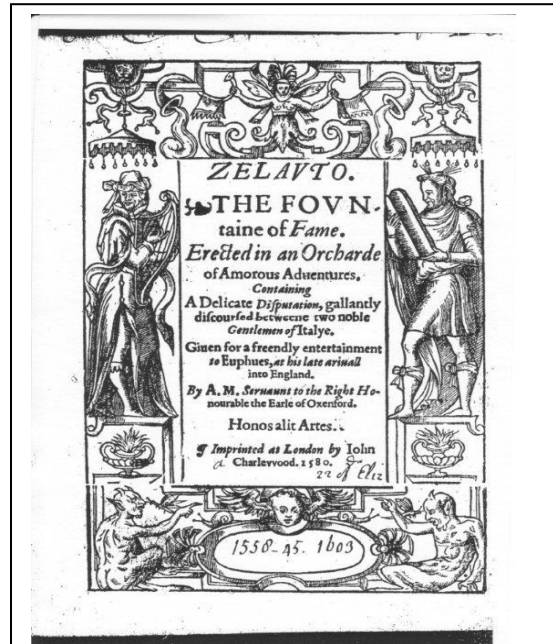
Strabino (*Bassanio*), son of a wealthy gentleman, travels to Verona to study. He falls in love with Cornelia (*Portia*), sister of his close friend and fellow student Rodolpho (*Antonio*).

A wealthy and miserly old usurer Truculento (*Shylock*, but a Christian) also woos Cornelia. On the condition that she accept him, Cornelia's father promises her in marriage to Truculento after receiving gifts from him. But Cornelia rejects Truculento and agrees to marry Strabino.

On Cornelia's advice, Rodolpho and Strabino borrow 4000 ducats from Truculento on another pretext. They pledge their lands and their right eyes as security for the loan. Strabino uses the money to buy Cornelia's father a jewel, and obtains his consent to marry Cornelia. Rodolpho courts and wins Truculento's daughter Brisana (*Jessica*).

Strabino (*Bassanio*) and Rodolpho (*Antonio*) celebrate a double wedding to Cornelia (*Portia*) and Brisana (*Jessica*). Strabino and Rodolpho fail to pay the debt on time, and Truculento, angry that he has been rejected by Cornelia, refuses even double payment. He sues Strabino and Rodolpho in court, demanding that they forfeit their lands and their right eyes. Cornelia and Brisana, disguised as lawyers, appear in court to defend their husbands. The Judge appeals to Truculento to have mercy on his fellow Christians, but he refuses. The Judge reluctantly rules in favor of Truculento, but Cornelia insists that no drop of blood may be shed in removing their eyes. His demand frustrated, Truculento decides to accept repayment, but the Judge rules that Strabino and Rodolpho need not repay the 4000 ducats.

As we see, the characters and the plot are very similar to those in *The Merchant of Venice*. There are also half-a-dozen words and phrases in *Zelauto* that are identical or

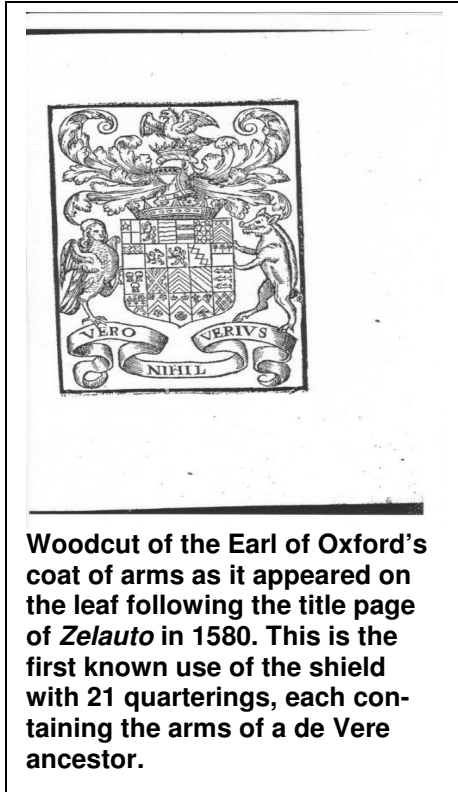


The title page of Munday's novel *Zelauto*, from the single extant copy in the Bodleian Library. The motto *Honos alit artes*—"Honor nourishes the arts"—also appears on the title pages of several of Munday's later works. It derives ultimately from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*.

nearly so with those in Shakespeare's play. These are listed in Brown's Arden edition of the play (156-68).

1. In *The Merchant*, Launcelot, Shylock's servant, complains:

I am famish'd in his service; you may tell every finger I have with my ribs. II.ii.106-107



In *Zelauto*, Cornelia's father is "amazed at Truculento's liberality, who before would scant bestow on himself a good meal's meat for expense of money" (147).⁶

2. In *The Merchant*, Shylock complains that Antonio called him a "cut-throat dog" (I.iii.111). In the trial scene in *Zelauto*, Strabino (*Bassanio*) complains to the judge about Truculento's (*Shylock's*) imposition of "cutthroat conditions" on the poor (172). Rodolpho (*Antonio*) reminds the judge that "we are far foolish to crave courtesie of such a cut-throat" (176).

