

“Shylock’s Return”: Translational Transactions in *The Merchant of Venice* on the Hebrew Stage

Dror Abend-David, University of Florida, Gainesville, , USA

ABSTRACT

This article addresses monetary, cultural, political and religious transactions, exchanges, conversions and translations between Jews and non-Jews in the play, “The Merchant of Venice,” in relation with Hebrew performances of the play and their social and political contexts. The article examines Leopold Jessner’s production from 1936, Tyrone Guthrie production from 1959, Yossi Izae’li’s production from 1972, and Hanan Snir’s production from 1995 (both in Israel and in Germany). The discussion will address various facets of the complicated intercultural relations that the *Merchant of Venice* has come to symbolize to Hebrew speaking audiences.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Exchange, Drama and Translation, Hebrew, Identity and Nationalism, Shakespearean Translation, Theater and Drama, Translation, Translational Transactions

PART I - TRANSACTIONS, EXCHANGES, CONVERSIONS, AND TRANSLATIONS

A significant facet of the plays of William Shakespeare is their structural symmetry: Already in *The Comedy of Errors*, one of Shakespeare’s earlier plays, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse are matched by Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus. And the wealthy Antipholus twins are matched by their Dromio servant twins – each separated and reunited with his respective brother. Naturally, the mishaps and romantic triangles of the wealthier twins are reflected in the mishaps and romantic triangles of their servants. And by maintaining this symmetry, Shakespeare is using class disparity to a comic effect that can already be found in the original play by Plautus.¹ However, Shakespeare adds a short speech of protest by Dromio of Ephesus in Act IV, scene iv, who delivers unexpected social commentary. This short speech, complaining of the woes of the oppressed servant, contains elements such as “heats me” and “cools me” (with beating) that employ antonyms to make a single point, and forecast Shylock’s speech in *The Merchant of Venice* (Act III, scene i), as well as Caliban’s complaint in *The Tempest* (Act I, scene ii). It is this structural symmetry, therefore, that renders Shakespeare’s work particularly suitable for a discussion of translational transactions – since his plays repeatedly provoke social, cultural, financial, romantic, religious, and gender-based exchanges and conversions. And these exchanges, either consensual or forced, mutually profitable or mutually destructive, often yield a great deal more than either the characters or the audience expect.

DOI: 10.4018/IJTIAL.2020010104

This article published as an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and production in any medium, provided the author of the original work and original publication source are properly credited.

It is in the discussion of Shakespeare and Translation that Dirk Delabastita refers to the dramatic function of translation. Delabastita speaks about translation *in* rather than *of* Shakespearean plays, pointing at instances that feature translation in order to motivate the plot, and to infuse the drama with social, political and historical meaning, while the “comprehension of the original text is not an issue at all” (Delabastita, 2004, p. 39).² Accordingly, the translation of Shakespeare’s work is matched by the “translation” within the play and various polarities that the text contains. Adding to this the move of Translation Studies since the 1960’s from Eugene Nida and Charles Taber’s concept of dynamic equivalences (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 200), through the discussion of Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere about Cultural Translation (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990), to recent scholarship such as that of Ahmed ElShiekh (ElShiekh, 2012) who speaks of the gap in translation – translation appears less as a transparent vehicle for delivering content, and more as a critical tool for exploring what is between the words, the possibilities that can be found within the text, and negotiated transactions between the contexts and the cultures of the source and target languages.

The Merchant of Venice lends itself particularly well to this discussion, since the entire plot is motivated by an economic transaction: Antonio borrows from Shylock three thousand ducats in order to enable Antonio’s friend, Bassanio, to pay the entrance fee to a competition for Portia’s hand. Antonio signs a bond in which he accepts the loan without interest, but promises to pay with a pound of his flesh if he does not repay the three thousand ducats on time. And, as Antonio defaults, Shylock sues for the pound of flesh. Another monetary facet of the play is that Shylock’s daughter, Jessica, runs away from home with some of Shylock’s money and his jewels. Not only that Shylock never receives either his pound of flesh or the money and jewels that his daughter stole, he is also forced to pay half of his property to the state as penalty, and to promise the remainder of his property to his daughter after his death. In his book, *Art and Money*, Mark Shell ties the historical vulnerability of European Jews with their fiscal relations with non-Jews. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shell observes that Jessica’s running away with Shylock’s “stones” projects the view “that coin clipping and penis snipping amount to the same thing” (Shell, *Art and Money*, 1995, p. 36).³ In other words, for Jewish men, who were allowed to participate in European society financially, but not in any other meaningful form, money was their “phallus,” their only possible form of authority and social status. The loss of money, either through the theft by his daughter or the defaulted loan, is therefore perceived by Shylock as an emasculation that he tries to rectify by suing for Antonio’s pound of flesh, which could be a symmetrical equivalent of emasculation. The transaction, therefore, is of money for social status, as in Shylock’s suggestion: “No, not take interest... I would be friends with you and have your love” (Act I, scene iii), as well as fierce physical punishment for public shaming, at the conversion rate of one pound of flesh for three thousand ducats.

