Revisiting the Usurer: The Portrayal of Shylock as an Affectionate Father in Howard Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name*

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Abstract: This article aims to re-interpret the figure of Shylock in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* by exploring how its novel rewriting by Howard Jacobson provides a more positive portrayal of the Jewish usurer. I attempt to argue that Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name* contributes to re-reading Shylock as a thoughtful father who truly loves his daughter Jessica. Indeed, this 21st-century retelling revolves around the connection between Shylock and Simon Strulovitch, a Jewish philanthropist who has also been neglected by his daughter. The novel presents Shylock as a trustworthy character that is determined to help his friend create an emotional bond with his daughter. Moreover, Jacobson succeeds in empowering Shakespeare's Shylock to such an extent that he evolves from being an underdog in Venice to being widely respected by English society. As regards methodology, I have used the rhizomatic model proposed by Douglas Lanier with the purpose of exploring the enriching dialogue between the source text and this rewriting.

Keywords: Shylock, William Shakespeare, Howard Jacobson, rewritings, Shakespearean rhizomatics.

Resumo: Este artigo visa reinterpretar a figura de Shylock em *The Merchant of Venice*, de William Shakespeare, explorando o modo como a sua reescrita novelística por Howard Jacobson oferece um retrato mais positivo do usurário judeu. Pretendo argumentar que *Shylock Is My Name*, de Jacobson, contribui para uma releitura de Shylock como pai cuidadoso que verdadeiramente ama a sua filha Jessica. De facto, esta versão do

século XXI gira em torno da ligação entre Shylock e Simon Strulovitch, um filantropo judeu que também foi negligenciado pela sua filha. O romance apresenta Shylock como uma personagem digna de confiança que está determinada a ajudar o amigo a criar um laço emocional com a filha. Para além disso, Jacobson consegue conferir poder ao Shylock de Shakespeare a tal ponto que ele passa de indivíduo desprezado em Veneza a pessoa amplamente respeitada pela sociedade inglesa. No que respeita a metodologia, foi seguido o modelo rizomático proposto por Douglas Lanier, com o objectivo de explorar o diálogo enriquecedor entre o texto-base e esta reescrita.

Palavras-chave: Shylock, William Shakespeare, Howard Jacobson, reescritas, rizoma shakespeariano.

1. Introduction

In the introductory section of the volume *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin mark that ours is "an age when Shakespeare is increasingly globalized, diversified, spread thin, and applied in service of a multitude of agendas" (2). The globalisation characterizing present-day society has contributed to the permeability of Shakespeare into the realm of popular culture. The spread of such a phenomenon has been boosted by means of a plethora of adaptations which bear some connection with the source text. As noted by Mark Thornton Burnett et al., such adaptations "function across and through history in an intricately layered fashion" (1). The horizontal connection between Shakespeare's texts and present-day rewritings entails adding new meaningful layers that enrich the source texts to such an extent that they become imperishable. In the case of narrative rewritings of Shakespeare, Marianne Novy argues that they "may give more attention to a minor character, and sometimes that shift drastically alters the balance of sympathies against the character based on Shakespeare's hero" (51). Indeed, rewriting Shakespeare means bringing to the surface minor themes and characters of the source texts that are of great relevance for better understanding social concerns that are prevalent in all cultures.

With this conception of rewriting-as-enriching in mind, this article will provide an analysis of Howard Jacobson's novel *Shylock Is My Name* (2016). This novel is a rewriting of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* set in contemporary England. The focus of this study will fall on how this adaptation calls into question the view that Shylock is an unsympathetic character who is solely concerned with money and religion. As for secondary literature on Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, scholars such as John Drakakis, John Gross, Joan Holmer, Ignaz Maybaum, Julie Mell, and Irene Middleton covertly suggest that, far from being a usurer blinded by his crave

for money and by his uneasy relationship with Christians, Shakespeare's Shylock could be sympathetically seen as a soulful character. Furthermore, they imply that Shylock might be seen as a loving father who is concerned with the welfare of his daughter Jessica. However, there is little research into the literary adaptations of this specific Shakespeare play. What is more, there are no studies so far on how these adaptations attempt to show Shylock as an affectionate father.