3. In Act II of *The Merchant*, the Prince of Morocco opens the golden casket and finds a poem on a scroll, the last line of which is "Fare you well, your suit is cold." He exclaims:

Cold indeed and labour lost:
Then farewell heat, and welcome frost!
II.vii.74-5

In *Zelauto*, as Strabino is courting Cornelia, he complains of the ill-treatment men receive at the hands of women: "...you bring us to utter beggary: In faith, fare well frost, more such have we lost ...A cold suit and a hard pennyworth have all they that traffic in such merchandise" (118). A few minutes later, he says, "...if all women were of your mind, I should have but a cold suit with my wooing. But belike you are betrothed already, and that makes you so dainty, if you be, tell me, that I may lose no more labour" (133).

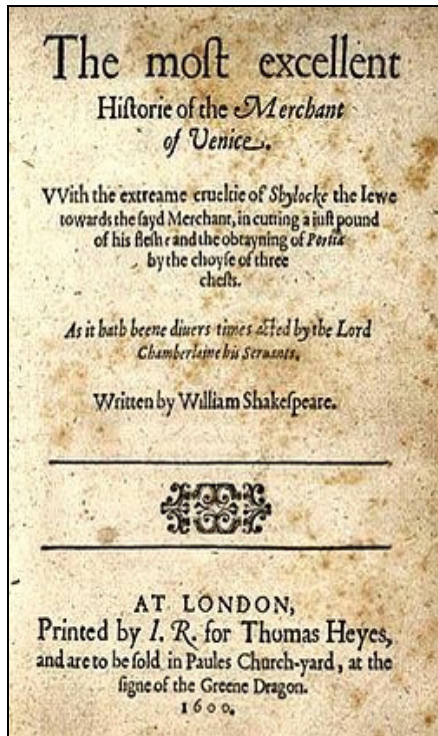
4. In the trial scene, Shylock says: "What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?" (IV.i.89). In the equivalent scene in *Zelauto*, Truculento says "I would be contented you would deliver me my deserts, so that you did minister nothing but justice" (175-6).

5. In *The Merchant*, Shylock insists: "The pound of flesh which I demand of him/

Is dearly bought, 'tis mine and I will have it." (IV.i.99-100.) In *Zelauto* Truculento says, "I crave justice to be uprightly used, and I crave no more, therefore I will have it" (176).

6. In her "quality of mercy" speech, Portia points out to Shylock:

Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation. IV.i.198-200



Similarly, in *Zelauto*, the judge reminds Truculento that if God were to impose justice upon him, instead of showing him mercy, "how mighty were the misery, which should justly fall upon you? How sharp the sentence that should be pronounced against you, and how rigorous the revenge, which should rightly reward you?" (174-5).

7. At the end of the trial in *The Merchant*, the Duke addresses Shylock:

That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit,
I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it.
For half thy wealth, it is Antonio's;
IV.i.368-70

In *Zelauto* the same inheritance is bestowed on Rodolpho, the man who married Truculento's daughter, in very nearly the same language. Truculento "accepted Rodolpho for his lawful son, and put him in possession of all his livings after his decease" (180).

8. Shortly after the Duke has pardoned Shylock, Portia asks him: "Art thou contented Jew? What dost thou say?" Shylock replies: "I am content." (IV.i.393-4).

Similarly, the last sentence in *Zelauto* reads, "Thus they were on all parts very well pleased, and "everyone accounted himself well contented" (180).

These obvious parallels of plot, character and language indicate that either Shakespeare or Anthony Munday read or saw the other's version of what we may now call "the usurer story," and borrowed the plot and many of the details. Which author is more likely to have used the other's plot? The nineteen-year-old Munday, who was writing his first novel, or the twenty-nine-year-old Oxford who had almost certainly been writing plays even before his return from Italy in 1576?

One answer to this question is suggested by one scholar's remark about the loan repayment story in *Zelauto*: "... the dialogue in the third book is remarkably vigorous, and the speeches in the Trial scene at least are of a quite reasonable length and very much to the point... it seems...probable that Munday had a play before him" (Spens 24). However, all orthodox scholars routinely assert that Munday's novel preceded *The Merchant*, and that the borrowings of characters, plot and language were by Shakespeare.

Since Oxford had taken over the playing company of the Earl of Warwick early in 1580 (Chambers 1923, II, 100), it is possible that Munday called himself his "servant" because he had joined the company as an actor, and conceivable that he therefore had access to one or more play manuscripts in Oxford's possession. More than one scholar has also noted significant similarities in language, thought, and plot between *Zelauto* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Wright 159; Spens 24-5).

Another young writer who was associated with the Earl of Oxford, John Lyly, may have also benefitted from a reading of *The Merchant of Venice*. The following short song appears in III.ii (italics added):

Tell me where is *fancy bred*,
Or in the *heart* or in the *head*?
How begot, how *nourished*?

Reply, reply.

It is *engend' red* in the [eyes],
With gazing fed, and *fancy* dies
In the cradle where it lies.
Let us all ring fancy's knell.
I'll begin it. Ding, dong, bell.

Ding, dong, bell. III.ii.63-72

In his novel *Euphues and his England*, registered in July 1579 and dedicated to the Earl of Oxford, Lyly included the following paragraph (italics added in both examples.):

For as by basil the scorpion is *engendred*, and by means of the same herb destroyed: so love which by time and *fancy is bred* in an idle *head*, is by time and *fancy* banished from the *heart*: or as the salamander which being a long space *nourished* in the fire, at last quencheth it, so affection having taken hold of the *fancy*, and living as it were in the mind of the lover, in tract of time altereth and changeth the heat, and turneth it to chillness" (Bond II, 74-5).