The economic transactions that are inscribed within the play become even more significant after the Holocaust and the Second World War. In her article, “Shylocks Wiederkehr—Die Verwandlung von Schuld in Schulden oder: Zum symbolischen Tausch der Wiedergutmachung [Shylock’s Return—The Transformation of Guilt into Compensation or: The Symbolic Exchange of Reparation],” Sigrid Weigel describes the extent to which *The Merchant of Venice* had become even more pertinent as a historical and political icon after the Second World War (Weigel, 1996).⁴ The play, which already possesses the historical function of symbolizing the relations between Jews and non-Jews, has become, through the impossible exchange of flesh and money between Shylock and Antonio, a vehicle for contemplating both the abstract notion of guilt about the Holocaust and its manifestation through the tangible concept of debt and the possible exchange of reparation for “Versöhnung [conciliation]”: “Es ist der Ort, an dem eine Konfrontation mit dem sich ereignet, was in den Verfahren juristischer und ökonomischer Schuldbewältigung unbearbeitet bleibt [This is the place in which the confrontation comes to pass with what remains unprocessed through the proceedings of legal and economic coming to terms with guilt]” (Weigel, 1996, p. 170).

Jacques Derrida develops these notions even further and relates them to translation in his article, “What Is a ‘Relevant’ Translation” (Derrida, 2001). He argues convincingly that *The Merchant of*

Venice is riddled with transactions of various kinds, starting with the loan of three-thousand ducats, continuing with Jessica's and Shylock's conversions, and ending with the exchange of the rings at the end of the play, when Portia and Nerissa, dressed as a judge and his clerk, force their fiancés to give them their engagement rings, later informing their fiancés that they had to sleep with the judge and the clerk (respectively) in order to win their rings back... Of course, there is also the matching of lovers at the end of the play, which preserves a traditional structural symmetry (with Shylock as the odd man out). Most importantly, the exchange within the play is of a cultural translation between Jews and non-Jews that culminates at the trial scene, and reaches its peak at the moment when Portia declares: "Then must the Jew be merciful," and Shylock replies, "On what compulsion must I? Tell me that" (Derrida, 2001, p. 187). Derrida endorses Ludwig W. Kahn argument that, in *The Merchant of Venice*, "not just two religions, but two lifestyles oppose each other" (Kahn., 1986, p. 244), and reads the play as a continuous attempted translation between two separate semantic systems (Derrida, 2001, p. 198). In the confrontation between Portia and Shylock, Shylock adheres to a strict textual approach, as the language of the contract and the law is his best source of power. Portia is using the rhetoric of Christian mercy, as it best serves her agenda. Here, not only Shylock and Portia misunderstand each other, as Shylock invites Portia to "show" him a compulsion to be merciful within the text of the contract – an entire balance of power between the "people of the book" and the rhetoric of "Christian Love" is exposed.

Derrida goes further to relate the frustrated exchange within the play to the nature of translation: "Translation is always an attempt at appropriation that aims to transport home, in its language, in the most appropriate way possible, in the most relevant way possible, the most proper meaning of the original text" (Derrida, 2001, p. 179). As Derrida repeats a number of times in this article, everything is simultaneously translatable and untranslatable, as the translation renders the various transactions within the text along with the unbridgeable gaps between Christian Love and the anti-Semitism in the play, the view of Shylock's conversion either as Christian Charity or as cruel punishment, the description of Jessica either as a gentle soul or a cruel daughter that betrays her father, and the view of the "quality of mercy" as either a valuable human characteristic or the rhetoric of a privileged class. It is exactly within these gaps of translation, of viewing Shylock as either a hero, a victim or a monster, and of his environment as either charitable or anti-Semitic, that the play is made relevant on the Hebrew stage, displaying different and changing attitudes towards Jewish money lenders, Jewish exile, intermarriage, anti-Semitism, and religious conversion.