Accordingly, the present study will focus on the role of Howard Jacobson's Shylock as a father who has been neglected by his daughter Jessica but nevertheless shows a deep emotional connection with her. Indeed, this article will attempt to provide a more positive portrayal of this Jewish male character as an affectionate father. My main contention is that Jacobson's literary adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* contributes to showing the hitherto remorseful Jew as a caring father who truly loves his daughter Jessica. As a result, this contemporary rewriting partakes of a rhizomatic relationship with the source text in that it aims to transform and enrich the source text by exploring some of its key aspects in a different, innovative light. With regard to methodology, first I briefly explore the relationship between Shylock and Jessica in Shakespeare's work, with a focus on how the Jew reacts to the elopement of his daughter. With a view to foregrounding the enriching dialogue between Shakespeare's play and Jacobson's rewriting, I apply the rhizomatic dimension suggested by Douglas Lanier. This rhizomatic approach proves fruitful for assessing to what extent the targeted adaptation enhances the fatherly side of Shylock, both as a counsellor to the other neglected father in the novel and as a figure who is admired by those who interact with him. As regards this article's structure, firstly there is a section that explains Lanier's rhizomatic approach to Shakespearean adaptations and how this scholar's theory is put into practice in the Hogarth Shakespeare series. After this, some scholarly contentions on the humane facet of Shakespeare's Shylock are reviewed. Finally, there is a thorough analysis of how Jacobson's novel contributes to presenting a positive portrayal of the targeted character as an affectionate father.

2. Shakespeare's Rhizomatics and the Hogarth Shakespeare Project

The postmodern endeavour to bring to the fore the (hi)stories of minorities whose voices had been previously erased was a starting point in the proliferation of literary retellings. As Fernando Galván contends, the English literary canon has undergone a "revolution" that translates into "a rereading, an interpretation of canonical works" (187). Such a new interpretation of canonical works has given rise to a large number of literary rewritings or appropriations: in the case of Shakespeare, Ángeles de la Concha maintains

that the influx of retellings is such that rewritings of Shakespeare may be said to have become a subgenre somehow (10). In this context where the canon is revisited, it seems reasonable to adopt an approach that does not favour the source text over the rewriting. In accordance, Christy Desmet proposes addressing appropriations as a "dialogical phenomenon – not simply a conversation or collaboration between appropriating and source texts, but an exchange that involves both sharing and contested ownership" (42). Along the same lines, Susana Onega and Christian Gutleben introduce the concept of *refraction*: "the assumption of a dialectic relation between the canonical and postmodernist texts, affecting the result as well as the source" (7). Such a dialogical approach is by no means an attempt to explore to what extent the rewriting is faithful to the source text. Instead, the dialogue between both works is analogous to the metaphor of the palimpsest, the palimpsest being "an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other" (Dillon 3-4).

In an attempt to go beyond the hackneyed emphasis on the question of fidelity to the original text, Douglas Lanier suggests shifting the focus to the Shakespearean adaptations themselves ("Rhizomatics" 27). In order to do so, he resorts to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's[1] concept of the "rhizome". In the chapter "Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value", Douglas Lanier explains that Shakespeare appropriations could be understood as "a horizontal, decentered multiplicity of subterranean roots that cross each other, bifurcating and recombining, breaking off and restarting" (28). The adjective *horizontal* aims to enhance the dialogic and palimpsestic approaches described above: actually, such a horizontal network of relationships guarantees that none of the texts is given more prominence, but both of them have a positive influence on the other. Then, Lanier goes on to provide an explanation of the main aim of Shakespearean rhizomes: "A rhizomatic conception of Shakespeare stresses the power of those ever-differentiating particulars [...] to transform and restructure the aggregated Shakespearean field into something forever new" ("Rhizomatics" 31). Hence, an appropriation of a Shakespearean text is not meant to be a mere pastiche or repetition of the source text; what it seeks is to provide an outcome that can be radically different from the original play but that is aimed at finding new meanings in the source text. This explanation may support the very nature of the word "rhizome": unlike in roots, there is nothing fixed or stable in the source text or in the adaptation; rather, the Shakespearean text could be described as palimpsestic in nature.

