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“The most famous Jew outside the Old Testament”:
Recontextualizing Shakespeare
in Clive Sinclair’s *Shylock Must Die*

“НАJSŁYNNIEJSZY ŻYD SPOZA STAREGO TESTAMENTU”:

SZEKSPIR W NOWYM KONTEKŚCIE W ZBIORZE OPOWIADAŃ CLIVE’A SINCLAIRA *SHYLOCK MUST DIE*

Streszczenie: Wydany pośmiertnie zbiór opowiadań *Shylock Must Die* [Szajlok musi umrzeć, 2018] brytyjskiego pisarza żydowskiego pochodzenia Clive’a Sinclaira na wiele twórczych sposobów nawiązuje do sztuki Szekspira *Kupiec wenecki*. Historie te podejmują główne wątki antysemityzmu właśnie z *Kupca weneckiego*, z Szajlokiem jako głównym bohaterem żydowskim na czele, ale ich akcja rozgrywa się zazwyczaj nie w renesansie, lecz w XX lub XXI wieku. Niektóre z opowiadań są odpowiedzią na ważne przedstawienia *Kupca weneckiego* na całym świecie, np. w Sztokholmie w 1944 r., w Londynie w 2012 r. czy w Wenecji z okazji 500. rocznicy założenia getta żydowskiego w 2016 r. Opowiadania zawierają również elementy tragikomiczne, co jest cechą charakterystyczną literatury żydowskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura żydowska, Clive Sinclair, *Shylock Must Die*, Szekspir, *Kupiec wenecki*

“САМЫЙ ИЗВЕСТНЫЙ ЕВРЕЙ ЗА ПРЕДЕЛАМИ СТАРОГО ЗАВЕТА”:

РЕКОНТЕКСТУАЛИЗАЦИЯ ШЕКСПИРА В *SHYLOCK MUST DIE* КЛАЙВА СИНКЛЕРА

Резюме: Выпущенный посмертно сборник коротких рассказов британско-еврейского писателя Клайва Синклера *Shylock Must Die* [Шейлок должен умереть, 2018] по-новому подходит к *Венецианскому Купцу* Шекспира. Рассказы берут из пьесы темы антисемитизма и Шейлока в качестве главного героя-еврея, но действие их происходит в XX или XXI веке вместо эпохи Ренессанса. Некоторые из рассказов реагируют на известные постановки пьесы: стокгольмскую 1944-го года, лондонскую 2012-го года или венецианскую 2016-го года, в котором отметили 500 лет с момента основания еврейского гетто в Венеции. Рассказы также включают в себя трагикомические элементы, присущие еврейской литературе.

Ключевые слова: еврейская литература, Клайв Синклер, *Shylock Must Die*, Шекспир, *Венецианский Купец*

While all of Shakespeare’s plays have attracted numerous reinterpretations on the stage as well as in other genres, it is *The Merchant of Venice* that particularly invites modern retellings due to its ambivalent portrayal of Shylock, its main Jewish character. While Jewish

characters were often depicted as villains in Renaissance drama, Edgar Rosenberg, writing about Shylock and Barabas from Christopher Marlowe's tragedy *The Jew of Malta*, argues that "Marlowe's and Shakespeare's Jews assert themselves actively against their persecution and regard it as a source of terror. The point is that none of them can be sensibly appreciated without an awareness of the restrictions which prevent them from participating fully in the social world."¹ As Shakespeare portrays Shylock as both a villain and a target of persecution, recent rewritings of *The Merchant of Venice* by British Jewish authors, such as Arnold Wesker's play *The Merchant* (1976) or Howard Jacobson's novel *Shylock Is My Name* (2016), provide a more sympathetic presentation of this character. Wesker's play, which retains the spatial and temporal setting of the original, portrays Shylock as a friend of Antonio's, suggesting Shylock's demand for a pound of flesh is not even meant seriously, although it cannot be retracted. Jacobson's Shylock reappears in early 21st century Britain and becomes friends with Simon Strulovitch, a philanthropist who is also a widower who had to bring up his only daughter on his own. The most recent response to *The Merchant of Venice* by a British Jewish writer is the posthumous short story collection *Shylock Must Die* (2018) by Clive Sinclair (1948–2018) who "name[d] his tellingly varied influences as Kafka, Roth and Shakespeare, and describe[d] his own affiliation as 'existentially Jewish.'"² Sinclair's collection thus combines a concern with the history and present of Jewish people with respect for the major English playwright. For instance, in the story "Shylock Our Contemporary," one of the characters criticizes the English for believing Shakespeare's plays were written by Francis Bacon: "The English are such snobs you can understand their difficulty in accepting that a lowly commoner could write the greatest plays ever conceived."³ The passage thus situates Shakespeare on the margin of society, similarly to the Jewish minority in England. In turn, Sinclair seems to pay homage to both Shylock as a character and Shakespeare as his author; the title of the story "Shylock Our Contemporary" alludes to Jan Kott's 1961 critical study of Shakespeare's major plays entitled *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*.