PART II – TRANSLATION AS REVENGE

The attitude of Jewish literary critics at the end of the nineteenth century towards the works of William Shakespeare was of moral suspicion, with the particular view of *The Merchant of Venice* as an anti-Semitic play. While the Yiddish Theater quickly changed this attitude at the beginning of the twentieth century, opting to benefit from the bard's literary reputation and to present the character of Shylock as a positive Jewish hero, the ambivalence towards Hebrew Shakespearean Translation lasted well throughout the 1950s. The Hebrew translation of the bard's work was therefore often imagined, or excused, as a transaction that is not necessarily an amicable quid pro quo. In 1874, Peretz Smolenskin wrote in the introduction to Isaak Salkinson's translation of *Othello*:

Today we shall take revenge against the British. They took our Holy Scriptures and treated them as their own, copied, and scattered them as if they were their own to give. Today we will repay them with equal malice, taking the books that they value like Holy Scriptures, Shakespeare's plays, and deposit them among the treasures of our language. Is this not sweet revenge!? (Smolenskin, 1874)

Translation is therefore presented, or rather excused, as revenge against the source culture, possessing, re-authoring and reinventing the text on the terms of the target audience. The same

combative attitude is found in Leopold Jessner's 1936 production, which was followed by a literary trial during which William Shakespeare (represented by Jessner) was "indicted" for writing an anti-Semitic play. But the revenge in the 1936 production was only partially directed against English anti-Semitism. It was also directed against the character of Shylock as a symbol of diaspora Jewry, and of Jewish money lenders who are trapped in spiritual, moral and urban decay. Against the heroic Yiddish Shylock of Jacob Adler (1903) and Rudolf Schildkraut (1912),⁵ Jessner was careful to present a character of Shylock that can only be redeemed by the ideology of a "new Jew" as prescribed by Zionist vigorous, self-sufficient and rural nationalism. Writing in the Hebrew-Palestinian periodical *Bamah* in 1936, Jessner refers to his own production of *The Merchant of Venice* in the same year, promising that it will provide a proper and educational presentation of Zionist values:

My reference here is to Habima, which rejected, from the very time of its inception, the character of a place of entertainment, in favor of the nobler mission of expressing the Eretz-Israeli [Jewish-Palestinian] worldview, to serve, in this capacity, as a vehicle of propaganda for the Eretz-Israeli-an conception. (Jessner, 1936)

Using Shimon Halkin's 1929 translation of *The Merchant of Venice*, which already render's Shylock words with a rhythm and a diction that turn them into militant speeches, Jessner turned Shylock by the third act into a "new Jew," proud, potent, and almost militant. Jessner therefore presented a redemptive process in which Shylock turned into a "new Jew," no longer an "enduring Shylock," but rather, "Shylock the warrior":

Schildkraut⁶ was... a Shylock of consciousness... But this was the consciousness of a Diaspora Jew... [This] cannot be useful for Habima...⁷ [It] therefore presents this legend, along with the significant character of Shylock. However, it does not present a tolerant Shylock, but Shylock the warrior. (Jessner, 1936)

Moreover, the transaction of exchanging the old Diaspora Jew for a "new Jew" enabled a partial reconciliation with Shakespeare's alleged anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism, as Hebrew poet Alexander Pen claimed during the mock trial that followed Jessner's production, is seen as simply irrelevant to Palestinian Jews, as they no longer depend on the manner in which they are viewed by non-Jews (Shylock's Mock Trial, 1936). The target of the production, therefore, was not to protest against alleged English anti-Semitism, but to redeem the Diaspora Jew and to convert him (either in addition or as an alternative to the conversion that is inscribed in the play) into a proud, nationalist, Zionist new Jew. Over all, Jessner, with the help of Halkin's translation, was able to perform a profitable translational transaction, simultaneously recruiting the play in the service of Zionist ideology and joining Shakespeare in his alleged criticism of Diaspora-Jews while assuming the mantle of Shakespearean production.

PART III – THE "NATIONAL EGOTISM" OF THE JEWS

It is in the nature of any business transaction that it includes several moving parts, and that, over time, it faces new circumstances and challenges. The translational transaction that conscripted William Shakespeare into the service of Zionist ideology faced particular difficulties after the establishment of the state of Israel, and a cultural normalcy that demanded a more critical reception of the play. Increasingly, Israeli dramaturges and literary critics found themselves conducting two separate dialogues: An external dialogue that took into account the traditional view of *The Merchant of Venice* as a romantic comedy, and an internal conversation that regarded the play as a political text that is preoccupied with Jewish identity.