[1] According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the rhizome designates a mode of relation involving "the aparallel evolution of two beings that have absolutely nothing to do with each other" (10).

With this aim in mind, in 2014 Hogarth Press launched the Hogarth Shakespeare Project. The British publishing house commissioned bestselling writers to reimagine and rewrite some of the most acclaimed of Shakespeare's plays for a 21st-century audience. Thus far, up to seven Shakespeare's novel rewritings have been published as part of this ambitious project: Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* (2015), on *The Winter's Tale*; Howard Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name* (2016), on *The Merchant of Venice*; Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl* (2016), on *The Taming of the Shrew*; Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed* (2016), on *The Tempest*; Tracy Chevalier's *New Boy* (2017), on *Othello*; Edward St. Aubyn's *Dunbar* (2017), on *King Lear*; and Jo Nesbø's *Macbeth* (2018), on *Macbeth*. Additionally, it is expected that a rewriting of *Hamlet* by Gillian Flynn will be released in the course of 2021. As Sheila Cavanagh has remarked, "the literary pedigrees of the commissioned authors are unassailable, but the quality of the texts presented varies widely" (99). The varying quality of these rewritings notwithstanding, it could be asserted that all of them partake of the rhizomatic conception explained above. Indeed, a dialogue between Shakespeare's plays and their present-day appropriations from the Hogarth series is established in two ways. First, scholars such as Sofía Muñoz-Valdivieso highlight how the ludic quality of this series enhances the two-way influence between source text and adaptation: "[It] forces the writers to never lose sight of Shakespeare's work and make sure that readers find enough elements that they can recognize from the plays" (108). Second, the process of novelisation allows for a more in-depth psychological portrayal of characters. Along the same lines, Miranda Fay Thomas argues that novelisations of plays "have the potential to offer the reader a direct view into the mind of already well-known characters, adding material to further flesh out characterisation, motivation, and back story" (43). Hence, the use of developed narrative techniques contributes to reimagining characters that are easily recognisable, such as Hamlet, Othello, and Shylock.

Besides enabling the development of these characters' backstory, the rhizomatic re-imagination of Shakespeare's plays facilitates the creation of alternative endings and sequels that re-explore aspects that have not been paid much readerly or scholarly attention. In the case of *The Merchant of Venice*, there is one specific retelling that should be briefly mentioned before dealing with Jacobson's novel. In 1973, the acclaimed playwright Arnold Wesker was bitterly hurt by Laurence Olivier's representation of Shylock in Jonathan's Miller production at the National Theatre. In the preface to his work *The Merchant*, Wesker reports his discomfort with Shakespeare's play accordingly: "I was struck by the play's irredeemable anti-Semitism. It was not an intellectual evaluation but the immediate impact I actually experienced" (l). As a Jewish artist, Wesker answered back by writing the play *The Merchant* (1976), a text that dignifies Shylock – and Jewish communities at large – by shifting the focus from usury to solidarity, and by calling for a harmonious coexistence between Christians and Jews. As a matter of fact, Shylock pleads

with the bigoted Lorenzo: "Learn to live with us. The Jew is the Christian's parent" (*idem* 39). Furthermore, Wesker contributes to enhancing Shylock's understanding by stressing his devotion to books and his unconditional love for his friend Antonio. To a lesser extent, this re-imagination also discloses the Jew's care for his daughter Jessica: "Nothing I treasure more, except my daughter" (*idem* 3). Nevertheless, the father-daughter relationship is not a major concern in this play. This family bond is a matter that is elaborated on in the literary adaptation to be studied in this article.

