

**Suspect Narratives of Solanio & Salarino:
A Stylistic Analysis of *The Merchant of Venice***

Akiko Watanabe

University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo

Introduction

The Merchant of Venice, written sometime between 1596 and 1598 by William Shakespeare, is known as a problematic play. John Drakakis begins the introduction of the Arden Shakespeare with the statement that ‘*The Merchant of Venice* is arguably Shakespeare’s most controversial comedy,’ contending ‘it broaches a topic that has become a touchstone of the political difference between tolerance and prejudice’ (2010: 1). The play has also evoked the questions about anti-Semitism, father-daughter relationship, homoeroticism, usury, and so on. I have been implementing a stylistic analysis of this play with the object of proposing a new interpretation in my PhD thesis, focusing on the character Antonio, the merchant whose one pound of flesh is demanded as a forfeit by a Jewish usurer.

Scholars’ interpretations of Antonio tend to be sympathetic to him. Jonathan Bate argues that ‘Antonio is the one who really cares about love more than money, about the “bond” of friendship more than the legal and financial bond, about what is “dear” to his heart more than what is “dear” in the sense of expensive’ (2010: 5). Conversely, Jan Lawson Hinely states, ‘the titular hero, Antonio, is found peculiarly inconsistent and unrealized’ (1980: 217), and Cynthia Lewis states, ‘Antonio may be the least visible character ever to have had a play named after him’ (1983: 19). Whatever the critics may say, it has seemed to elude them that Antonio is a man who has openly persecuted a Jewish usurer with his words and actions.¹

On the other hand, Antonio’s adversary, Shylock, has a common reputation of being greedy. The definition of *New Oxford American Dictionary* (2005) for the word,

Shylock, is ‘a moneylender who charges extremely high rates of interest.’ However, there is no description in the play about the rates Shylock charges. On the contrary, he lends a large sum of money to Antonio without charging any interest, and moreover, he demands Antonio’s flesh, which has no monetary value as security, rather than ten times the money he lent.

In this paper, I would like to bring up the questions, ‘Why does Antonio hardly become the target of criticism?’ and ‘Who said Shylock is greedy?’ and to present my view by analyzing the text, mainly from Act 2, Scene 8. The scene consists of a conversation solely between Solanio and Salarino, who are considered ‘minor characters,’ introduced as ‘gentlemen of Venice, and companions with Bassanio’ in the Third Quarto published in 1637, which was the first to include ‘The Actors Names,’ the basis for the list of characters in modern editions.² Solanio and Salarino are not directly involved in major occurrences, having no part in Bassanio’s courtship of Portia, no specific line in the climax scene at the court, and moreover, no entrance on the stage in the final act. Furthermore, their names are mentioned only in the stage directions, and not in the dialogue at all. Therefore, their words have not attracted much scholarly attention. Although M. M. Mahood has carefully examined their names (2003: 191-95), to date no detailed analysis of their words seems to have been conducted. Katsuhito Iwai, a renowned economist in Japan, even states in his well-known book, *Capital in The Merchant of Venice*, that ‘Solanio and Salarino, or Salarino and Solanio—friends to each other, who have interchangeable names and whose only lines are mutually interchangeable, are symbolic of being most unworthy of attention among friends of Antonio’s for the very fact of their being “interchangeable”’ (1992: 9-10). It is not unusual, indeed, to see two people who are alike in appearance playing the roles of Solanio and Salarino on stage or in screen. However, their utterances should be marked more carefully because as Christian friends of Antonio and Bassanio, Solanio and Salarino often utter significant words which can influence the feelings of the audience/readers dominantly.