One comedy of errors that took place between the cultural fronts of literary exchange and nationalist interpretation occurred between 1956 and 1959, revolving around Tyrone Guthrie's production of *The Merchant of Venice* for the *HaBima* theater in Tel Aviv. In 1956, Irish director Tyrone Guthrie staged a production of *The Merchant of Venice* in Stratford, Canada. The production met with protest by the Jewish community, and when Guthrie contacted the *Habima* theater with a proposal to stage the play in Israel, his offer was initially refused. A year later, in December 1957, Jewish-Austrian actor Ernst Deutsch performed in the role of Shylock in Düsseldorf. In response, Israeli newspaper, *Haboker*, featured two items on December 27, 1957: A scathing criticism of Deutsch's performance of Shylock ("[featuring] a usurer and a coward, as well as a traitor of his religion") (Aviel, 1957), and a short news item, informing readers that Guthrie was invited by *Habima* to direct a production of *The Merchant of Venice*. The artistic director of *Habima*, who was asked why Guthrie's suggestion to direct the play was initially refused, said: "it seems that we still have not freed ourselves from a Diaspora-like mentality" (Director Guthrie Will Direct Shylock at Habima, 1957).

Guthrie's production, therefore, was meant as liberation from a "Diaspora-like mentality," as well as from Deutsch's "diaspora-like" performance. However, a public debate between the Hebrew translator of the play, Shimon Halkin, and director Tyrone Guthrie soon took place. The debate, as reported by the Israeli newspaper, *Maa'riv*, took place "without a Jewish complex" (K., 1959). Halkin merely wished to stress the role of Shylock as the main character in the play, presenting a new concept of Jewish identity. In other words, Halkin "only" insisted on placing Shylock in the middle of the action, and criticizing through his character Jews of different "sorts." And while this debate was described by the Hebrew press as a friendly intellectual exchange, the clash between the traditional and the Zionist versions of the play is portrayed more harshly in a news item in the *Jerusalem Post* (which is published in English) that followed a reception that was organized by the British Embassy in Tel Aviv, during which Guthrie was able to speak more freely (and in English) about his disagreement with his hosts:

"Jews cannot go on forever pretending that this masterwork by a mastermind was anti-Semitic, and that therefore it had to be censored," Mr. Guthrie declared.... "The concept of Shylock is a hangover from the nineteenth century, and it is time to explode this myth"... Mr. Guthrie considers it "national egotism" to call the play "Shylock," for the leading role was Portia, whereas Shylock was secondary. "The merchant" is not Shylock but Antonio. (1959)⁸

The "deal," to use Guthrie's words, "exploded," as both sides came to the table with very different expectations. The Israeli dramaturges refused, with good reason, to ignore the anti-Semitic elements in the play. And their guest, also with good reason, refused to be co-opted into an ideological project that subverted the original play. The result was a translational mis-transaction (or mistranslation), a "botched deal" that satisfied neither international standards nor the local audience, to judge from local reviews:

Finkel [who played Shylock] looks like he was blown in from a different theatrical atmosphere.... The demand for a pound of flesh sounds in his voice like a declaration of independence, and the knife in his hands (a horridly unaesthetic item) looks like the Tablets of the Law. He plays with great inspiration in an entirely different play and creates an un-Shylock-like character that is self-infatuated. (Saa'roni, 1959)

The ideological fervor that triumphed in the Jewish-Palestinian theater was no longer viable on the Israeli stage. The translational transaction of creating a Hebrew Shylock had to be restructured in a manner that would not only satisfy the expectations of international colleagues and the discussion of Israeli-Jewish identity, but also a more sophisticated audience that was aware of the original play and expected a reasonable level of fidelity to the original.

PART IV - “A PUNY AND PATHETIC JEW”

The reception of Shakespeare’s work in Israel underwent a vivid change, particularly after the four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s birthday in 1964, which was marked by various productions, publications, and events.⁹ In addition to the significant date of Shakespeare’s four-hundredth anniversary, the growing interest in his work after 1964 can be attributed to the need of many Israelis, particularly after the Israeli-Arab war of 1967, to break away from the pioneering and didactic attitudes of the 1950s. The late 1960s were marked by a military victory as well as an economic prosperity that resulted in political, financial, and cultural affinity with Western Europe. Hebrew critics needed, therefore, a new Shakespearean myth, one that would legitimize Shakespeare’s work and harness it to a new national project, while erasing some of the uneasy residue contained in the history of Shakespearean reception in Hebrew. Such a myth was provided swiftly, already at the inception of the Shakespearean Renaissance of 1964. The collection, *The Shakespearean World*, edited by Murray Roston, published in the same year, opens with a dedication by Deputy Prime Minister Abba Eban. In this dedication, Eban finds a certain affinity between Shakespeare and the Israeli reader, as both witness the political and economic growth of their nations (Roston, 1965, Inside Cover). This view is repeated by Israeli Shakespearean scholar, Avraham Oz, who draws a parallel in his edited collection, *Strands Afar Remote*, between the Israeli-Arab war of 1967 and the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, presenting the Hebrew reception of Shakespeare’s work as a process informed by similarities between the national, economic, and military purposes of Renaissance England and the state of Israel (Oz, Afterword: ‘Prosper Our Colors, 1998, p. 278). In this manner, the mainstream of Shakespearean reception in Israel after 1964 replaced the initial suspicion toward Shakespeare’s work with a translational transaction that was described as a civil exchange between empires, which military victories and economic growth have freed to consider both social and aesthetic values at leisure.