Howard Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name* delves into the edgy relationship between Shylock and his daughter Jessica. Prior to exploring how this rewriting contributes to presenting a more humane portrayal of Shylock as a loving father, there should be a brief exploration of the father-daughter relation in *The Merchant of Venice*. Seemingly, such a relationship could be deemed somewhat secondary in Shakespeare's play for two reasons: first, there are very few moments in which father and daughter coincide on stage; second, it could be asserted that more prominence has been given to issues such as the individual and collective bond between Christians and Jews, and the figure of Shylock as a usurer. However, Jacobson's novel engages in Lanier's rhizomatic model and ultimately gives more prominence to the hitherto secondary father-daughter tie with a view to re-imagining the behaviour of Shylock.

3. The Relationship Between Shylock and Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*

The first occasion in which Shylock and Jessica happen to meet on stage is in Act II, Scene V. At this point in the play, Shylock calls his daughter and announces to her that he will not dine at home. After giving Jessica the keys of the house, he urges her to take a number of precautions for fear that trouble is coming:

> Hear you me, Jessica.
> Lock up my doors [...]
> Clamber not you up to the casements [...],
> Nor thrust your head into the public street,
> To gaze on Christian fools with varnish'd faces;
>
> (II.v.27-33)

This passage reflects the fact that Shylock has a paternalistic attitude towards Jessica, thus pointing to the overarching patriarchy that, according to scholars such as John Drakakis and Irene Middleton, prevails in Shylock's house. Such a relationship is strengthened by Holmer's contention that the Jew is "protectively unnatural in his treatment of his daughter" (122). In their seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar

maintain the following with regard to authority: "The roots of 'authority' tell us, after all, that if woman is man's property then he must have authored her, just as surely as they tell us that if he authored her she must be his property" (13). Extrapolating this quotation to the aforementioned situation in the play, Shylock might be authoring Jessica by giving her instructions, thus attempting to ensure the continuity of patriarchy.

Nevertheless, the hierarchical father-daughter relationship which the Jew may want to preserve comes to an end when Jessica decides to leave her house with the Christian Lorenzo. Shylock's reaction to this event is reported by Solanio to Solarino:

> 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!
>
> (II.viii.12-15)

The melodramatic response of the Jew shows the pain which he feels for having lost both his daughter and a certain amount of money which has been taken by Jessica. Given that Shylock is a usurer, he might be scathingly criticised for linking such a material element as the ducats to the loss of a relative. However, John Gross brings to the fore Shylock's humane side by arguing the following: "The one thing about her that is not in doubt is that Shylock loves her. Even the cry that amuses his enemies so much – 'O my ducats! O my daughter' – implies that if he did not love her more than his ducats, at least he did not love her less" (60). Along the same lines, Julie L. Mell describes the Jew as "an affectionate husband and loving father" (181).

Mell's contention points to a conversation between Tubal and Shakespeare in Act III, Scene I. In this specific dialogue, Tubal announces that he has no news of Jessica, to which Shylock responds in an irrational way by cursing her: "I would my daughter were dead at my foot and the jewels in her ear!" (III.i.84). With regard to this utterance, Jesús Cora-Alonso contends: "When we hear Shylock's words, we, of course, censure him, we reject and despise him because he is such an uncaring, unnatural father, such a vile miser" (279). However, such a view does not take into account that Shylock has fallen prey to a psychological imbalance caused by the elopement of his daughter. This is the view taken by Ignaz Maybaum, who highlights both Shylock's disorder and his love for Jessica: "The cursing old man reveals himself as a man of deep emotion. He loves his daughter. He is the father betrayed by his child, whom he never stops loving" (147). Likewise, Irene Middleton asserts that Shylock "should be shown as a deeply grieving father" (301), and John Drakakis maintains that the Jew's reaction conveys "the emotion of the father faced with the actions of a wayward and unruly daughter", creating "an

intensity of feeling from which spectators cannot easily detach themselves" (159). Therefore, the miserly and ill-tempered Jew depicted in Shakespeare's play could also be seen in a sympathetic way as a grieving father who truly cares for his runaway daughter. Hence, this article will cast light on this nicer portrayal of Shylock by exploring how Jacobson's novel contributes to presenting him as an affectionate father.