As the example above suggests, in his response to Shakespeare, Sinclair adopts rather different strategies to Wesker and Jacob-

¹ Edgar Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali: Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 117.

² Axel Stähler and Sue Vice, "Introduction: Writing Jews and Jewishness in Contemporary Britain," *European Judaism*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2014): 4.

³ Clive Sinclair, "Shylock Our Contemporary," in *Shylock Must Die* (Halban: London, 2018), 79.

son. Of seven stories in the collection, only the eponymous one which opens the book and was originally published in Sinclair's earlier collection *Death & Texas* (2014),⁴ is set in the Renaissance; its primary focus, however, is on Jessica as a young independent woman who rebels against her father rather than on Shylock as a sympathetic character. Still, this short story resembles Wesker's and Jacobson's texts in that it rewrites the plot of *The Merchant of Venice*, as I have argued elsewhere.⁵ I am thus deliberately omitting this story from the present article to concentrate on those that borrow only characters or motifs from Shakespeare's play and put them into new contexts or refer to notable productions of the play across the globe at various historical moments: Stockholm in 1944, London in 2012, and Venice in 2016. There are also many connections among the six stories; for example, some of them feature the same characters. For this reason, I will discuss the stories in the order of appearance in the collection.

Besides, the frame of intertextual references throughout the collection extends beyond *The Merchant of Venice*, spanning a variety of texts from many countries and centuries. For instance, the epigraph to the collection is not taken from *The Merchant of Venice*, but from Claudius' speech on death and mourning addressed to Hamlet (1.2.290–95):

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father.
But you must know your father lost a father,
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
To do obsequious sorrow.

The epigraph thus prepares the reader for the recurrent themes of the collection – death and relationships between fathers and sons, but also among family members in general. As expected, death is associated with sadness and mourning, but in Sinclair's writing also with dark humour; David Brauner characterizes the collection as “both playful and death-haunted,”⁶ and Elizabeth Lowry observes “the plunges from high seriousness to slapstick.”⁷

⁴ According to the Acknowledgements, two more stories in the collection were published earlier, as “A Wilderness of Monkeys” was originally written for an anthology inspired by the 500th anniversary of the Venetian Ghetto, and “Shylock's Ghost” first appeared in *The Reader*.

⁵ See my article “When Tubal Tells *The Merchant of Venice* as Jessica's Story: Clive Sinclair's ‘Shylock Must Die,’” *American and British Studies Annual*, vol. 14 (2021): 154–161.

⁶ David Brauner, Review of *Shylock Must Die*, by Clive Sinclair, *Jewish Renaissance*, July 2018, 45.

⁷ Elizabeth Lowry, “It Was His Humour: Final Stories of a Comic Master,” review of *Shylock Must Die*, by Clive Sinclair, *Times Literary Supplement*, August 24, 2018, 29.

Sinclair himself provided a witty comment on the dead in general and his late wife Fran, who died prematurely at the age of forty-six, in particular:

I've nothing against ghosts personally; some of my best friends are dead. This does not make for an active social life, needless to say, but once in a while the departed do pay calls. These are always unexpected (for the deceased do not keep diaries) and usually occur at night. In fact it is after midnight when my late wife shows up. I can see at once that she does not know she is dead. Why should she? She looks in her prime.⁸

Writing about death in a very personal context, yet in a darkly humorous way, is what this statement shares with a brief text entitled "Yosl Bergner's Last Dreams," which comes right after the epigraph to *Shylock Must Die* and functions as an introduction to the collection. Yosl Bergner was an Israeli artist and Sinclair's close friend, who died at the age of ninety-six in 2017, a year before the collection was published. Writing in the first person, Sinclair concentrates not only on his and Bergner's friendship, but also mentions their artistic collaboration: "Yosl loved to tell me his dreams, the more outrageous the better, in the hope that I would incorporate them in one of my stories. Oftentimes I did."⁹ Besides highlighting the two men's creativity and connection, the text thus lays the ground for the following stories, as many of them indeed have a dream-like, surrealistic element.

