STAGING *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE* IN THE 21st CENTURY:

A DRAMATURGICAL CASE STUDY

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STAGING THE MERCHANT OF VENICE IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
A DRAMATURGICAL CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

“Staging The Merchant of Venice in the 21st Century: A Dramaturgical Case Study” aims to document the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival’s 2015 production of The Merchant of Venice by framing it within the historical narrative of the play’s place in Kansas City theatrical history. This thesis also seeks to further define the relationship between the production process and dramaturgy by examining the development and implementation of dramaturgical responsibilities as they related to audience engagement with The Merchant of Venice.

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of The Merchant of Venice and examines the progression of the play from comedy to anti-Semitic tragedy beginning in the late nineteenth century. This chapter also identifies the decades-long hiatus of The Merchant of Venice from Kansas City. Chapter 2 will explore this gap in Kansas City’s production history of The Merchant of Venice by looking at the two most recent productions of the play in 1950 and
1986 and introducing the initial conversation about bringing the play to Kansas City audiences in 2015. Chapter 3 then explains the nature of the production’s rehearsal process by exploring the role of dramaturgy in the rehearsal hall. Chapter 4 continues the discussion of dramaturgy’s involvement by looking at the role the dramaturg played in preparing audiences for the upcoming production. Chapter 5 analyzes the play’s success with engaging an audience in a dialogue about *The Merchant of Venice*, and points to the play’s importance in discussing the larger social issues of the Kansas City community.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled “Staging *The Merchant of Venice* in the 21st Century: A Dramaturgical Case Study,” presented by Alyson E. Germinder, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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The University Archives housed at University of Missouri-Kansas City started my journey for research on past productions of *The Merchant of Venice* in Kansas City. Without their theatre collection and the assistance of Senior Manuscript Specialist Tonya Crawford, I would never have known the full cast and crew for both the 1950 and 1986 productions. The journey continued with the State Historical Society on UMKC’s campus. I cannot thank Tracey L. Howerton, Senior Manuscript Specialist, enough for her digging and insight into the Blevins Davis collection. Without her knowledge of Davis, I would not have found the scrapbook that held the key to understanding the community reception of the 1950 production.

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coffee to the post-its of encouragement, you are and you continue to be my eternal source of
support and love. I cannot wait to see what journey we will take together next.
INTRODUCTION

“Simple and clever.” For a production of William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* to work in two spaces within two weeks of each other in two venues never used by the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival (HASF) before, the design needed to be simple and clever. These were the two words repeated in conversations during site visits to the Jewish Community Center and Johnson County Community College—both community campuses located in Overland Park, Kansas, and the presenters of the upcoming production—on Tuesday, August 19, 2014. These words were brought up in conversations on the stages with technical directors and designers. They were reiterated in the much more private banter on the car rides to and from the spaces.

Sidonie Garrett, HASF’s Executive Artistic Director and the production’s director, stressed that these words—“simple and clever”—were important, that they needed to be hammered down in the upcoming concept meeting, in subsequent production meetings, and in the over-coffee-behind-doors meetings that would pop up before rehearsals began in March 2015. As of that mid-August day, the creative team had seven months to piece together a simple and clever concept that would travel from the HASF offices in Kansas City, Missouri, to those two theatre spaces in Overland Park, Kansas—both different spaces with different equipment and different supporting staff.

The 2015 production of *The Merchant of Venice* was a “three-pronged bi-state collaboration”¹ between three arts organizations housed in the greater Kansas City

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metropolitan community. The collaboration was, to the knowledge of those involved in the project, the first of its kind in the Kansas City arts community. The production was the result of a two-year-long conversation between Garrett and two leaders of the Kansas performing arts scene: Krista Blackwood, the Jewish Community Center’s Director of Cultural Arts, and Emily Behrmann, the General Manager of the Performing Arts Series at Johnson County Community College. The conversation initially began between Garrett and Blackwood with the idea to increase the HASF audience to include the entire Kansas City metropolitan community. Garrett and Blackwood then selected *The Merchant of Venice* for many reasons, one of which was to involve Kansas City’s Jewish community in the hopes of removing the “fear factor” regarding the play’s challenging issues. Behrmann later became part of the planning process as all organizations worked together to figure out the means necessary to fund this unusual project.

Bringing *The Merchant of Venice* to a Kansas City audience—one anticipated to be much different from the one that joined HASF every summer—required a series of firsts for HASF. Founded in 1993 by Tony-award winning producer Marilyn Strauss, HASF had spent the last twenty-three years producing free, professional Shakespeare in an outdoor setting every June and July. Never in its history had HASF produced *The Merchant of Venice* in Southmoreland Park, its outdoor home located in Kansas City, Missouri. The principle reason for *The Merchant of Venice*’s absence in HASF’s production history was Strauss’s hesitancy to produce the play for free in Southmoreland Park. In a conversation leading up to the production, Garrett recalled Strauss saying she would never produce *The Merchant of Venice*.