Applying Discourse Analysis and Classical Rhetoric, I will attempt to highlight

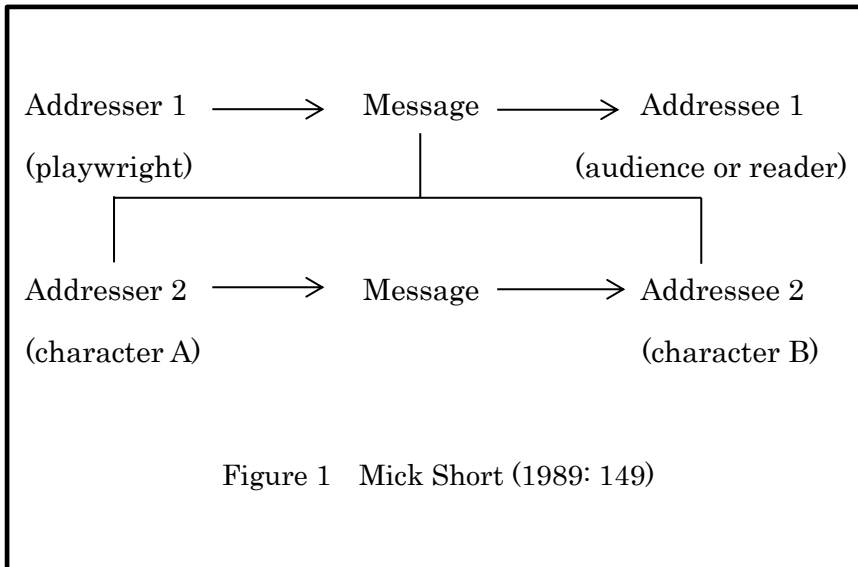
how Shakespeare prejudices his audience/readers through the point of view of Solanio and Salarino, by employing rhetorical devices of repetition and hyperbole for dramatic effect. The structure of the scene will also be discussed because unusual reactions of addressees on the stage suggest that the way the words are delivered is more like a monologue, rather than a dialogue, deviating from the ordinary discourse structure. I will argue that the unconventional structure of this scene, which is not explicitly recognized, is essential not only to deliver the message of the speakers but to influence the emotion of the audience/readers in their judgment of the two main characters of the play and also the events that follow.

1. Narrators in a play

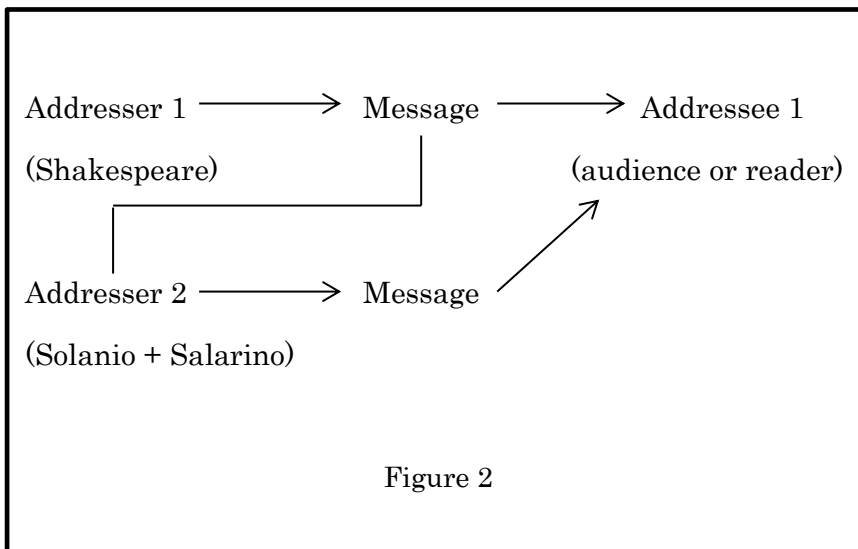
Although narrators are uncommon in plays, a character in Shakespeare's often tells a story as a narrator to provide some important information to the hearer as well as the audience/readers. Act 2, Scene 8 of *The Merchant of Venice* should be considered as an extreme example in which no physical action that develops the plot takes place. Only Solanio and Salarino appear, and talk quickly and passionately, introducing four different scenes which have not, and will not be performed on the stage. Firstly, Shylock's search of Bassanio's ship for Jessica, secondly, disturbances Shylock caused on the streets of Venice, thirdly, a story heard from a Frenchman, and finally, the parting of Antonio and Bassanio. Since Solanio and Salarino tell their stories alternatively, it may appear as if they are having an ordinary conversation, providing new information to each other. However, the style of their talk is peculiar. Neither of them shows normal reactions to the new information he hears, such as surprise, misgiving, or disagreement. Each thoroughly goes along with what the other says, as if one voice is telling the whole story and there is no listener on the stage. Therefore, this paper argues that the narratives given by Solanio and Salarino are only meant to be heard by the theater audience, or perused by the readers.

This should be considered 'extremely artificial,' deviating from the norm.

According to Mick Short (1989, 1996), a prototypical drama has two levels of discourse, the playwright-audience/reader level and the character-character level. The figure below shows the discourse structure of drama.



However, the discourse structure of Act 2 Scene 8 of *The Merchant of Venice* is more like that of a monologue, though there are two addressers on the stage, as is shown in figure 2 below.