"Tears of the Giraffe," the first story analysed in this article, is set in Sweden during WWII and uses an animal motif to comment on the ideology of Nazism. While Sweden remained officially neutral, the story's characters are two brothers who sympathize with Nazism – 19-year-old Stig Oberg, founder member of the Swedish Nazi party, and thirteen-year-old Arnie, a member of Hitler Youth. Both brothers are present when a disciple of Lutz Heck, director of the Berlin Zoological Garden and member of the Nazi party, arrives in Stockholm to conduct a public autopsy on a giraffe, arguing: "Some of you may think this cruel, [...] but it is necessary to ensure a healthy population. Eugenics requires a variety of perfect specimens. Otherwise the consequences of in-breeding become apparent. You only have to look at the Jews."¹⁰ The irony is the speaker believes Swedes will not feel sorry for the dead giraffe once the animal is compared to Jews.

⁸ Clive Sinclair, "The Spirit Is Willing," *Independent*, June 21, 1996, <https://www.independent.co.uk/lifestyle/the-spirit-is-willing-1338275.html>.

⁹ Sinclair, "Yosl Bergner's Last Dreams," in *Shylock Must Die*, 3.

¹⁰ Sinclair, "Tears of the Giraffe," in *Shylock Must Die*, 32.

Stig and Arnie do think of Jews as subhuman; however, there is a striking example of dramatic irony in the text, as they are unaware their maternal grandmother was Jewish. The omniscient narration reveals their mother regrets not having told them earlier and cannot find the courage to inform them now. She even stays silent when the family attend a performance of *Hamlet* at Helsingør to which Stig is invited soon after the capitulation of Denmark and securing of Norway. To her unease, she ends up watching Claudius looking like a Jew, Fortinbras dressed as an officer of the Wehrmacht, and her sons greeting the Wehrmacht members with the Nazi salute. This passage thus reflects how theatre was used by Nazi ideology.

The story moves in time to October 1, 1943, the date set for mass deportation of Danish Jews. Mrs Oberg's cousin Louise and her two daughters, Karen and Ella, thus escape to Sweden. It is only after their relatives' arrival that the brothers find out they have Jewish blood; however, Stig's initial shock is partially overcome by his attraction to Karen. When Mr Oberg suggests both families attend a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* which, according to the newspaper, features a sympathetically portrayed Shylock, Stig agrees to go. However, after the actor cast as Shylock announces to the audience that three survivors who managed to escape from the Sobibor extermination camp are present, Stig refuses to join the standing ovation, proclaiming himself a Nazi. Only when Karen confronts him with the question "is it me that you love, or is it Hitler?"¹¹ Stig symbolically buttons his jacket to hide his brown shirt, associated with the Nazi uniform.

Arnie's reaction to the revelation of his Jewish heritage is more confused than Stig's. At the end of the story, Arnie has a nightmarish dream in which he wanders on his own and eventually is bitten on the tongue by a tiger. It seems that Arnie feels guilty about being a Nazi sympathizer in the past and is now afraid of being attacked himself. In Arnie's mind, the violence committed on animals and people that he has witnessed and learned about intermingle, giving the ending a surreal quality characteristic of Sinclair's writing.

While in "Tears of the Giraffe," the only element associated with *The Merchant of Venice* is the depiction of its performance, the story "A Wilderness of Monkeys" borrows its title from Shakespeare's play, namely the passage when Shylock learns that the turquoise ring he valued above anything was not only stolen by his daughter

¹¹ Sinclair, "Tears of the Giraffe," in *Shylock Must Die*, 38.

ter Jessica, but also traded for a monkey (3.1.117–122). Another reference to *The Merchant of Venice* is provided by the story's spatial setting – the Belmont hotel in Italy, where the Salmons, a Jewish family, parents and two sons, are spending their holiday in 1961. During the first night, the Salmons are targets of antisemitism, as an elderly Italian Contessa, who is sharing her dinner table with her Chihuahua, objects to them being let in the room. The story thus shares with the previous one a juxtaposition of an antisemite's love for animals and hatred for Jews.