4. The Portrayal of the Loving Father in *Shylock Is My Name*

Howard Jacobson's novel *Shylock Is My Name* (2016) re-examines the figure of Shakespeare's Shylock through the exploration of his friendship with Simon Strulovitch, a wealthy Jewish philanthropist living in the Golden Triangle near Manchester. As Douglas Lanier notes, "Jacobson never explains how Shakespeare's Shylock has come to be in the contemporary English Midlands, instead treating his presence as a narrative *donnée*" ("Hogarth" 235). Besides lacking an explanation of how the sixteenth-century Venetian Jew has translated into a present-day Mancunian, this novel barely gives a broad hint that the novel's Shylock is a re-imagination of Shakespeare's Jewish usurer. What this rewriting does very sporadically is provide descriptions or statements about the contemporary Shylock which readers who are familiar with the source text may ultimately identify as traits belonging to Shakespeare's character. However, these pieces of information are scattered around the novel, so this novel partakes of the Hogarth series' ludic quality as highlighted by Muñoz-Valdivieso. In the course of the novel, it is explicitly mentioned that Shylock is a Jewish character that has a sardonic and quick-witted look. It is also acknowledged that his daughter Jessica has left him in order to marry a Christian man. Finally, from the outset of the novel there are references to the fact that he is a widower: it is mentioned that his wife's name is Leah and that she has passed away.

Shylock and his friend-to-be Strulovitch meet in a cemetery in South Manchester, where the former is talking by the tomb of his wife. From this moment onwards, the novel intertwines the two characters' lives to such an extent that it could be argued that Strulovitch can be considered Shylock's double. Furthermore, the construction of this double enables Jacobson to provide an in-depth and innovative portrayal of Shakespeare's Shylock as an affectionate father. The first piece of evidence that suggests a strong bond between Strulovitch and Shylock is their initial descriptions as angry-looking characters. The former is described as a "rich, furious, easily hurt philanthropist with on-again off-again enthusiasms" (Howard 1), and who is passionate about Shakespeare. As regards the latter, the external narrator observes the following: "An infuriated and tempestuous Jew, though his fury tends more to the sardonic than the mercurial" (*ibidem*). Both of them

are presented as moody characters, and this quality somehow foreshadows the fact that they have been hurt. In the case of Jacobson's Shylock, this feeling of being depreciated runs parallel to that of Shakespeare's Jew, who is characterised by a dismal and grudging attitude. However, there is a key difference in terms of mood between Strulovitch and his companion. Whereas it is suggested that Strulovitch has unpredictable changeableness of temper, Shylock is more whimsical than irrational. This witty trait of the latter is of key relevance for the understanding of how this novel provides a positive portrayal of Shylock: gradually, Shylock's intelligence contributes to making him an exemplary adviser to the Jewish philanthropist.

There is one element that strengthens the bond between the two protagonists throughout the novel, and this is their condition of fathers "on whom the burden of bringing up a daughter had exclusively fallen" (*idem* 55). Whereas Shylock's wife passed away, Strulovitch's second wife suffered a stroke on the day of Beatrice's fourteenth birthday and has not been able to effectively communicate since then. Their efforts to raise their daughters notwithstanding, both of them are eventually betrayed by them: these female characters elope with two Christians. In the case of Shylock's (Jessica), she has already left with Lorenzo by the time the narrative starts. As for Strulovitch's (Beatrice), she decides to elope with Gratan Howsome, a Christian footballer who, to make things worse, is reported to have apparently given the Nazi salute on the pitch. Having been neglected by their respective daughters, so far none of them has found a person to lean on. In the novel, both of them feel helpless by society at large, but at some points they imply that Christian people should be more sympathetic to them, and at least understand their suffering. In the first conversation between Shylock and Strulovitch as friends, Shylock confesses: "We lack charity, they say, but when I ran out to the streets calling for Jessica children jeered at my distress. No *charitable* Christian parent dragged them home and admonished them for their cruelty" (*idem* 52). Along the same lines, his double Strulovitch is often shown as a resentful man that bears a grudge against the art importer D'Anton: this homosexual art dealer is complicit in the elopement of Beatrice with the Christian sportsman, thus undermining the pain that the Jewish father is likely to bear.