Having two people to tell a story, the narratives can expect to sound more natural and plausible than a story told by a single narrator.

On the other hand, the possibility that the narrators are not telling what exactly

happened should not be excluded. Let me introduce an example from *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1600?-1602?). Gertrude's description of the drowning of Ophelia is so vivid that it has inspired many artists, including John Everett Millais, to create their works. Since Gertrude does not mention herself in her narrative at all, it gives the impression as if she has heard about the death of Ophelia from someone else. However, her narrative seems to be unnaturally detailed, for example, it says, 'Her clothes spread wide, / And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up, / Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds' (4.7.175-77).³ If that is so, what was the witness doing all the while? It is not absurd to conclude, therefore, that Gertrude was following Ophelia and was just watching the poor girl drown, in other words, it is possible that the narrative hides an important aspect that the Queen may have had a part in Ophelia's death.

Out of the four narratives by Solanio and Salarino, half of them are referred to only in this scene. Therefore, the members of the audience/readers have few clues to judge whether the reports are accurate or not. More importantly, Salarino's anxiety over the Frenchman's story later turns out to become a reality in the play, affecting the whole plot. Including this crucial and trustworthy sign that the play is going to be tragic, the all four narratives are told as if everything they say is true and fair. However, it is essential to attach great importance to the purpose of the narrators because they are indirectly but cleverly talking to the audience/readers with a specific intention.

2. Analysis of Act 2, Scene 8

2.1. Narratives regarding Shylock

As Solanio and Salarino enter, the scene opens. They begin their first narrative about Shylock, who appeared with the Duke before the ship Antonio had prepared for Bassanio.

SALARINO. Why, man, I saw Bassanio under sail,
With him is Gratiano gone along;

And in their ship I am sure Lorenzo is not.

SOLANIO. The villain Jew with outcries raised the Duke,

Who went with him to search Bassanio's ship. 5

SALARINO. He came too late, the ship was under sail.

But there the Duke was given to understand

That in a gondola were seen together

Lorenzo and his amorous Jessica.

Besides, Antonio certified the Duke 10

They were not with Bassanio in his ship. (2.8.1-11)⁴

Salarino says in his first turn that he is 'sure' that 'Lorenzo is not' in the ship to Belmont. Later in Act 3, Lorenzo tells Portia in Belmont that 'My purpose was not to have seen you here, / But meeting with Salerio by the way / He did entreat me past all saying nay / To come with him along' (3.2.226-29). Therefore, Salarino's report in the above quotation sounds reasonable. However, the explanation in his second turn reveals that he has no solid foundation for his confidence. All the information he has is secondhand. Moreover, it seems that no actual search was made. Therefore, Salarino's report is perhaps produced by his own judgment of the situation.

There is another important aspect in the utterance of Solanio's in the above quotation. In line 4, he calls the father of Jessica, '[t]he villain Jew.' This is a unique junction of the word 'villain' and 'Jew,' which cannot be found in any other plays of Shakespeare, or in other known literary works of his time.⁵ Since it is not "villainous Jew," the noun "villain" is used as a part of the word "Jew" acting as a compound.⁶ In spite of such malicious and uncommon use of the phrase by Solanio, Salarino does not respond to it and continues their talk, using the pronoun 'he' referring to the 'villain Jew.' This indicates that Salarino also shares the same idea, that Shylock is 'a villain.' It is important to note that at this point, Shylock has lent three thousand ducats to Antonio without charging interest, and also he has not yet in effect demanded Antonio's flesh. That means, the reason they call Shylock 'the villain' has to be because he has either done something terrible before the play begins, or simply because he is a Jew and

a usurer.

This is not the only scene in which Solanio utters his spiteful feelings towards Shylock. Later in Act 3, Scene 3, Solanio accompanies the desperate Antonio to go and see his creditor Shylock. Since Antonio is guarded by a Jailer, Solanio's attendance seems unnecessary. However, his brief statement, 'It is the most impenetrable cur / That ever kept with men' (3.3.18-19), referring to Shylock, is caustic. The word 'dog' and 'cur' are typical insulting words used in Shakespeare's plays, as they appear as the first and the second in Norman Blake's list of insulting, derogatory, and familiar forms of address (2002: 275). However, these words can humiliate much more deeply when religious issues are concerned because the word 'dog' often appears in the Bible as a symbol of a detestable object.⁷ Moreover, Solanio's expression, 'kept with men,' emphasizes his biased view that Jews are like dogs kept by men such as Solanio and Antonio. After making such a clear distinction between Antonio as a man and Shylock as a cur, Solanio speaks about the Duke's treatment of the case: 'I am sure the Duke / Will never grant this forfeiture to hold' (3.3.24-25). However, there is no ground for the statement of Solanio's, and his confidence is immediately crushed by Antonio, who says, 'The Duke cannot deny the course of law' (3.4.26). Nevertheless, it is made clear that Solanio's view is that the Duke should stand on their side, not on the Jew's, whatever circumstance they are in.