The following day, the father buys an expensive looking necklace for the mother, Beth, but when she wears it for the first time, the Contessa claims the very necklace had been stolen from her. While Salmon is suspected of buying the necklace from the thief rather than stealing it himself, there has to be a hearing so that he is proved innocent. Eventually, the necklace Salmon bought is revealed to be only a cheap imitation of the stolen one. Thus, Salmon is released, and his family can finally enjoy the holiday. Commenting on the luxuries the Belmont offers, Salmon proclaims "this place is nothing but a wilderness of monkeys."¹² Yet, the idyll is disturbed again when Salmon encounters a man who uses a racial slur toward him. In turn, Salmon punches the man, but it is himself who falls and has a heart attack.

Before Beth realizes how serious Salmon's health issue is, she makes a fitting comment on his character: "Isn't that typical. [...] My husband hits someone, and he's the one who falls down."¹³ Salmon thus presents a character type often associated with Jewish literature, a *Luftmensch*. As Galili Shahar writes, *Luftmensch* is "the name for a rootless, nomadic subject, one that lacks belongingness, is detached, and embodies a 'weak' connection to earth and reality."¹⁴ While to a degree, rootlessness relates to many of Sinclair's characters, it is mainly the lack of connection to reality that characterizes the well-intentioned, but consistently failing Saloman. This quality relates to another character type in Jewish literature, a *schlemiel*. According to Sanford Pinsker, a *schlemiel* is "a moral bungler, a character whose estimate of the situation, coupled with an overriding desire for 'commitment,' invariably caused comic defeats of one sort or another."¹⁵ Whether Salmon tries to

¹² Sinclair, "A Wilderness of Monkeys" in *Shylock Must Die*, 52.

¹³ Sinclair, "A Wilderness of Monkeys" in *Shylock Must Die*, 52.

¹⁴ Galili Shahar, Review of *Luftmenschen. Zur Geschichte einer Metapher*, by Nicolas Berg, *Central European History*, vol. 42, no. 4 (2009): 761.

¹⁵ Sanford Pinsker, *The Schlemiel as Metaphor: Studies in the Yiddish and American Jewish Novel* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 79.

please his wife or defend himself, he never succeeds, which makes him a tragicomic hero typical of Jewish literary tradition.

Earlier in the story, the older of the sons mentions he was born in 1948, the same year as Sinclair himself, and the ending of the text switches from omniscient to first-person narration to present the story as Sinclair's fictionalized memory; similar direct as well as indirect references to the author's life reappear throughout the collection. The ending also reveals that the lawyer who arranged the hearing for Salmon switched the two necklaces, giving the fake one to the Contessa. While the hearing may be reminiscent of *The Merchant of Venice*, Sinclair uses this plot device for a different purpose – in Shakespeare, Portia's intelligence saves Antonio and humiliates Shylock, but in Sinclair's story, the subterfuge is used for the benefit of the Jewish character.

The following story, "If You Tickle Us," whose title is taken from Shylock's famous speech (3.1.64), focuses on the Carps, neighbours of the Salmons in Hendon, North London, an area where Sinclair lived. The omniscient narrator explains that the families were given their unusual names by the head of the Prussian civil service in Warsaw, who named those who arrived on Fridays after the fish that was on the luncheon menu. Inspired by the Salmons and their holiday in Venice described in the previous story, the Carps choose the same destination the next year. The Carps have two teenage sons, twins Esau and Jacob. As the biblical names suggest rivalry and disagreements between the sons, unlike Jacob and his parents, Esau is interested in Marxism rather than his Jewish heritage.

On the holiday, Esau and Jacob meet a Palestinian boy named Yusef, who tells them that in 1948, the Israelis took the town his family lived in, letting his mother stay because of her Jewish heritage, but making his father leave. Under the influence of meeting Yusef, Esau later shocks his father by telling him "today's most diligent disciples of the Nazis are your Zionists."¹⁶ As Esau continues to voice anti-Zionist views after the Salmons return to England, when he is at university, the father bans him from the family home. Esau and Jacob also gradually drift apart from each other, although both become university professors; Esau teaches Political Science and Jacob is a lecturer in English Literature, writing about Shylock and other Jewish characters created by English authors.