The remaining difficulty, however, had to do with Shylock’s character, which Oz describes in his book, *The Yoke of Love—Prophetic Riddles in The Merchant of Venice*, as “some distant relative awaiting his verdict in the next room” (Oz, 1995, p. 193). A 1972 production of *The Merchant of Venice*, directed by Yossi Izrae’li for the *Cameri* Theater in Tel Aviv, attempted to present a new approach to the issue of anti-Semitism: The production featured an array of icons that can be recognized as anti-Semitic: uniforms of the Ku Klux Klan, a yellow star, and even the mere images of the crucifix and the cross, which, along with Shylock’s depiction in traditional Jewish-orthodox clothing, were the subject of great attention by Israeli critics.¹⁰ As Izrae’li explains in an interview, the production attempted to criticize anti-Semitism on the one hand, while rejecting the character of Shylock (and thus bolstering the image of Israeli Jews) on the other:

The Christians are the proprietors of a dressy world. They speak of mercy and charity but they torture Shylock. I think we can present their Merchant of Venice in this manner. They can’t. Shylock agrees to convert in order to keep on living. He is not the beautiful Jew who dies for his faith. But there is no justification to torture him, just because he is a puny and pathetic Jew... I wanted to present the Jews as they are seen by the Christians, and the Christians as the Jews know them to be. (Har-Gil, 1972)

Izrae’li’s production, which bore all the trappings of an avant-garde interpretation with international sophistication,¹¹ along with a brand-new translation by Avraham Oz, was still trapped between the anger over anti-Semitism, and the rejection of Shylock, the “puny and pathetic” Diaspora Jew. The civil exchange between empires that Eban and Oz try to imagine, has been spoiled by Shylock, an uncouth and unsophisticated Jew who refused to be pacified by the promises of late twentieth-century prosperity and international acceptance. Some dramaturges tried to change Shylock’s identity in order to resolve the issue of anti-Semitism: A 1994 production by Omri Nitzan featured Shylock as a Jewish terrorist, addressing political disagreement within Israeli society; and *Avanti Popolo*, Rafi Bukai’s film from 1986, features Shylock as an Egyptian prisoner that uses Shylock’s speech (Act III, scene

i) to tell his Israeli captives that they are fulfilling the role of oppressors rather than the traditional role of Jewish victims. In either case, however, the character of Shylock continued to represent the “return of the repressed,” preventing Israeli-Jews both from participating in the glamorous world of Western Culture, and (paradoxically) from reclaiming the right to grieve over European anti-Semitism.

PART V - THE MERCHANT OF BUCHENWALD

The need to find a “final solution” to the Shylock problem had only become more urgent after the Eichman¹² trial of 1962, and the increased awareness about the Holocaust both in Israel and around the world in the following decades. A tradition of associating *The Merchant of Venice* with a discussion of the Holocaust began in Germany in the early 1970s, most noticeably with Peter Zadek’s production in 1972, George Tabori’s dramatic event of 1978 (based on his 1966 production of the play in Stockbridge, Massachusetts), and Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s play, *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod* from 1985. A number of these performances were legitimized by the participation of Jewish directors such as Peter Zadek, and Jewish actors such as Ernst Deutsch.¹³ As mentioned above, Weigel describes the extent to which *The Merchant of Venice* had become a vehicle for negotiating guilt about the Holocaust with both symbolic and tangible reparations. And yet, neither the dramatic history of *The Merchant of Venice*, nor the political and economic significance that this play was awarded in the twentieth century, nor even the Jewish identity of some of the people that were involved with its production after the Second World War, seemed to muster enough poetic license to transform Shylock’s character from that of an angry victim to one that can be mollified. Much like their Israeli counterparts, German dramaturges, critics and audiences, needed a “new Jew,” a revised Shylock that could be negotiated within a new translational transaction.