At the time Lyly was completing *Euphues and his England*, he had already begun his lengthy literary collaboration with the Earl of Oxford, and was living in one of the "tenements" the Earl had rented in the Savoy (Ward 84, 159). Oxford also hired him as

his private secretary about this time (Ward 264; Bond I, 24), and Lyly's use of the identical imagery and language from *The Merchant of Venice* makes it probable that he had access to the manuscript.

The Three Ladies of London

Another literary work related to *The Merchant of Venice* is *The Three Ladies of London*, a morality play published in 1584, but written in 1581 by Robert Wilson, an actor in the Earl of Leicester's company. The three ladies are *Lucre*, *Love*, and *Conscience*, and the simple allegorical plot describes how *Lady Lucre*, her servant *Usury*, and her friends *Disimulation*, *Lust*, and *Fraud*, assisted by a lawyer and a priest, conspire to corrupt *Love* and *Conscience*, and their friends *Simplicity* and *Hospitality*.

The play opens with more than 300 lines of wordy dialogue among these abstract characters, and in the second scene *Lady Lucre* directs a question to her servant *Usury*:

Lady Lucre: But Usury, didst thou ever know my grandmother, the Old Lady
Lucre of Venice?

Usury: Yes, madam, I was a servant to her and lived there in bliss.

Lady Lucre: But why camest thou into England, seeing Venice is a city
Where Usury by Lucre may live in great glory? II.ii.16-17⁷

Usury replies that he came to England to see *Lady Lucre* after her grandmother died.

The link with Venice is made stronger a few lines later, when suddenly an Italian merchant named Mercadorus enters and declares that he loves *Lady Lucre* and will do anything for her. He addresses her as "Madona" and speaks in a sing-song Italian accent: "Me will a forsake a my fader, moder, king, country and more den dat" (2.34). In return for her love, *Lucre* demands that he ship English goods and commodities to foreign countries and then import such items as trifles and baubles, beads and glass for bracelets, and amber, coral, crystal and jet—all for the ladies of England. Mercadorus agrees to do this.⁸

A few scenes later, *Hospitality*, who is a bearded old man, rushes onstage in a great fright. He is being pursued by *Usury* who threatens to "cut his throat." Despite the pleas of *Lady Conscience*, *Usury* repeats his threat and drags *Hospitality* into a corner and kills him. In the character *Usury* Stephen Gosson's phrase about "bloody minds of usurers" is crudely exemplified.

Half way through the play, a new character enters—Gerontus, described as a Jew and a moneylender. It transpires that he has made a loan of 3000 ducats for three months to Mercadorus, which he has not repaid. Gerontus criticizes Mercadorus for his default, which he claims is typical of Christians. Mercadorus asks for a few more days to pay, to which Gerontus agrees.

In the meantime, the contest among the various virtues and vices continues. At this point, scene 11 in the play, the setting shifts to Turkey, where Mercadorus has traveled in search of the luxury goods required by *Lady Lucre*. Gerontus is also there, and chides Mercadorus for not repaying the loan. Gerontus declares he will have Mercadorus ar-

rested if he doesn't repay him. Mercadorus threatens to become a Turk, in which case all his debts are cancelled. (It is claimed in the play that in Turkey when someone converts to Islam, all his debts are cancelled.)

On the suggestion of *Lady Lucre* in a letter to him, Mercadorus plans to deceive Gerontus by dressing in Turkish clothes. Hauled before a judge in Turkey, Mercadorus admits to the loan and his failure to repay. He declares that he will renounce his Christianity and become a Turk.

Just as the judge is about to take the oath of Mercadorus as a Muslim, Gerontus intervenes. He offers to forgive the interest on the loan, then to forgive half the loan, if Mercadorus will abandon his plan to become a Turk, but Mercadorus refuses. Finally, Gerontus forgives the entire debt because he does not want Mercadorus to renounce his Christian faith. But Mercadorus then abandons his interest in Islam, and gloats over his deception of the Jew Gerontus.

With this, Mercadorus and Gerontus exit, and no more is heard from them or about them. Eventually, *Lady Lucre* is brought before the same judge, who sentences her to "the lowest hell" for her evil deeds. But she is not blamed for her corrupting influence on Mercadorus. The strange story about a moneylending Jew and a duplicitous Italian merchant plays no part in the *denouement*, and has only a tenuous connection and relevance to this standard morality story.

But the similarities to *The Merchant of Venice* are arresting. The loan that is made to Mercadorus is for the same amount (3000 ducats) and for the same period (three months) as that made to Antonio. In both plays, the loan is made for the same purpose—to facilitate a merchant's shipping business in the Mediterranean region, and the repayment of it becomes contested. In the trial scene in both plays, many of the same elements are present—the initial ruling in favor of the moneylender; the idea of conversion from one religion to another; the greediness of an Italian; and, finally, the moneylender's forfeit of his money. It seems that the playwright Robert Wilson took some of the most prominent features of *The Merchant*, rearranged them somewhat, and then spiced up his tedious story by forcing them into the plot. Or was it the other way around? The most recent editor of the play commented that "There is no doubt that *Three Ladies* was an important precursor to Marlowe and Shakespeare's "Jewish" plays, in which we hear echoes of Wilson's scenes..." (Kermode 34).⁹ According to David Kathman, the author of Wilson's biography in the *ODNB*, "Gerontus is a sympathetic figure who probably influenced Shakespeare's Shylock."