The story moves in time to Spring 2012, when the Globe Theatre organizes a festival called Globe to Globe, during which

¹⁶ Sinclair, "If You Tickle Us," in *Shylock Must Die*, 61.

Shakespeare's plays are staged by foreign companies in their native tongues. Jacob books tickets to the Habima Theatre's production of *The Merchant of Venice* in Hebrew for his widowed father and himself. Esau also attends, if only to interrupt Shylock's famous speech by paraphrasing it: "Palestinians are human beans [sic] too! If you shoot them, do they not die?"¹⁷ However, Esau's outcries are not the only unpleasant occurrence at the Globe at that night. After the performance, a Muslim man films the audience, which Jacob finds disturbing and potentially dangerous; still, he decides to put a caricature of the Muslim man on the cover of a magazine he occasionally publishes.

Several shocking revelations come by the end of the story. First, Esau is asked to identify the body, as Jacob was assassinated due to the caricature of the Muslim man. Second, at Jacob's funeral, Esau sees a Muslim man filming the mourners, and notices the man "looked a lot like his good friend Yusef,"¹⁸ as Yusef had become Esau's student, writing a doctoral thesis on Palestine under his supervision. It follows that Yusef is also the man whom Jacob caricatured, and very likely Jacob's killer. These discoveries make Esau feel guilty, as he wonders to what extent has he indirectly contributed to his brother's tragic death. In turn, he disconnects from his anti-Zionist associates.

This short story deals with the interconnectedness of the personal and political, as Jacob's death is linked to the family members' different opinions on the conflict between Israel and Palestine. While the story features the Hebrew performance of *The Merchant of Venice* as one of the ways of expressing sympathy with Israel, a character in the following story "Shylock Our Contemporary," mentions that the play has also been appropriated by the other side of this conflict by referring to a 1990s "production by the Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv, which was in rehearsal when Baruch Goldstein massacred nearly three dozen Muslims at prayer in Hebron, an act which prompted the recasting of Shylock as a West Bank settler."¹⁹ Such an interpretation of Shylock as the oppressor of Palestinians would radically differ from the one offered at the Globe in 2012.

The title of the story "Shylock Our Contemporary" refers to the title of a fictional academic book written by one of its characters, an English professor of literature and a Shakespeare expert. The professor goes to a conference in Venice, accompanied by his

¹⁷ Sinclair, "If You Tickle Us," in *Shylock Must Die*, 64. The original passage in *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Shylock refers to Jewish people, is: "If you poison us, do we not die?" (3.1.65–66).

¹⁸ Sinclair, "If You Tickle Us," in *Shylock Must Die*, 68.

¹⁹ Sinclair, "Shylock Our Contemporary," in *Shylock Must Die*, 75.

nineteen-year-old daughter named Jessica, who narrates the story. The story takes place in 2016, the year of the quincentennial commemorations of the foundation of the Venetian ghetto, and refers to a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* on that occasion, in which Shylock's role is taken by five different actors, one of whom is female. The performance did take place in March 2016; as one of the audience members, Sinclair described its aim as presenting "Shylock as humanity's ambassador."²⁰

Besides referring to the two performances of the play mentioned above, the story includes other allusions to *The Merchant of Venice*. Jessica reveals her mother died of cancer six years ago, so that she has taken her mother's place in her father's social life, as she often joins him on his business trips. Despite the close bond between them, Jessica is going to leave her father like Shylock's daughter in *The Merchant of Venice*, although only temporarily, due to her studies at University of East Anglia rather than at University of St Albans where he teaches. As David Herman notes, "references to Shakespeare interweave with Sinclair's own life," as Sinclair lived in St Albans and studied and taught at UEA.²¹ Jessica also confides in the reader that her pilfering boyfriend stole her mother's wedding ring to pay off his gambling debts. She wonders whether her father may have already noticed not having seen the ring. However, the father seems too absent-minded and nervous without any apparent reason.