This new Shylock, authored by a new Jew, entered both the metaphorical and literal stage at the Cologne *Schauspielhaus* in October 1979, introduced by Israeli director Arie Zinger. In his review of a performance of the same production in Stuttgart in 1980, Joachim Kaiser writes:

Heinz Hilpert...said once: I would only play The Merchant of Venice again if forty Jews would sit in the audience and [be moved to] laugh by the performance. These forty Jews were apparently missing in the audience at the Stuttgart guest performance by the Cologne Schauspielhaus. Yet, at least one Jew was standing at the director’s console: Arie Zinger. (Kaiser, 1980)

Kaiser presents a lucrative translational transaction at the conversion rate of one Israeli Jewish director for forty Diaspora Jews in the audience. Moreover, while the early productions of Peter Zadek and the performances of Ernst Deutsch were met with some understandable discomfort, the production of an Israeli director, a delegate of an official state that negotiates on behalf of the victims (rather than the victims themselves) was imagined to produce a more approachable Shylock.¹⁴ Kaiser is pleased to report that “Zinger (no German today would dare do so) put an end to all the Shylock-sentimentality” (Kaiser, 1980), echoing the artistic director of the National Israeli Theater, *Habima*, who claimed the 1957 performance of the play as a liberation from “a Diaspora-like mentality” (Director Guthrie Will Direct Shylock at Habima, 1957). Adding to this the performance of Joshua Sobol’s play, *Ghetto*, in 1984,¹⁵ with an enthusiastic response in the German press, one can well understand the extent to which German-Israeli cooperation has been mutually profitable: The alleged anti-Semitism of William Shakespeare has been replaced with the undisputed malice of the Nazis, and the image of Shylock as an angry victim has been replaced by, to use Oz’s terms, his “distant relatives,” ones who – despite taking up Shylock’s cause – have never been his biggest fans.

In 1995, the *Deutsches National Theater* of Weimar invited Israeli director Hanan Snir to mount a production of *The Merchant of Venice* in an event that marked a fifty-year anniversary of the liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp. Snir agreed to direct this production, which was labeled both by the Israeli and the German press “The Merchant of Buchenwald” (Shokhat, 1996) (Schaper,

1995), on the condition that it would feature a “play-within-a-play” in which *The Merchant of Venice* is produced by Nazi soldiers in a concentration camp, forcing Jewish prisoners to play the parts of Shylock and Jessica. In 1996, Snir brought his production back to Israel, where it was performed by the actors of the *Deutsches National Theater* as part of the annual “Israel Festival” celebration. In a press interview before the show, Snir expressed concern about the possible reaction of an Israeli audience to his production (Shokhat, 1996), but the show was well received. In the context of the “Israel Festival,” the “Merchant of Buchenwald” was presented as a formal Israeli interpretation that narrows the two-thousand years of Jewish European history into the historical period of the Holocaust, and appropriates the story of Holocaust victims, who are imagined to be represented by Israeli dramaturges.

The irony that is implicit in this translational transaction should not be lost: Not only does the close cooperation between Israeli and German dramaturges signify the attempt to overcome the memory of the Holocaust by a common desire to ignore the image of the Diaspora Jew (the direct victim of the Holocaust); it also signifies the preference of Israeli artists over German-Jewish ones, who, in some cases—such as that of Peter Zadek—have been personally affected by the Holocaust, and whose voices should carry most authority when dealing with this issue.¹⁶ The imaginary glance that Israeli scholars and dramaturges hoped to exchange with William Shakespeare over Shylock’s head in the 1960s, has turned in the 1990s into a literal glance by Germans and Israelis over the heads of Holocaust victims. It is, to borrow a legal term, a transaction by proxy using a dubious power of attorney. Such a transaction, whether in the business world or on stage, is always precarious. And the usurped party, either sooner or later, is likely to resurface, with both his unrequited sentimentality and his Diaspora-like mentality. This will be, as Weigel titles her article, “Shylock’s Return.”

CONCLUSION

Every translation incorporates a translational transaction that depends on a delicate balance of the relationship between the source and the target culture, and which requires particular consideration of the context of translation and its venue. In addition to the text itself, a translational transaction depends, perhaps even more so, on what is omitted from the text; what is between the words and between lines, implying polarities and exchanges of identity, culture, religion, class, and gender. Particularly in relation with *The Merchant of Venice*, and particularly for an Israeli-Jewish audience, the focus moves quickly from Shakespeare’s alleged anti-Semitism to the character of Shylock, which is treated with hostility at the beginning of the twentieth century, and with ambivalence and with some sense of guilt towards the century’s end. Several translational transactions are attempted by Israeli dramaturges, moving from hostility to a reluctant defense, to ignoring the vast historical significance that Shylock’s character represents. But these are only temporary solutions, as the relationship between Israeli dramaturges and the character of Shylock, as well as between Israeli and Diaspora Jews is yet to be resolved.