As regards the reason why the daughters have left their parents, in the case of Jessica the novel makes no explicit reference to why she has abandoned Shylock; the only utterance that the notably silent Jew makes with respect to this event is the following: "Jessica was taken from me. After Leah's ring was stolen" (*idem* 176). This quotation suggests that Jessica's elopement might be linked to his father's patriarchal attitude, since he considered her a belonging to be equated with his wife's ring. This remark might be misleading, since it implies that Shylock may still be portrayed as a materialistic man in this 21st-century rewriting. However, as will be discussed later on, the novel provides enough evidence that Shylock is far from being a greedy man. In the case

of Beatrice, Strulovitch has spoiled her, and this is something that Shylock notices from the beginning of his relationship with the philanthropist: "It's evident you spoil her" (*idem* 50). What is more, he has grown to become an overprotective father who ultimately overwhelms Beatrice and curtails her freedom. With regard to Strulovitch's impositions, Shylock retorts: "How do you draw a line under where your daughter wants to go? The answer is you can't" (*idem* 53). All along the novel, it is reported that the philanthropist is a somewhat controlling father that goes beyond trying to protect her. For instance, in chapter eight there is a narratorial remark that points to Strulovitch's dominant attitude: "Untrue what Strulovitch said about not exactly tailing his daughter" (*idem* 78). It is implied that he is constantly spying on her, and indeed the novel goes on to provide a brief account of how he reproaches her for apparently wasting both his and her mother's ambitions for her: "She was throwing that promise away. On boys who were beneath her. On crazes that demeaned her. On drinks and drugs she didn't need. On music that didn't merit a second of her attention" (*idem* 79). This patronising attitude on the part of Strulovitch proves detrimental for Beatrice, and this is revealed later on in the following excerpt: "She tried to remember a time when he hadn't pursued her, dragged her out of parties, punched her boyfriends [...]. *Look what you're doing to me. You're killing me*" (*idem* 167). As a consequence of her father's overprotective attitude, Beatrice has developed a sense of rebelliousness that has triggered her decision to leave.

Contrary to such an initially negative portrayal of these two fathers, all along the novel there are hints that the somewhat patriarchal attitude of these fathers is accounted for by the love that they feel for their daughters. This is the case of the following narratorial remark: "The universe decreed that fathers should love their daughters not wisely but too well. And that daughters should hate them for it" (*idem* 51). This quotation enhances the love of these fathers, which reveals itself as an affection that has become so excessive that it has become overwhelming for their daughters. The loving nature of both Strulovitch and Shylock is strengthened by an instance of reported speech that explicitly points to their fatherliness: "We are not the slightest bit alike, he thought, except in what we feel for our daughters" (*idem* 105). This quotation reports the stance of Strulovitch, who considers that, no matter how different they are, both of them care for their daughters. In the case of Shylock, he expresses his thoughts about Jessica in a key passage that illustrates how this novel overturns the hackneyed views on Shylock as a heartless father: "I half expect to hear from my too dear daughter every hour. I buried her in my heart the day she left, but a daughter doesn't stay buried. Even a daughter that steals her father's most precious possession" (*idem* 55). Even if he may still be angry with her for stealing Leah's ring, he acknowledges that he has feelings for her. This is enhanced by his desire to hear from her. Moreover, later on in the conversation he feels apologetic toward her: "She