Now, I will return to Act 2, Scene 8. In no time, Solanio begins the second narrative, calling Shylock, 'the dog Jew.'

SOLANIO. I never heard a passion so confused,

So strange, outrageous, and so variable,

As the dog Jew did utter in the streets:

'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!

15

Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!

Justice! The law! My ducats and my daughter!

A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,

Of double ducats, stolen from me by my daughter!

And jewels—two stones, two rich and precious stones, 20

Stolen by my daughter! Justice! Find the girl!

She hath the stones upon her and the ducats!

SALARINO. Why, all the boys in Venice follow him,

Crying his stones, his daughter, and his ducats. (2.8.12-24)

The confusion of Shylock is vividly depicted with short sentences and as many as thirteen exclamation marks. However, why he can be so sure that his daughter has fled with a Christian, and is not simply missing or abducted, is not explained. Why he is certain that his stones and money were stolen by his daughter, not by someone else, is also unrevealed. It can be imagined that Shylock learns by intuition that Lancelot, a Christian man serving him at that time, was somehow involved, and that he went to Lancelot's new master Bassanio, who was preparing to leave Venice by the ship provided by Antonio. Although Shylock could not find Jessica there, he probably overheard the report spoken to the Duke that she was on a gondola with Lorenzo. However, it is highly probable that someone like Solanio, who had witnessed what exactly happened, told Shylock teasingly how joyfully Jessica took his money and ran away with a Christian man.

In the above narrative of eleven lines, 'my daughter' is repeated five times. The structure of line 15, 'my daughter' at the beginning and the ending of the line, with 'my ducats' in-between, suggests that Shylock's greatest concern is his daughter, rather than his money, though the alliteration of /d/ may confuse the audience. More importantly, however, there is a trick in Salarino's words which can change the audience/readers' understanding of the situation. Salarino corroborates Solanio's narrative, further describing the fuss in the streets. Line 24 may sound like a repetition of Solanio's report, but one of the 'daughters' is replaced with 'stones,' and the order of the words are changed with more emphasis on his valuables rather than his daughter, having 'stones' at the beginning and 'ducats' at the end of the line. Since it is the last information about the issue, there is no doubt that it leaves a much stronger impression to the audience/readers.

Line 15 is often compared with a line in *The Jew of Malta*, written by Christopher Marlowe in around 1589-91. Barabas, the Jew, rejoices at the recovery of his money by the aid of his daughter, 'O my girl, / My gold, my fortune, my felicity' (2.1.47-48), and also, 'O girl, O gold, O beauty, O my bliss!' (2.1.54).⁸ However, the important point is that the words are uttered by Barabas himself. Moreover, unlike Barabas, Shylock does not show a wild obsession with money.⁹ He decides to lend a large sum of money without charging any interest, and moreover, he refuses the money Bassanio offers in an attempt to save Antonio in the court, which is ten times the amount he lent.¹⁰ Furthermore, one of the stones was a present from his late wife, Leah. When Tubal, his Jewish friend, reports that someone showed a ring to him, saying that he had received it from Jessica in exchange for a monkey, Shylock cries out, 'Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal: it was my turquoise, / I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have / given it for a wilderness of monkeys' (3.1.95-97). This cry of Shylock is widely regarded as an indication of his humanity, however, the meaning of the word 'torture' here is much deeper than its definition.¹¹ When Shylock hears that Antonio will certainly go bankrupt, he utters, 'I am very glad of it. I'll plague him; I'll torture him. / I am glad of it' (3.1.105-6). Here, the verb 'torture' is used synonymously with 'plague.' In Shakespeare's time, 'plague' in noun form could very closely mean 'death.'¹² Therefore, Shylock's intention to 'torture' Antonio, and also the 'torture' he suffers by losing Leah's ring bear grave meanings.

2.2. Narratives regarding Antonio

Planting the view in the minds of the members of the audience/readers that for Shylock, his money is as important as his daughter, or even more, now Solanio and Salarino change their tone and begin to talk seriously. They shift their focus to Antonio, allowing Salarino to take up the third narrative, a Frenchman's story.