REFERENCES

- Abend-David, D. (2003). *Scorned My Nation: A Comparison of Translations of The Merchant of Venice into German, Hebrew and Yiddish*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Abend-David, D. (2019). Shylock and the Ghetto, or East-European Jewish Culture and Israeli Identity. In L. J. Greenspoon (Ed.), *Next Year in Jerusalem: Exile and Return in Jewish History*. East Lafayette: Purdue University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctvh9w1wk.17
- Almagor, D. (1966). Dan Shakespeare in Israel: A Bibliography of the Years ca. 1950–1965. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 17(3), 291–306. doi:10.1093/sq/17.3.291
- Almagor, D. (1975). Shakespeare in Hebrew Literature During the Periods of Enlightenment and [Hebrew] Renaissance—Bibliographic Overview and a Bibliography. In B. Shekhviz, & M. Perry (Eds.), *Jubilee Volume for Simon Halkin: On the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (pp. 721–784). Jerusalem: R. Mas. (In Hebrew)
- Aviel, Y. (1957, Dec 27). A Jew Performs in the Role of Shylock in Germany. *Haboker*. (In Hebrew)
- Bassnett, S., & Lefevere, A. (1990). *Translation, History and Culture*. London: Printer Publishers.
- Delabastita, D. (2004). If I Know the Letters and the Language: Translation as a Dramatic Device in Shakespeare's Plays. In T. Hoenselaars (Ed.), *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation* (pp. 31–52). London: Arden Shakespeare.
- Delabastita, D., & Hoenselaars, T. (2015). Introduction: 'If but as well I other accents borrow, that can my speech diffuse' – Multilingual perspective on English Renaissance drama. In D. Delabastita & T. Hoenselaars (Eds.), *Multilingualism in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (pp. 1–16). Netherlands: John Benjamins. doi:10.1075/bct.73.01int
- Derrida, J., & Venuti, L. (2001). What Is a 'Relevant' Translation. *Critical Inquiry*, 27(2), 174–200. doi:10.1086/449005
- Director Guthrie Will Direct Shylock at Habima. (1957, December 27). *Haboker*.
- Efrat, G. (1972, March 17). The Revenge of the Jew. *Davar*. (In Hebrew)
- ElShiekh, A. A. (2012, February). Translation: Bridging the Gap, or Creating a Gap to Bridge? Reflections on the Role of Translation in Bridging and/or Widening the Gap Between Different Cultures with Particular Reference to Religion and Politics. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 2(1), 28–34.
- Guthrie Attacks Shylock Myth. (1959, Feb 24). *Jerusalem Post*, p. 3.
- Har-Gil, S. (1972, April 6). I Wanted to Show the Jews as They are Seen by Christians. *Maariv*. (In Hebrew)
- Hoenselaars, T. (2017). Captive Shakespeare. In J. C. Bulman (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Performance* (pp. 138–154). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Horowitz, A. (2007). Shylock after Auschwitz: The Merchant of Venice on the Post-Holocaust Stage—Subversion, Confrontation, and Provocation. *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 8(3), 7–19.
- Jessner, L. (1936, May). Of the Eeretz-Israeli [Palestinian] Theater and Its Purpose. *Bamah*, 3. (In Hebrew)
- K., R. (1959, December). A 'Duel' About Shylock. *Maa'riv*. (In Hebrew)
- Kahn, L. W. (1986). The Changing Image of the Jew: Nathan the Wise and Shylock. In M. H. Gelber (Ed.), *Identity and Ethos* (pp. 235–252). New York: Peter Lang.
- Kaiser, J. (1980, July 6). Wie sie (mit) Shakespeare spielen [How They Play (with) Shakespeare]. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.
- Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1969). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: Brill.
- Oz, A. (1995). *The Yoke of Love—Prophetic Riddles in The Merchant of Venice*. Newark: University of Delaware Press.

- Oz, A. (1998). Afterword: 'Prosper Our Colors. In A. Oz (Ed.), *Strands Afar Remote—Israeli Perspectives on Shakespeare* (pp. 276–300). Newark: University of Delaware Press.
- Roston, M. (Ed.). (1965). *The Shakespearean World*. Tel Aviv: Am HaSefer. (In Hebrew)
- Saa'roni, Y. (1959, April-May). The Shylocks and Us. *Moznaim—A Monthly Periodical of the Hebrew Writers. Association in Israel*, 8(5-6), 459. (In Hebrew)
- Shaper, R. (1995, April 11). Der Kaufmann von Buchenwald. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.
- Shakespeare, W. (1959). *Tragedies* (R. Avinoam Trans. & Ed.). Tel Aviv: Am-Hasefer. (In Hebrew)
- Shakespeare, W. (1963). *Plays*. Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim and HaKibutz HaMeuchad. (In Hebrew)
- Shell, M. (1978). *The Economy of Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Shell, M. (1995). *Art and Money*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Shokhat, T. (1996). Hanan Snir is Concerned about the Reaction of the Israeli Audience to His [Production of] *The Merchant of Venice*. *Haaretz*. (In Hebrew)
- Shylock's Mock Trial. (1936, October). *Bamah*, 27. In Hebrew.
- Smolenskin, P. (1874). Introduction, Isaak. In W. Shakespeare, *Itiel the Black Man [Othello]* (I. Salkinson, Trans., p. xxxv). Vienna: Vie'n Dfus Spitzter et Haltzverte. (In Hebrew)
- Weigel, S. (1996). Shylocks Wiederkehr—Die Verwandlung von Schuld in Schulden oder: Zum symbolischen Tausch der Wiedergutmachung [Shylock's Return—The Transformation of Guilt into Compensation or: The Symbolic Exchange of Reparations]. In S. Weigel, & B. Erdle (Eds.), *Fünfzig Jahre danach: Zur Nachgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus [After Fifty Years: The Later History of Nazism]* (pp. 165-192). Zurich: Hochschulverlag AG an der ETH Zürich