It is not until they return home that he tells her about his health issue that started in Venice and was eventually diagnosed as a Polycystic Kidney Disease. As the disease has been in the family for generations, Jessica takes an ultrasound test to find out if she has also inherited it, and is relieved to be informed that "the cysts are evident, but a long way from threatening."²² Yet, she cannot help feeling uneasy when her father later says that the only cure for his illness would be a transplant from a family member, and jokingly adds: "My disease has turned me into a latter-day Shylock. He wanted a pound of flesh. I'd settle for a quarter. That's all a kidney weighs, you know."²³ Jessica's fear is then reflected in a nightmarish dream in which Shylock is performed by her father and approaches her with a knife, as if he wanted to get her kidney.

²⁰ Clive Sinclair, "Shylock, Our Contemporary," in *The Merchant in Venice: Shakespeare in the Ghetto*, ed. Shaul Bassi and Carol Chillington Rutter (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2021), 164.

²¹ David Herman, Review of *Shylock Must Die*, by Clive Sinclair, *Jewish Chronicle*, July 19, 2018, <https://www.thejc.com/news/all/book-review-shylock-must-die-1.467437>.

²² Sinclair, "Shylock Our Contemporary," in *Shylock Must Die*, 79.

²³ Sinclair, "Shylock Our Contemporary," in *Shylock Must Die*, 80.

When she wakes up, she concludes: "Polycystic Kidney Disease is my Portia, my guardian angel. Thanks to it I will never be in a position to donate that vital quarter pound of flesh to my father. Had my kidneys been unspckled I would certainly have felt obligated to make the sacrifice."²⁴ The story thus raises the issue of family members' mutual dependence on each other; while Jessica is worried about her father as her only living parent, his rather unfortunate comment disturbs her considerably.

While being primarily concerned with familial relationships, the story also includes a passage in which the father is asked to name a contemporary Shylock, and he mentions Donald Trump, explaining: "If – God forbid – Trump were to win there will be plenty to cheer him on as he trashes Belmont. Some might even see it as the revenge of the deplorables, among whose number stands Shylock."²⁵ This mention connects to the following short story "Ain't That the Truth" which puts Donald Trump into an unexpected context, portraying him as a golem, an animated anthropomorphic being in Jewish folklore, most famously associated with 16th-century Prague. Although Sinclair's story never explicitly mentions the former American president's name, the similarities are striking.

As the story satirizes Trump's behaviour by rewriting the myth of golem, the Shakespearean reference is provided via the character of Shy Lokshen who aims to create the golem for the White House. Shy lives in a luxurious home in Las Vegas and comes from an affluent Jewish family that descended from Shylock's heirs who emigrated to the United States. The story is narrated by Shy's friend, one of the few Jews to work for the Las Vegas Police Department.

When Shy tells the narrator about his plan, he also explains to him that the golem can only be killed by having rubbed out the first letter "e" on his forehead, changing the word *emet*, meaning "truth," to *met*, which means "death." After being privately educated and introduced to the public, the golem is revealed to be "boastful, cruel, incurious, merciless."²⁶ Soon, the golem becomes popular in talk shows due to his phrase "I don't talk to losers," which goes viral. Eventually, the golem becomes a presidential candidate despite a lack of his own programme: "He simply exposed and exploited his opponents' weak spots, making them appear ineffectual and ridiculous."²⁷ In the end, the golem unex-

²⁴ Sinclair, "Shylock Our Contemporary," in *Shylock Must Die*, 80.

²⁵ Sinclair, "Shylock Our Contemporary," in *Shylock Must Die*, 73.

²⁶ Sinclair, "Ain't That the Truth," in *Shylock Must Die*, 86.

²⁷ Sinclair, "Ain't That the Truth," in *Shylock Must Die*, 88.

pectedly wins the presidential election, beating his female democratic candidate. Out of gratitude the golem offers to marry Shy's daughter, Jessica, and she accepts the proposal.