The Orator

Another literary work that clearly relates to *The Merchant of Venice* is a dialogue in a collection of "Declamations" illustrating various moral and legal questions that was published in Paris in 1581 under the title *Epitome de cent histoires*. An English translation was published in 1596 under the title *The Orator: Handling a hundred severall Discourses in forme of Declamations* (Arber III, 67). The author was Alexandre Van den Busche, known as "Le Silvayn," a military officer who served under both Charles IX and Henri III when they were kings of France.¹⁰ Declamation 95 is subtitled "Of a Jew, who

would for his debt have a pound of flesh of a Christian.” In this case, a loan of 900 crowns is made to a Christian merchant for three months, the bond being a pound of his flesh. When the loan goes overdue, the Jew refuses to accept repayment, and demands the forfeit of the bond. The issue is brought to court and the judge rules for the Jew, but warns him that if more or less is cut, he will be beheaded.

In addition to this replication of the “pound of flesh” subplot in the play, there are also several similarities of thought and language between *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Orator*:

1. In the third act of *The Merchant*, after Bassanio learns that Antonio’s ships have been lost, his friend Salerio remarks that Shylock will no longer accept repayment of the debt, and demands his bond:

Never did I know
A creature that did bear the shape of man
So keen and greedy to confound a man. III.ii.274-6

In *The Orator*, the Christian debtor expresses the same thought—that the Jew considers it “no strange matter that he should be willing to be paid with man’s flesh, which is a thing more natural for tigers, than men.”¹¹

2. In the trial scene in the play, Shylock argues that the city will violate its laws and endanger its reputation for freedom if his suit is denied:

And by our holy Sabbath have I sworn
To have the due and forfeit of my bond.
If you deny it, let the danger light
Upon your charter and your city’s freedom! III.i.36-39

Earlier, Antonio also acknowledged that the credibility of the state should not be impaired:

The Duke cannot deny the course of law;
For the commodity that strangers have
With us in Venice, if it be denied,
Will much impeach the justice of the state, III.iii.26-9

In *The Orator* the Jew makes the same argument to the judge: “Impossible is it to break the traffic among men without great detriment unto the Commonwealth.” He also asserts the same right to justice as does Shylock: “I refute it all, and require that the same which is due should be delivered unto me.”

3. Another example is Shylock's posing of the question of why he would demand the pound of flesh instead of payment of the debt:

You'll ask me why I rather choose to have
 A weight of carrion flesh than to receive
 Three thousand ducats. I'll not answer that;
 But say it is my humour: is it answered? IV.i.40-3

In *The Orator* the Jew poses the same question and, similarly, fails to give a specific answer: "A man may ask why I would not rather take silver of this man, than his flesh? I might allege many reasons . . ."

4. A fourth example is Shylock's comparison of his demand for the pound of flesh with the Christians' practice of using slaves like animals:

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. IV.i.90-3

In *The Orator* the Jew makes the same comparison—with Christian practices that are "more cruel," such as "to bind all the body into the most loathsome prison, or unto an intolerable slavery."

The Orator is listed by most editors as a possible source for *The Merchant of Venice*. (Furness 310-13; Mahood 5-6; Brown xxxi)

The Jew of Malta

Another literary work that is routinely associated with *The Merchant of Venice* is Christopher Marlowe's *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*, said to have been written in 1589, but not registered until 1594, and not published until 1632. It is recorded as being played more than thirty times between 1592 and 1596 (Chambers 1923, III, 424-5). Barabas, the Jew of Malta, is a wealthy and miserly merchant with a daughter, Abigail, who is being courted by two Christians, one of whom she loves. When a heavy and unfair tax is imposed on Barabas and the other Jews on the island, Barabas uses Abigail in a successful scheme to conceal part of his wealth. Then, because he cannot bear to have her marry a Christian, he tricks her two suitors into killing each other in a duel. In despair over the death of her suitor, Abigail denounces Barabas and enters a nunnery. In revenge, Barabas prepares a pot of poisoned rice and sends it to the nunnery, where all the nuns eat it and die, as does Abigail, but not before she reveals her father's treachery.

Barabas avoids exposure and punishment by strangling and poisoning people right and left, but is finally betrayed by his Turkish slave Ithamore. Escaping yet again, Barabas eventually concocts a plot to kill a roomful of Turks by use of a collapsing floor above a boiling cauldron. But at the last minute, his plot is foiled, and he is the one who falls into the cauldron. There he dies, begging for mercy, and cursing both Christians and Turks.

Shylock and Barabas are both wealthy and miserly Jews with a daughter who is in love with a Christian. They both suffer mightily for their avarice and their anger at Christians. Conversion to Christianity is demanded of both of them, and the wives of both are absent. Almost every commentator on the sources of *The Merchant* has found the genesis of Shylock in Marlowe's Barabas. Almost every commentator agrees that Barabas is an avaricious monster of impossible wickedness, a coarse and violent hater of Christians whom Shakespeare softened and made human in his Shylock.

The similarities between the two plays are hard to resist, and numerous scholars have addressed them—always labeling Shakespeare the borrower. Both plays are about merchants and shipping, and both set in a Mediterranean port. The two daughters, Jessica and Abigail, both abandon their religion and convert to Christianity. Both plays deal directly and in depth with conflicts between Christians and Jews. There are also more than half-a-dozen parallels of language and thought:

1. In his first appearance in *The Merchant*, Shylock remarks on the number of *argosies*, large merchant ships, that Antonio possesses (I.iii.17-21).

In his first appearance in *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas speaks about his own ships, which he describes as *argosies* (I.i.44-5),¹² using the same unusual word for a ship that first appeared in English only in 1577 (*OED*).

