

JUDAISM IN SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND

EDICT OF EXPULSION (1290)

- THIS WAS A DECREE ISSUED BY KING EDWARD I THAT EXPELLED ALL JEWS FROM THE KINGDOM OF ENGLAND. THIS WAS THE PRODUCT OF SEVERAL CENTURIES WORTH OF PERSECUTION AGAINST THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN ENGLAND.



King Edward I

OLIVER CROMWELL ALLOWS THE REENTRY OF JEWS IN 1657

- LORD PROTECTOR OF ENGLAND, OLIVER CROMWELL, PERMITTED THE REENTRY OF JEWS TO ENGLAND. THE EXACT REASONS FOR THIS ARE MURKY.
- SOME ARGUE IT WAS DUE TO ENGLAND'S LIBERALIZATION, WHILE OTHERS BELIEVE IT WAS BECAUSE OF ENGLAND'S ECONOMIC INTERESTS.



Oliver Cromwell

BETWEEN 1290 AND 1657?

- DURING THE INTERVENING YEARS, THERE WAS VERY LITTLE JEWISH PRESENCE IN ENGLAND. AS A RESULT, COMMON JEWISH STEREOTYPES CONTINUED PROLIFERATE AND MOST PEOPLE NEVER WOULD HAVE MET A JEW. THEIR ONLY EXPOSURE TO JUDAISM WOULD HAVE BEEN THROUGH THESE COMMON STEREOTYPES. THIS INCLUDES EVEN THE WELL-READ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.
- STEREOTYPES OF JEWS AND THE EXPULSION OF JEWS WAS NOT ISOLATED TO ENGLAND. THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE AGES, THE JEWISH PEOPLE WERE COMMONLY EXPELLED FROM CIVILIZATIONS ACROSS EUROPE.



COMMON STEREOTYPES

THE JEW AS MONEYLENDER STEREOTYPE

- SHYLOCK, THE CENTRAL JEWISH CHARACTER IN *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*, IS A MONEYLENDER.
- LENDING OUT MONEY WITH INTEREST (LIKE A MODERN LOAN) WAS NOT ALLOWED FOR CHRISTIANS IN ENGLAND; HOWEVER, FOR-PROFIT LOANS WERE NOT AGAINST JUDAISM SO JEWS WERE ALLOWED TO LEND OUT MONEY WITH INTEREST.
- FOR MANY JEWISH PEOPLE, THIS WAS THE BEST WAY TO SURVIVE IN THE ENGLISH ECONOMY.

THE JEW AS MONEYLENDER, CONTINUED

- SOME JEWISH MONEYLENDERS MADE A LOT OF MONEY
- AS A RESULT, ANTI-JEWISH SENTIMENT BECAME COMMON ACROSS EUROPE, AND ANTI-SEMITIC PROPAGANDA HAS CONTINUED TO PORTRAY JEWISH PEOPLE AS A GREEDY MONEYLENDERS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF SOCIETY.

EXAMPLES OF THIS STEREOTYPE

- THIS IS THE POSTER FOR A NAZI PROPAGANDA FILM, *The ETERNAL JEW* (DIR. FRITZ HIPPLER; 1937)
- THIS POSTER DEPICTS A MAN OF STEREOTYPICAL JEWISH APPEARANCE. HE CARRIES A WHIP AND A HANDFUL OF COINS. THE OBJECTIVE WAS TO CONVINCe VIEWERS THAT JEWS WERE TAKING ADVANTAGE AND ABUSING THE COMMON GERMAN.
- ALSO, THE MAN IS DEPICTED WITH A PIECE OF A MAP DISPLAYING THE SOVIET UNION'S SICKLE AND HAMMER. THIS ALSO SERVES TO VILIFY THE JEW AS COMMUNIST AND IN LEAGUE WITH THE ENEMIES OF GERMANY. THIS IS DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE SOVIET UNION, PARTICULARLY UNDER JOSEPH STALIN, WAS RAVENOUSLY ANTI-SEMITIC.



SHAKESPEARE AND JUDAISM

- SHAKESPEARE, DESPITE BEING VERY WELL READ IN MOST SUBJECTS, WOULD HAVE HAD LIMITED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT JEWISH PEOPLE AND HIS MAIN SOURCE OF THAT LIMITED KNOWLEDGE WOULD HAVE BEEN HEARSAY.
- THEREFORE, THE CENTRAL JEWISH FIGURE IN *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*, SHYLOCK, IS DEPICTED WITH THESE STEREOTYPICAL TRAITS OF BEING GREED AND TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE NON-JEWS.
- THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN ONE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION:

RODERIGO LOPEZ

- HE WAS THE PHYSICIAN-IN-CHIEF FOR QUEEN ELIZABETH I.
- WHILE RAISED A CATHOLIC, HE FLED HIS HOME COUNTRY OF PORTUGAL DURING THE PORTUGUESE INQUISITION. HE WAS OF JEWISH ANCESTOR AND WAS ACCUSED OF PRACTICING JUDAISM IN SECRET.
- HE WAS ACCUSED OF ATTEMPTING TO POISONING ELIZABETH I AND WAS SUBSEQUENTLY HANGED, DRAWN AND QUARTERED FOR HIGH TREASON IN 1594. HE WAS ACCUSED BY THE EARL OF ESSEX.
- HE IS CONSIDERED A POSSIBLE INFLUENCE FOR SHYLOCK AND HIS EXECUTION ONLY PREDATED *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE* BY SEVERAL YEARS (*MERCHANT* WAS WRITTEN BETWEEN 1596-1599)



Lopez, depicted on the right



Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex

SHYLOCK

- AFTER SHYLOCK'S DAUGHTER, JESSICA, RUNS AWAY, HE CARES MORE ABOUT THE MONEY AND JEWELS SHE TOOK THAN ABOUT HER, "A DIAMOND GONE COST ME TWO THOUSAND DUCATS IN FRANKFURT! . . . TWO THOUSAND DUCATS IN THAT, AND OTHER PRECIOUS, PRECIOUS JEWELS! I WOULD MY DAUGHTER WERE DEAD AT MY FOOT AND THE JEWELS IN HER EAR; WOULD SHE WERE HEARSED AT MY FOOT AND THE DUCATS IN HER COFFIN" (III.i.84-90)



Shylock and Jessica by Maurycy Gottlieb,
a Polish-Jewish painter

SHYLOCK, CONTINUED

- WHEN WE READ *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*, PAY ATTENTION TO HOW SHAKESPEARE DEPICTS SHYLOCK HAS BOTH A VILLAINOUS JEWISH STEREOTYPE AND A TRAGIC FIGURE.
- A CENTRAL STRUGGLE FOR AUDIENCES WHEN INTERPRETING THE PLAY IS HOW TO FEEL ABOUT SHYLOCK. IN MANY SCENES, HE IS ROUNDED AND COMPLEX WHILE IN OTHER SCENES, HE IS PIGEONHOLED INTO THE ROLE OF A MINDLESSLY GREEDY JEW.