SOLANIO. Let good Antonio look he keep his day,

25

Or he shall pay for this.

SALARINO. Marry, well remembered:

I reasoned with a Frenchman yesterday
Who told me, in the Narrow Seas that part
The French and English, there miscarried
A vessel of our country richly fraught.
I thought upon Antonio when he told me,
And wished in silence that it were not his.

30

SOLANIO. You were best to tell Antonio what you hear.

Yet do not suddenly, for it may grieve him. (2.8.25-35)

After calling Shylock 'the villain Jew' and 'the dog Jew,' Solanio refers to Antonio as 'good Antonio' in line 25. He begins to worry about Antonio's debt, having a feeling that Shylock may vent his fury on Antonio. Since both of them know well that Antonio's ships carry considerable amount of merchandise and one of them could have plied the English Channel between Dover and Calais. Salarino's report should be shocking for Solanio. However, he does not comment about the allegedly wrecked ship, or show his amazement. Instead, he advises Salarino to tell Antonio, in a manner that will not grieve him. Solanio's role here is obviously that of a narrator who needs to advance the plot rather than as a listener.

Salarino immediately responds in the same tone.

SALARINO. A kinder gentleman treads not the earth.

I saw Bassanio and Antonio part:
Bassanio told him he would make some speed
Of his return: he answered, 'Do not so.
Slubber not business for my sake, Bassanio,
But stay the very riping of the time;
And for the Jew's bond which he hath of me,
Let it not enter in your mind of love.
Be merry, and employ your chiefest thoughts
To courtship, and such fair ostents of love

40

As shall conveniently become you there.' (2.8.36-46)

Now it is Salarino's turn to praise Antonio. His description is foregrounded by use of the figure of hyperbole, 'A kinder gentleman treads not the earth' (2.8.36). This kind of figure is used, as George Puttenham explains, in order to 'greatly advance or greatly abase the reputation of any thing or person' (2007: 276-77). Salarino's utterance here is unquestionably meant 'to greatly advance the reputation of Antonio.' Then, who could be the addressee? Since Salarino's utterance includes no new information, but even employs a figure of hyperbole, his companion, Solanio, cannot be the addressee. Thus, this paper argues that the message of Salarino here is meant to be delivered only to the audience/readers. In other words, the narrator, Salarino, is speaking to the audience/readers with the object of influencing their views of Antonio. This narrative contributes to display an image of 'Antonio, a man of love' more forcefully by not only presenting Antonio's words and behavior towards Bassanio, but also by highlighting his generosity and unselfishness.

However, Antonio's behavior proves that his words come from his vanity, rather than from his heart.

SALARINO. And even there, his eye being big with tears,

Turning his face, he put his hand behind him,

And with affection wondrous sensible

He wrung Bassanio's hand, and so they parted. (2.8.47-50)

Having 'his eye [. . .] big with tears' at a temporary parting with his male friend, who is going to propose marriage to a woman, is inordinate. Moreover, Antonio turned his face, putting his hand behind him, and wrung Bassanio's hand. Why was he almost crying? Why could he not even see Bassanio's face and embrace him tightly? Antonio's behavior is obviously strange if he really wishes Bassanio to 'be merry' and to concentrate on his business.

Nevertheless, as if there is nothing to be surprised at, Solanio puts forward his view objectively.

SOLANIO. I think he only loves the world for him.

I pray thee let us go and find him out
And quicken his embraced heaviness
With some delight or other.

SALARINO. Do we so.

Exeunt (2.8.51-54)

Solanio's statement, 'I think he only loves the world for him' approves not only Antonio's love for Bassanio, but also Salarino's inconsistent narrative. Then, he suggests they go and see Antonio to cheer him up together. Salarino's short answer, 'Do we so,' which shares Solanio's line, closes the scene, emphasizing their togetherness as 'one voice.'

Conclusion

In the above analysis, this paper has highlighted Shakespeare's unique technique to influence the perspectives of his audience, using narratives of his minor characters in *The Merchant of Venice*. Act 2, Scene 8 of the play may seem as if two men on the stage are talking casually in order to supply some information to each other and to the audience. However, the close analysis conducted in this paper has made it clear that the information of the speaker is not meant to be delivered to the hearer on the stage, but to the audience/readers, as if a narrator is telling a story, deviating from the ordinary discourse structure of drama.