2. Both Shylock and Barabas allude to the same two passages in the Bible, in the same context:

In his initial conversation with Antonio and Bassanio, Shylock refers to the story in chapter 30 of Genesis about Abraham and his son Jacob and their ability to profit by being thrifty:

This was a way to thrive, and he was blest;
And thrift is blessing, if men steal it not. I.iii.89-90

In the opening scene of Marlowe's play, Barabas recalls the same story in the same context—in a conversation with two other merchants:

These are blessings promised to the Jews
And herein was old Abram's happiness; I.i.107-8

3. Later in the same conversation, Antonio alludes to a passage in chapter 4 of Matthew when he cautions Bassanio about Shylock's reference to Genesis:

Mark you this Bassanio,
The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose. I.iii.97-8

In *The Jew of Malta*, it is Barabas who makes a similar observation after the Maltese authorities propose to confiscate all his wealth on the grounds that Jews are cursed because of their “inherent sin”:

What, bring you Scripture to confirm your wrongs?
Preach me not out of my possessions. I.ii.114-5

4. Later in the same conversation, Shylock complains about Antonio’s treatment of him:

Signor Antonio, many a time and oft
In the Rialto you have rated me
About my money and my usances.
Still I have borne it with a patient shrug
(For suff’rance is the badge of all our tribe).
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, I.iii.106-111

In the same complaint about Christians in *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas uses similar images and language when he says:

I learned in Florence how to kiss my hand,
Heave up my shoulders when they call me dog, II.iii.23-4

5. In *The Merchant Launcelot Gobbo*, Shylock’s servant, complains that his master gives him too little to eat:

I am famish’d in his service; You may tell every
finger I have with my ribs. II.ii.106-7

In his role as a clown, Gobbo mixes up his fingers and his ribs. Later in the play, Shylock remarks:

The patch is kind enough, but a huge feeder, II.v.46

(*Patch* is another word for a clown.)

The same notion of a servant who eats too much appears in *The Jew of Malta*, when Barabas questions a slave whom he is considering buying at the slave market:

Barabas: Tell me, hast thou thy health well?
Slave: Ay, passing well.
Barabas: So much the worse; I must have one that’s sickly, and ‘t be but for sparing vit-
tles: ’tis not a stone of beef a day will maintain you in these chops; let me see one
hat’s somewhat leaner. II.iii.125-30

6. After Shylock's daughter, Jessica, has eloped with Lorenzo and taken her father's gold and jewels, Salerio and Solanio joke about Shylock's distress and repeat his words:

My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
 Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
 Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter! II.viii.15-18

In Act II of *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas' daughter Abigail recovers her father's gold from under the floorboards of his house, which has been converted to a nunnery. As she throws down the bags to him from a window, he uses the same language as Shylock:

Oh my girl,
 My gold, my fortune, my felicity; . . .
 Oh girl, oh gold, oh beauty, oh my bliss (*Hugs his bags*) II.i.49-50, 56

7. In the trial scene in *The Merchant*, after the Duke has spared his life but confiscated all his wealth, Shylock exclaims

Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that:
 You take my house when you do take the prop
 That doth sustain my house; you take my life
 When you do take the means whereby I live. IV.i.374-7

In the analogous scene in *The Jew of Malta*, after the Governor has confiscated all his wealth, but spared his life, the identical thought occurs to Barabas as he exclaims

Why I esteem the injury far less,
 To take the lives of miserable men,
 Than be the causers of their misery.
 You have my wealth, the labour of my life,
 The comfort of mine age, my children's hope,
 And therefore ne'er distinguish of the wrong. I.iii.150-155

8. At the end of the trial scene in *The Merchant*, Antonio demands that Shylock become a Christian, and the Duke agrees, making it a condition of his pardon (IV.1.391-2).

In *The Jew of Malta*, the issue is raised in the second scene when the government officer threatens that those Jews who do not forfeit half their wealth to the state must convert to Christianity:

Officer: Secondly, he that denies to pay shall straight become a Christian. I.ii.77

These obvious parallels of plot, character and language indicate that either Shakespeare or Marlowe read or saw the other's treatment of the story, and re-used some of the char-

acters, ideas and details. Neither playwright was alive when the other's play was published. It is significant that Marlovian scholars admit that for *The Jew of Malta* there is "no known source" (Riggs 263; Craik ix; Bakeless I, 334).

Constrained by the Stratfordian chronology, orthodox scholars unanimously assert that Shakespeare borrowed from Marlowe. But which author is more likely to have borrowed from the other? Orthodoxy has the thirty-four-old Shakespeare lifting a setting and characters and language from a play written ten years earlier by the twenty-four-year-old Marlowe, a less-skillful playwright. This, of course, is not impossible, but considering the substantial evidence that Oxford was Shakespeare, the more likely scenario is that the twenty-four-year-old Marlowe borrowed from the play written ten years earlier by the twenty-eight-year old Oxford.

Gernutus

In June of 1594 an anonymous ballad of forty verses called "the usurer's reward" was entered in the Stationers Register (Arber II, 654). The earliest extant text appeared in a journal, *The Connoisseur*, in 1754, where it is described as "A new Song: Showing the cruelty of Gernutus a Jew, who lending to a Merchant a hundred crowns, would have a pound of his flesh, because he could not pay him at the day appointed. To the tune of *Black and Yellow*."¹³

The ballad *Black and Yellow* had been written about twenty-five years earlier, on another subject. We find the ballad *The Cruelty of Gernutus, a Jew*, with the accompanying score, in *Shakespeare's Songbook*, a collection of songs that Shakespeare used or alluded to in his plays (Duffin 330-34). The claim that in *The Merchant of Venice* he alluded to the ballad of *Gernutus* is based on similarities in the stories:

Gernutus, a Jew and a cruel usurer, lives in Venice. A merchant approaches him for a loan of 100 crowns for twelve months for his friend. Gernutus demands a bond of a pound of flesh against the timely repayment of the loan. After twelve months the merchant's ships are still at sea, and he is unable to repay the loan. Gernutus has the merchant jailed, and they go to court.