found living in a Jewish house something worse than a prison" (*idem* 57). What the novel does is turn Shakespeare's unforgiving Jew into a thoughtful figure that truly understands why Jessica has decided to elope. This positive portrayal is enhanced by Shylock's connection with his double, a patronising father who nevertheless ultimately acknowledges having been excessively protective. In a dialogue with his counsellor Shylock, Strulovitch deliberates: "I cannot be said to have protected her if she runs away" (*idem* 135). When his friend advises him to explain his motives, the art dealer replies: "*I behave like a barbarian, Beatrice, because I love you?*" (*ibidem*). As is explicitly mentioned, the novel does not condemn Shylock as a thoughtless father, but ultimately brings to the fore his unconditional love for his daughter. This is something that links Shylock and Strulovitch, and that contributes to enhancing a re-imagination of Shakespeare's Shylock as a forbearing father who does not favour his avarice over his affection for Jessica and Leah.

The role of Shylock as an altruistic counsellor reaches its highest point after Strulovitch declares that he will not consent to the match between Beatrice and Gratan. Strulovitch warns that he must weigh his options, and his friend replies: "And they include sparing [Gratan] the cut?" (*idem* 148). At this point in the narrative, the Jewish Shylock implicitly proposes that the Christian footballer be circumcised. Such a mutilation could be symbolically read as a rite of passage that would potentially enable Gratan to marry Beatrice. Indeed, Shylock's reference to circumcision is an allusion to Antonio's bond to the usurer in Shakespeare's play: "The two men fell naturally to discussing Shylock's own original intentions, vis-à-vis Antonio's flesh. Had his aim been Antonio's privy parts, or Antonio's heart?" (*idem* 149). This narratorial remark problematizes the question of Antonio's pound of flesh in *The Merchant of Venice*, as the Jew never mentions explicitly which organ he wants to get. Likewise, this quotation points to an ambivalence in relation to the flesh of the novel's Christian footballer. This ambiguity can be perceived in the allusion to the heart, which could refer to the physical organ or else to emotions. Such vagueness is kept in the course of the novel with the aim of building up suspense. Nevertheless, the novel ultimately gives prominence to the emotional dimension of the term with the aim of enhancing the positive depiction of Shylock. By way of illustration, in a dialogue between Gratan and D'Anton, the art dealer asks the footballer whether Strulovitch said anything about "circumcision of the heart", and he goes on to argue: "We can be better Christians, St Paul argued, by understanding circumcision metaphorically, not following the letter of the law, but the spirit. We can be circumcised in the heart" (*idem* 169). In the context of the novel, Shylock's proposal could be read as a far-reaching change from which all the implicated characters will benefit, especially Strulovitch as a father and Beatrice as a daughter.

As a thoughtful and loving father, Shylock is aware that Strulovitch's consent to the marriage will make Beatrice happy. After all, she loves

Gratan and, what is more, her impending matrimony would guarantee her emancipation from the overprotecting Strulovitch. Providing that the footballer's bond is a circumcision in the heart, Shylock's advice could be interpreted as an endeavour to bridge the emotional gap between Jews and Christians, not only in the rewriting but also in the source text. Not coincidentally, Gratan is reported to having given a Nazi salute on the pitch, so his circumcision would translate into the first step in the individual and collective reconciliation between Christians and Jews. As the novel progresses, it is finally D'Anton who proposes being circumcised in place of Gratan (*idem* 221). This turning point is doubly advantageous for the suffering Strulovitch. On the one hand, the potentially physical circumcision of his long-standing enemy will enable him to avenge his having procured Beatrice for the football player. On the other hand, the emotional mutilation might trigger a rapport between the previously antagonistic characters: since D'Anton is closely linked to Beatrice, the construction of such an emotional bond could improve Strulovitch's edgy relationship with his beloved daughter.