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *The Comedy of Errors* is a close adaptation of Plautus' play, *The Brothers Menaechmus*, from the second century BC.
- ² See also: (Delabastita & Hoenselaars, 2015, pp. 1-16).
- ³ See also Shell's interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* in *The Economy of Literature* (Shell, 1978).
- ⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, the translations in this article are my own.
- ⁵ As well as others, and culminating in Maurice Schwartz's production of *Shylock's Daughter* in 1947
- ⁶ An actor who played the character of Shylock both in German and in Yiddish.
- ⁷ The Israeli (then Jewish-Palestinian) National Theater.
- ⁸ Gurie was also freer to express his feelings as he left Israel three days after the premier performance and the publication of this news item.
- ⁹ In preparation for Shakespeare's birthday, two collections of translated plays were put together, titled *Tragedyot [Tragedies]* and *Makhazot [Plays]*. The first, published in 1959, was edited by Reuven Avinoam, containing nine Shakespearean tragedies translated since 1923 by various translators. The second published in 1963, was edited by Menachem Dorman, containing translations by various translators as well. The year of Shakespeare's birthday was marked by various occasions, most significant of which was an evening at the *Habima* Theater, held on April 26, featuring various Israeli actors reciting lines from their most significant Shakespearean roles. In 1966, Dan Almagor edited a chronology for *Shakespeare Quarterly*, citing articles, bibliographies, surveys, books, translations, and adaptations of Shakespearean works that appeared in Israel between 1950 and 1965. The list, containing dozens of articles, reviews, and adaptations of passages for textbooks, radio dramas, and musical reviews, features items prepared mostly between 1962 and 1965. According to Almagor, this list added about four hundred new items (the choice of the number four hundred is notable in the context of Shakespeare's four-hundredth anniversary) to a previous list, published in 1951 by Yehuda A. Klausner (Unfortunately, Almagor's reference to Klausner's bibliography is erroneous. It is therefore impossible to compare the two sources). See (Almagor, 1966) (Almagor, 1975) (Shakespeare, 1961-1963) (Shakespeare, 1961-1963).
- ¹⁰ For example, Gideon Efrat, writing in *Davar*, couples the Ku Klux Klan with the image of the crucifix, seeing both as symbols of anti-Semitism (Efrat, 1972).

- ¹¹ Among other features, non-Jewish characters in the production were dressed in white, juxtaposing Shylock's black Jewish-orthodox clothings.
- ¹² Adolf Eichmann was a German-Austrian high-ranking Nazi officer and one of the senior administrators of Jewish extermination during the Second World War.
- ¹³ For more on this, see: (Hoenselaars, 2017), (Horowitz, 2007).
- ¹⁴ Whehter Zinger's Shylock, who was not only presented as an angry character, but also as one that carried direct references to the Holocaust, such as a large Jewish star with the word "Jude" in its middle, was indeed less rigid than the one that was presented by German Jews is a matter of interpretation.
- ¹⁵ For more about the significance of Sobol's production of *Ghetto* and the relation of this play to *The Merchant of Venice*, see: (Abend-David, 2019).
- ¹⁶ It is only fair mention, however, that although the first productions of *The Merchant of Venice* by Zadek, in 1961 and 1973, were not well received – after the German activity of Zinger and Sobol – his productions in 1988 and 1993 were very popular.

Dror Abend-David teaches at the department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Florida. His first book was published in 2003 by Peter Lang under the title: 'Scorned my Nation: A Comparison of Translations of The Merchant of Venice into German, Hebrew, and Yiddish. His second book, Media and Translation: An Interdisciplinary Approach, was published in 2014 (soft cover 2016) with Bloomsbury Academic Publishing. His third book, Representing Translation: Languages, Translation, and Translators in Contemporary Media came out in January 2019. Dror has published articles on Translation in relation to Media, Drama, Literature, and Jewish Culture