The merchant's friends offer to pay Gernutus ten times the debt, and more, but he refuses. The judge rules that Gernutus may take a pound of flesh, but must let the merchant live. As Gernutus wields the knife, the judge cautions that he shed no blood. Gernutus "waxed frantic mad" and demands 10,000 crowns in lieu of the pound of flesh. The judge disallows any payment, and orders him to take his pound of flesh or cancel the debt.

In addition to these identical elements in the two stories, there are half-a-dozen similarities in thoughts, words and phrases.

Date of Composition

To sum up the evidence for a composition date of 1578, we have, early in 1579, several clear allusions to a play with characters, circumstances and language that are identical with those in Shakespeare's play. During the next fifteen years, there are published at least five literary works that contain characters and details of plot, imagery, and language that orthodox scholars describe as sources or possible sources of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Table 1 illustrates the appearance of the elements in the Stephen Gosson tract and the Spenser letter in the five subsequent literary works, and in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Table 1

Elements in the Gosson tract and the Spenser Letter 1579	<i>Zelauto</i> 1580	<i>The Three Ladies of London</i> 1581	<i>The Orator</i> 1581	<i>The Jew of Malta</i> 1588	<i>Gernutus</i> 1594	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> 1596?
Play		X		X		X
Venice	X	X			X	X
Jew		X	X	X	X	X
Merchant		X	X	X	X	X
“Worldly choosers”						X
Bloody-minded usurer	X	X	X		X	X
Loan/obligation	X	X	X		X	X
Bond	X		X		X	X

Orthodox scholars place Shakespeare’s play at the end of this sequence in accordance with their contention that it was written in the late 1590s. They explain the elements in the Gosson tract and the Spenser letter as belonging to a “lost” play, an *Ur-Merchant of Venice*. However, based on the facts available, simple logic demands that the literary work that contains all the elements present in the 1579 documents be placed at the beginning of the sequence, as in Table 2.

Table 2

<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> 1578	Elements in the Gosson tract and the Spenser Letter 1579	<i>Zelauto</i> 1580	<i>The Three Ladies of London</i> 1581	<i>The Orator</i> 1581	<i>The Jew of Malta</i> 1588	<i>Gernutus</i> 1594
X	Play		X		X	
X	Venice	X	X			X
X	Jew		X	X	X	X
X	Merchant		X	X	X	X
X	“Worldly choosers”					
X	Bloody-minded usurer	X	X	X		X
X	Loan/obligation	X	X	X		X
X	Bond	X		X		X

In addition to this well-known evidence, the additional passages in *The School of Abuse* mentioned earlier supply further proof that *The Merchant of Venice* antedated not only *The School of Abuse*, but all five of the literary works that treat the same story. This can be seen clearly in Table 3.

Table 3

<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> 1578	Language in Gosson's <i>School of Abuse</i> 1579	<i>Zelauto</i> 1580	<i>The Three Ladies of London</i> 1581	<i>The Orator</i> 1581	<i>The Jew of Malta</i> 1588	<i>Gernutus</i> 1594
X	Admonition to avoid masques/plays.					
X	Music, window, door, house, ears image cluster.					
X	Reference to Scylla and Charybdis.					
X	Use of the word <i>sober</i> to mean free of music, acting, etc.					

There are only two explanations for this collection of facts. One is that *The Merchant of Venice* was written in 1578 or earlier. The other is the one reached by orthodox scholars—that the documents of 1579 refer to an imaginary “lost” play, an *Ur-Merchant of Venice*, written in 1578 or earlier by an unknown playwright. This is reminiscent of the explanation given for the large vocabulary and literary skill of the businessman from Stratford—“genius.” It is obvious that orthodox scholars have rearranged the sequence of sources and derivatives to conform to the Stratfordian paradigm, which is constrained by the birth date of their candidate, Shakespeare of Stratford. To use a phrase that originated with Eric Sams, there can hardly be a more striking example of an attempt “to infer historical fact from literary opinion” (36).

***The Merchant of Venice* and Oxford**

In addition to the substantial evidence produced over the last ninety years that the Earl of Oxford is the actual author of the Shakespeare canon, there are several reasons for associating *The Merchant of Venice* with him and with the year 1578.

The most obvious is Oxford's fifteen-month continental tour in 1575-6, during which he spent several months in Venice, and visited nearby Padua, a city that also figures in the play. Having competence in the Italian language, Oxford was in a better position than any other playwright to use the Italian works that were major sources for the play. Over the last eighty years, half-a-dozen scholars, both orthodox and Oxfordian, have documented the numerous specific and accurate details of geography, customs and language of the Veneto region that permeate the play.¹⁴ In particular, the late Noemi Magri identified the

villa on the Brenta River that was Belmont, Portia's home (2003), and the also late Richard Roe discovered and photographed Shylock's penthouse in the Jewish Ghetto (138-9).