As the architect of the strategy to bring Strulovitch closer to his daughter, Shylock is eventually regarded by his friend as an exemplary figure. Indeed, the philanthropist grows so attached to Shylock that he considers him "his conscience", and he even describes the otherwise cold-natured Jew as his "best man" and a "role model" (*idem* 236, 257-258). Actually, Shylock is portrayed as a forbearing man whose phlegm and whose unconditional advice could help Strulovitch in his dire attempt to gain the love of Beatrice, even if reconciliation is by no means easy to attain. Shylock's generosity is reflected in the following declaration: "I don't deny you anything. The man presently cohabiting with your daughter denies you. Your daughter denies you. The opinion of the world denies you" (*idem* 233). Even though he might sound pessimistic about the outcome of his plan, Shylock is determined not to neglect his companion. Such a statement entails that, in addition to the fatherly trait aforementioned, this novel brings to the fore Shylock's excellence as a human being. This humanity is not only acknowledged by Strulovitch, but also by a certain friend of Beatrice's called Plurabelle, who was responsible for delivering a letter by D'Anton to Strulovitch: "You looked so forbidding when you opened the door to me at Simon Strulovitch's I didn't dream you could be capable of such humanity" (*idem* 269). As can be seen in the statement, the novel manages to reverse the role of Shakespeare's Shylock as an outcast to be neglected to an influential and respectable figure who, besides being a caring father, displays benevolence in his interactions with other people. The good impression that Shylock has made on Plurabelle is enhanced by a speech that the Jew gives prior to D'Anton's admission to the clinic. In this monologue, Shylock puts the focus on the quality of mercy: "You can act in the spirit of God's love, show charity [...], spare the undeserving, love those that do not love you" (*idem* 266). The disinterested love between human beings

highlighted in his speech could be set in stark opposition to the greediness and grudge shown by the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice*. Instead, Jacobson contributes to dignifying Shylock as a deeply emotional man who is able to connect with his audience and who, most importantly, has been the promoter of a potentially stronger bond between Strulovitch and his daughter. By the end of the novel, a full reconciliation between father and daughter has not been attained yet. However, Beatrice decides to return home, and Strulovitch decides that this is more than enough for him: "It was enough she was here. It was everything she was here" (*idem* 277).

5. Conclusion

In this article, the rhizomatic conception of Shakespeare suggested by Douglas Lanier has been applied to the analysis of how the novel *Shylock Is My Name* revisits the character of Shylock. Howard Jacobson's rewriting of *The Merchant of Venice* establishes a dialogue with Shakespeare's play whereby both the source text and the appropriation are perfectly complemented. The Jew depicted in this 21st-century rewriting is by no means a usurer blinded by his rage over Jessica's elopement and by his greediness. To the contrary, he is presented as a thoughtful father who, in spite of his suffering, bears no grudge against his daughter. In addition to his lack of rancour, what defines Jacobson's Shylock is his disinterested readiness to help Strulovitch regain the love of his daughter Beatrice. In exploring the connection between these present-day Jewish characters, this novel successfully re-interprets the previously resentful figure of Shylock. Though being described as a sardonic man, he proves a genuine individual that never abandons his companion. What is more, he fully understands his friend's anguish and sympathises with him because he has also been neglected by his daughter and, on a large scale, by society. This article has indicated that what definitely links these two characters is their love for their respective daughters. They admit having been controlling parents and hence they fathom their offsprings' motives for leaving. Moreover, they express their insatiable desire to know about their daughters. In the case of Strulovitch, such a craving triggers Shylock's proposal that Beatrice's Christian partner should be circumcised. However, it is eventually revealed that the nature of the amputation is above all an emotional one: what Shylock wishes is the potential reconciliation between father and daughter.

As regards implications for future research, the rhizomatic model followed in the present article might be used to expand scholarly knowledge on the dialogue between Shakespeare's plays and the rewritings of the Hogarth Shakespeare Project. In the case of the novel targeted in this study, a potential line of research might be approaching Jacobson's retelling though a

feminist lens in order to assess how this novel explores the issue of patriarchy. Even if the present article does not provide a feminist approach to the relation between Shylock and Jessica, Gilbert and Gubar's theory could certainly be extrapolated to the analysis of whether this novel celebrates or condemns paternalism. Likewise, it would be interesting to provide a more thorough study of how this novel explores Jewish identity, and, most importantly, how it contributes to destabilising the race-based insults and stereotypes present in Shakespeare's play.

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