The narratives of the two men, Solanio and Salarino, not only include some crucial portents for Antonio, but they actually have the function to promote prejudice toward Shylock and Antonio. As friends of Antonio, on one hand they emphasize Shylock's attachment to money, and enjoy his anguish over his missing daughter, money and other valuables, by repeating the same words and phrases. On the other hand, they extol Antonio to the skies and sympathize with him about his pain of parting from his friend, employing a rhetorical figure of hyperbole. The comparison between Shylock and Antonio established in this scene is devious and may not be clearly noticed by the audience/readers because Solanio and Salarino change their tone when they change the

topic; moreover, Antonio's name is not mentioned when they talk about Shylock, and vice versa. Such a comparison cannot be persuasively portrayed by a single narrator without attracting overt attention of the audience/readers. Creating two characters, who are equally inconspicuous and identical, Shakespeare has knitted two voices into one so that they can deliver their prejudiced view covertly in unison.

Although the narratives of Solanio and Salarino have not yet become the object of close scholarly attention, this paper has demonstrated that they deserve more consideration. They may exert a considerable influence on the audience/readers because the prejudiced view of Solanio and Salarino alters interpretations of the following scenes, particularly the court scene.

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Notes

1. The following is an extract from the first encounter of Antonio and Shylock on the stage:

SHYLOCK. You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,

And spit upon my Jewish gabardine,

And all for use of that which is mine own. (1.3.103-5)

ANTONIO. I am as like to call thee so again,

To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too. (1.3.122-23)

The following is Shylock's denunciation of Antonio's persecution in prose before he

begins the ‘Hath not a Jew eyes?’ speech:

SHYLOCK. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million,
laughted at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation,
thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies—
and what’s his reason? I am a Jew. (3.1.43-46)

2. The following modern editions introduce Solanio and Salarino as:
【Arden】 ‘gentlemen of Venice, and friends of Bassanio and Antonio’
【Cambridge】 ‘gentlemen of Venice, and companions with Bassanio,’ bracketed
with Gratiano and Lorenzo.
【Norton】 ‘friends of Antonio and Bassanio,’ bracketed with Lorenzo and Graziano.
【Oxford】 ‘Venetian gentlemen, Antonio’s friends,’ bracketed with Salario.
【RSC】 ‘friends of Antonio and Bassanio.’
3. Quotations from *Hamlet* are cited from the following edition: William Shakespeare. (2006). *Hamlet*. Ed. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. Ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. London: Methuen Drama.
4. Quotations from *The Merchant of Venice* are cited from the following edition: William Shakespeare. (1987). *The Merchant of Venice*. Ed. M. M. Mahood. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
5. No other example of ‘villain Jew’ was found through a search of *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223417,101210>> (16 Oct. 2012), *Literature Online* <<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/searchTexts.do>> (22 Oct. 2012), and *Open Source Shakespeare* <<http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/search/search-results.php>> (22 Oct. 2012).
6. Although the word ‘villain’ was also used as an adjective in Shakespeare’s time <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223418>> (def. 2), (26 Oct. 2012), other distinctive examples in this text, ‘master Jew’ (2.2.25-26, 31), ‘father Jew’ (2.6.26) and ‘dog Jew’ (2.8.14), suggest that ‘villain’ in ‘villain Jew’ which Solanio utters here is more likely to be a noun.
7. In Deuteronomy 23:18, ‘a dog’ and ‘a whore’ are discussed equally as abominations

to God. 2 Peter 2:22 compares 'a dogge [dog]' to 'a fowe [sow],' a female pig. See *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*. (2007).

8. Quotations from *The Jew of Malta* are cited from the following edition: Christopher Marlowe. (1995). "The Jew of Malta." *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*. Ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen. Oxford: Oxford UP.
9. From the very beginning of the play, Barabas' attachment to money is clearly depicted (1.1.1-47, 101-33).
10. Bassanio confesses in the court that "if that will not suffice, / I will be bound to pay it ten times o'er / . . . (4.1.206-7).
11. 'To inflict severe pain or suffering upon; to torment; to distress or afflict grievously; also, to exercise the mind severely, to puzzle or perplex greatly. Also *absol.* to cause extreme pain.' < <http://www.oed.com/Entry/223418> > (Def. 2), (16 Oct. 2012).
12. The playhouses in London were closed almost continuously from June 1592 to May 1593 due to a severe outbreak of bubonic plague. From April 1603 to April 1604, they were closed again for the same reason. Besides, Hamnet, Shakespeare's son died, possibly from the plague in 1596, at the age of eleven.

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