Moreover, the plot of the play may have been suggested to the playwright by an unusual trial that took place in Venice in 1567, just eight years before Oxford's arrival. Gaspare Ribeiro, a merchant and a moneylender, and his son João, Portuguese *conversos*—Jews who converted to Christianity—were found guilty of making a usurious loan of 3000 ducats to another Venetian merchant (Pullan 195-6). They were initially required to forfeit the amount of the loan, and all the interest, but subsequent appeals reduced the amount forfeited by more than half. Similarly, after Shylock was frustrated in his attempt to cut a pound of flesh from Bassanio, he faced confiscation of all his possessions and execution, but the Duke spared his life and allowed him to keep half his goods.

According to the report of the trial, Gaspar Ribeiro was notoriously miserly and deeply suspicious of his domestic servants. In 1572, in spite of his attempts to prevent it, his daughter Violante married a Christian, who subsequently seized a case of jewels from Ribeiro's home (Pullan 198-9). These details also appear in *The Merchant of Venice*. Furthermore, as the result of the trial, Ribeiro was required to convert to Christianity, just as was Shylock. Lastly, at the time of Oxford's residence in Venice, Ribeiro and his son lived in the parish of Santa Maria Formosa in the Castello district and attended the famous church there, the same church that Oxford is known to have also attended (Pullan 199; Magri 2002, 6-7).

Another individual whom Oxford may have met in Italy could have been the model for "Doctor Bellario," Portia's kinsman, who sends the letter commending "Balthasar" to the Venetian court.

During the latter half of the sixteenth century, "there was living in Padua a professor ...whose characteristics fully and entirely corresponded" to the description of Doctor Bellario in the play. Ottonello Descalzo "was at that time the most eminent Professor of Law, especially Civil Law, in the University of Padua...The Government of the Republic continually consulted him, and heaped him with honours, commissions, and embassies...Many a defendant in civil cases he rescued from the perils of legal procedure ..."¹⁵ It is entirely possible that Oxford met Descalzo or knew of his reputation and found in him the ideal vehicle on which to base Portia's deception.

At the time of Oxford's residence in Venice, Ribeiro and his son lived in the parish of Santa Maria Formosa in the Castello district and attended the famous church there, the same church that Oxford is known to have also attended.

Both Stratfordian and Oxfordian scholars have also explored the origin of the name and the character of *Shylock*. The latter propose that they might be based on Michael Lok, a merchant adventurer and the uncle of one of Oxford's long time servants, Henry Lok (Clark 194-201).¹⁶ In 1577 Michael Lok was appointed governor of the Cathay Company, which had been formed to finance Martin Frobisher's search for a northwest passage to "Cathay." After the first expedition, the original search was largely abandoned and, instead, Frobisher made two more voyages to North America to collect large amounts of black ore that some thought might yield gold. Oxford was persuaded to make an invest-

ment in the third Frobisher expedition in 1578, two-thirds of which went to purchase some of Lok's shares in the venture. In his letter to the organizers of the voyage, Oxford declared "I will enter into bond" for the investment (Ward 238-9). Ultimately, the black ore proved worthless, and Oxford lost his entire outlay of £3000, a number identical with Shylock's loan. Blame for the failed enterprise fell largely on Lok, who was accused of being "a cozener to my Lord of Oxford," and spent several years in debtors' prison as a result (Clark 195). His role in the affair may have stimulated the playwright to portray him as Shylock.

Another explanation for the name *Shylock* is that it may derive from *Shallach*, Hebrew for *cormorant*, a word often used for usurers.¹⁷

Eva Turner Clark suggested that the story of the many suitors of Portia and her various remarks about them are a depiction of the situation of Queen Elizabeth during the 1570s, a subject in which Oxford had a strong interest (192-4). The same thought occurred to Samuel Johnson in connection with Nerissa's interrogation of Portia about her seven suitors in I.ii: "Perhaps in this enumeration of Portia's suitors there may be some covert allusion to those of Queen Elizabeth" (Woudhuysen 177).

Lastly, Portia's remark about the restrictions in her father's will:

If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as
Diana, unless I be obtained by the manner of my
father's will: I.ii.106-8

may refer to a similar stricture on Elizabeth's marriage imposed by her father, Henry VIII, who specified that her choice of a husband must be approved by the Privy Council (Clark 194).

To no other playwright and to no other decade do these facts, some of which are indisputable, apply more specifically and more aptly than to the Earl of Oxford in the 1570s. There is documentary evidence in the next decade that he was among the best of the court poets and playwrights (Anderson 236), and a letter from the courtier Gilbert Talbot reports a Shrovetide performance of a "show" or "device" by him and three other noblemen before the Queen at court in March 1579 (Ward 163-4).

Another connection with Oxford is the entry for *The Merchant of Venice* in the Stationers Register in 1598. It reads in full: "James Roberts. Entered for his copy under the hands of both the wardens, a book of *The Merchant of Venice*, or otherwise called *The Jew of Venice*. Provided that it be not printed by the said James Roberts; or any other whatsoever without further licence first had from the right honorable the Lord Chamberlain" (Arber III, 122). In an article in *The Oxfordian*, Robert Detobel argued convincingly that this entry was intended to prevent any publication of the play before the author gave his consent (2001, 21). In a subsequent article, he supplied evidence that the author in question was the cited "right honorable the Lord Chamberlain," and that the only Lord Chamberlain who wrote plays was the Earl of Oxford (2002, 42-3). In the use of two dif-

ferent titles for the play, the entry also suggests that it was not a new play, and had been performed at one time under the title *The Jew of Venice*.

For our final piece of evidence, I return to *Zelauto*, which Anthony Munday wrote during 1579-80. I believe the significance of this passage has not been noted previously.