As Dan Bilefsky explains that, according to the most well-known legend, "the Golem was fashioned from clay and brought to life by a rabbi to protect Prague's 16th-century ghetto from persecution."²⁸ Accordingly, Shy also reminds the golem of this purpose, adding, to the narrator's disagreement: "Above all this requires Israel to be as strong as possible. Once in office you must end all talk about a Palestinian state, move our embassy to Jerusalem, and recognize the legality of all the settlements. Then, for the first time in two thousand years, we may actually feel safe."²⁹ In result, the embassy transfer³⁰ leads to violent protests of Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories, as the narrator predicted. Worried about the spread of the conflict, the narrator convinces Shy to let him put the golem to a stop, and he meets the golem under the excuse of being a hairdresser arriving to finetune his toupee. As a satire of Trump, the story is the most bizarre one in the collection; at the same time, it deals with significant issues such as what makes the right world leader and what is the position of Israel in global politics.

The final short story is "Shylock's Ghost," which in fact features several ghost-like characters. The story is narrated by a man who lives in London and has a son, who is a movie director and has just flown over from Los Angeles to shoot a reboot of *The Merchant of Venice* in Golders Green and Kenwood. On this occasion, the narrator decides to take a walk in the nearby Hendon where he grew up, only to observe that all the old shops and businesses in the area have disappeared. Suddenly, the narrator sees a man who looks like a Jew, but turns out to be the 18th-century Irish actor Charles Macklin; as Filip Krajinik emphasizes, in 1741, Macklin broke the tradition of Shylock being played by low comedians by presenting the character "as a serious dramatic figure, to the great applause of the audience and praise from the critics."³¹ In the story, Macklin tells the narrator he is going to play "the most famous Jew outside the Old Testament"³² once again. Therefore,

²⁸ Dan Bilefsky, "Hard Times Give New Life to Prague's Golem," *The New York Times*, May 10, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/11/world/europe/11golem.html>.

²⁹ Sinclair, "Ain't That the Truth," in *Shylock Must Die*, 89.

³⁰ The Embassy of the United States of America to Israel was in fact moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May 2018, about two months after Sinclair's death.

³¹ Filip Krajinik, "Reading Shylock's Dream: A Pathological Miser or an Anxious Dream Interpreter?" *Ostrava Journal of English Philology*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2021): 44.

³² Sinclair, "Shylock's Ghost," in *Shylock Must Die*, 96.

Macklin is looking for Hendon Hall, currently a hotel where the narrator's son is staying, formerly the home of Sir David Garrick, the major 18th century Shakespearean actor and theatre manager. Suddenly all the streets look like the narrator remembers them from his childhood. As the narrator invites Macklin to visit his former home, the narrator's parents are there, and the following conversation reveals the narrator's mother wants to go on holiday to Venice like in the story "A Wilderness of Monkeys." As the narrator leaves the scene and returns to the film set, where his son is directing the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, he feels a closer connection to the son than ever before. Having an autobiographical element, as Sinclair's son Seth is a film writer,³³ the final story returns to relationships between family members, especially fathers and sons, as one of the central themes of the whole collection.

In conclusion, the stories react to *The Merchant of Venice* in a variety of creative ways, borrowing characters, motifs, or scenes from the play. Some stories recontextualize the theme of antisemitism, whether in relation to WWII in "Tears of the Giraffe" or the post-war period in "A Wilderness of Monkeys." Others, such as "If You Tickle Us" and "Ain't That the Truth," focus on the perception of the conflict between Israel and Palestine among British and American Jewry. While some stories deal with serious issues such as death, most of them provide tragicomic elements as typical features of Jewish literature. In several stories, the major reference to *The Merchant of Venice* is provided by a particular production of the play. "Tears of the Giraffe" refers to a 1944 Swedish performance featuring a positively portrayed Shylock, "If You Tickle Us" uses a 2012 Hebrew performance at the Globe, and "Shylock Our Contemporary" mentions a 2016 experimental performance in Venice, all of them aiming to raise sympathy for Jewish people at different historical moments. The final story "Shylock's Ghost" refers to both 18th-century and contemporary renderings of Shylock. To a degree, any performance of *The Merchant of Venice* may be considered a reinterpretation, similarly to other writers' texts drawing on this play. Thus, while the title of Sinclair's collection is *Shylock Must Die*, the phrase "the most famous Jew outside the Old Testament" from the story "Shylock Our Contemporary" may be more fitting in emphasizing Shylock's persisting significance and relevance as well as the multiplicity of interpretations of this literary character actors, directors and writers have come up with.

³³ See Herman, Review of *Shylock Must Die*.

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