The reclusive knight with whom *Zelauto* exchanges stories is named *Astraepho* and, in one of the tales that *Zelauto* relates to him, he describes his visit to England. In London he is introduced to “diverse Gentlemen, which were of the Court of England” (35), who eventually bring him into the presence of the Queen. At the end of this account, *Astraepho* questions him about the activities of the court:

Astraepho: I thank you for your good will heartily. But do her noble peers and lords that are about her, often use to recreate her person with such brave and strange devises?
Zelauto: Sir, those gallant youths do, and have bestowed abundance in the pleasing of her Majesty, and are so well contented there withal: that surely it surpasseth any mans wit to give them praise according to their desert.
Astraepho: But did you ever come in acquaintance with any of those noble gentlemen?
Zelauto: Yea sir, and am much bound to one of them in especial, who sure in magnanimity of mind, and valor of courage, representeth in that famous land,
Zelauto telleth how much bound he was to a noble Lord in the English Court, a second *Caesar*, to the view of all that know him. And a little before I departed out of this worthy country, I wrote a few verses in the commendation of that virtuous Maiden Queen: and also I wrote a few other in praise of that noble Lord, to whom I am bound for his singular bounty.¹⁸

Printed at the end of this exchange are four stanzas of effusive praise of Queen Elizabeth and three of the same for “a certain noble Lord in the English Court.” As Munday had become the Earl’s “servant” less than two years earlier, and had dedicated *Zelauto* to him, there is little question about what noble Lord he was referring to. This is further evidence that Oxford was actively involved in entertaining Queen Elizabeth at court during the late 1570s. Although he may have addressed poetry to the Queen in later decades, there is no evidence that he did so in the 1570s, and there are no surviving masques by him from any period. His forte was writing plays, and when he formed his own playing company early in 1580, he may have done so to insure that they were performed.

This evidence, and that presented above, leads to the conclusion that the Earl of Oxford wrote *The Merchant of Venice* in the late 1570s and that, under one title or another, it was performed at The Bull in the early part of 1579, and most likely again for Queen Elizabeth in her court shortly thereafter. The five variations on “the usurers story” that were written and published in the following two decades were derivatives, not sources, of the original Shakespeare play. The numerous details of character, plot, language, and thought that they share with *The Merchant of Venice* suggest that each of their authors saw or read that play before composing his own version.

E. K. Chambers (1930, I, 248) and G. B. Evans (*The Riverside Shakespeare* 82) place *The Merchant of Venice* fourteenth and fifteenth, respectively, in their lists of Shakespeare’s plays in the order of composition. Just earlier than them on the same lists are his

other early Italian plays—*The Taming of the Shrew*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Thus, an established date of 1578 for *The Merchant of Venice* would place all four within a few years of his extended stay in Venice, surely a watershed for his artistic development and for Elizabethan drama.

Acknowledgments

The author is indebted to the late Robert Brazil for the history and details about the Oxford coat of arms

Notes

- ¹ In an identical colloquial translation, John Fletcher, in his play *The Chances* (1618), used the phrase “Here’s tough old Andrew” to refer to a type of Italian broadsword, an “Andrea Ferrara”. See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_Doria.
- ² Quotations from *The Merchant of Venice* are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. 1997, Ed. G. Blakemore Evans *et al.*
- ³ In his excerpt from *The School of Abuse*, E. K. Chambers excludes these passages (1923, IV, 205).
- ⁴ The matter is recounted in Furness at 322. Scott reported his discovery in his *Athenaeum* article.
- ⁵ Cited by Bullough at I, 452.
- ⁶ Citations are to page nos. in the Stillinger edition of *Zelauto*.
- ⁷ Quotations from *Three Ladies of London* are from *Three Renaissance usury plays*, Lloyd Edward Kermode, ed.
- ⁸ The play has been called “an economic document in theatrical form” (Wright 128).
- ⁹ Bullough calls *The Three Ladies* a “rival play” and “an answer” to *The Jew*, the play mentioned by Gosson (I, 455).
- ¹⁰ Both Charles IX, in the 1560s, and Henri III, in the 1570s, were suitors of Queen Elizabeth.
- ¹¹ Quotations from *The Orator* are from the text printed in the Arden Shakespeare *The Merchant of Venice*, 2nd series. John Russell Brown, ed. pp. 168-72. The first translation of *The Orator* into English was made by Anthony Munday.
- ¹² Quotations from *The Jew of Malta* are from the Stephen J. Lynch edition.
- ¹³ According to Thomas Warton, the text is found in *Mus. Ashmol.* Oxon. cod. impress. A. Wood. (Furness 287-8)
- ¹⁴ The most complete accounts of these are in Jeffery; Magri (2003 & 2009); and Roe.
- ¹⁵ Th. Elze, quoted in Furness 458-9.
- ¹⁶ Henry Lok was a devotional poet of unusual productivity who published a collection of 200 sonnets in 1593. This collection and another published in 1597 were printed by Richard Field, the printer of *Venus and Adonis* in 1593. Henry Lok was in the service of the Earl of Oxford for about twenty years, beginning in 1570. At the time of his death, in Venice in 1611, he was apparently in the service of Robert Cecil as a newsgatherer and spy. See Doelman, p. 11 and http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/StatePapers12/SP_12-234_ff_8-9.pdf
- ¹⁷ Detailed discussions of this and the three other Jewish names in the play can be found in Furness ix-xi; Brown 3; and in the Goldstein article.
- ¹⁸ Marginal comments of the sort shown appear throughout the text. The excerpt is from pp. 51-2 of the Stillinger edition.

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