...
Veni in Southmoreland Park because of the play’s association with anti-Semitism. Strauss had been weary of the play her entire life, and was quoted as saying *The Merchant of Venice* is “one play we’ll never do.” Garrett, however, felt the time was right to bring this play to Kansas City, and believed this new relationship with JCC and JCCC provided the best opportunity to expose audiences to *The Merchant of Venice*.

Producing *The Merchant of Venice* meant making an addition to the HASF programming for the 2015 fiscal year. In the past, HASF has presented two shows in summer repertory, but that has been the only format for two plays in a HASF season. Adding *The Merchant of Venice* meant balancing funds, resources, and time between two productions scheduled within only two months of one another. The season addition also marked the first time HASF produced indoors, and the first time HASF produced for such a limited run. *The Merchant of Venice* ran only seven performances over a two-week period.

I was officially extended an offer to serve as the Production Dramaturg for *The Merchant of Venice* in the spring of 2014. I completed my dramaturgical work the same year I completed my graduate studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Garrett and I had been discussing my academic goals for the 2014-2015 school year, and it was decided my dramaturgical work would also serve as the foundation of this thesis project. Because the production would also require an unusual amount of audience outreach during HASF’s

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3 Chapter 1 will explore the origins of the term “anti-Semitism,” as well as its association with *The Merchant of Venice*.

4 Most HASF summer productions run for three weeks, with performances held Tuesdays through Sundays each week for a total of eighteen performances.
traditional off-season\(^5\), I played a role in shaping programming and educational materials for distribution. Serving as dramaturg also meant I documented the process from beginning to end, which included recording production meetings, traveling to performance spaces, and interviewing company members. This documentation was done in the hopes of preserving HASF’s production of *The Merchant of Venice* in writing, thus adding it to the existing production history of the play both in Kansas City and in the United States.

The dramaturgical opportunities created for *The Merchant of Venice* were possible because of the existing collaborative relationship between Garrett, Director of Education Matthew Rapport, and me. Having worked for two previous summer productions and contributing to administrative operations during HASF’s off-season, I had grown familiar with HASF’s working dynamic and with the small number of full-time staff members\(^6\). Their knowledge of my interest in production dramaturgy led to my serving as Associate Dramaturg for the summer 2014 production of *The Winter’s Tale*, another play that had not previously been produced in HASF’s history.

As I considered my dramaturgical efforts in the months that followed the initial creative team conversation, I looked for other ways to implement “simple and clever” in my own work on *The Merchant of Venice*. These three words became the guiding motto I used as I developed the program essay, the public lectures, and the list of resources collected for educational purposes in relation to HASF’s production of *The Merchant of Venice*.

\(^5\) August through April. Auditions, fundraising, production meetings, and year-round educational programming occur during this time, but a full performance is never in rehearsal.

\(^6\) At the time of writing, HASF employed only two full-time staff members and one part-time staff member year-round. Many of the other employees hired specifically to work on HASF productions have limited contracts that extend only for the rehearsal process and production run.
Simplicity should be key when approaching any of Shakespeare’s plays in conversation with a contemporary audience, but it has proven especially important for lesser-known or more complicated works. Simplicity therefore proved integral when addressing the play’s absence in the local theatrical production history.

Developing an outreach process and executing a professional production of *The Merchant of Venice* required a well-crafted balance between simple and clever. In a re-reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, done in preparation for writing the final draft of the program essay, I was intrigued by the idea of the scales of justice. The scales’ association with Shakespeare’s play on usury and bonds is a concept that is fitting but not entirely new. It appears most often in advertisements and visual design elements for both publications and theatrical productions of the text. The image of balanced scales graces the cover of The Oxford Shakespeare 2008 print edition of *The Merchant of Venice*. The Folger Shakespeare Library text has a sketch of the scales dating back to 1682 in its side-by-side line notes for act four, scene one. Throughout the years of the play’s production history, a large set of brass scales has often made an appearance in promotional photos—usually with one side of the scales tipped with the weight of money or flesh.7

HASF chose not to incorporate the scales in its initial marketing materials. Despite the image’s simplicity, the choice seemed—in comparison to existing posters and postcards—much more obvious than clever. Instead, the final design distributed by HASF

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7. A quick Google search for “The Merchant of Venice posters” yields multiple examples on the first page alone: The Oxford Shakespeare’s text is indeed one result, but images from theatres such as Hillbark Players, The Porters of Hellsgate, and The Gallery Players also depict the scales as a prominent visual. It is, unsurprisingly, less popular than Shylock’s knife, yet it is worth noting that both images are associated with the Jewish usurer and not the actual merchant of the play’s narrative.
focused on the contrast between Judaism and Christianity. For this contemporary production, the most important message Garrett wanted the production to convey was that, regardless of circumstance or motive, it is never appropriate, just, or moral to force someone to convert to a religion in which he or she does not believe. To best reflect this concept, Garret intended to use the overbearing presence of a Christian cross was an image in the play’s finale and it therefore made sense that the idea made an appearance in the poster.

The final promotional image—a photo of actor Mark Robbins seated in front of a lit menorah and set against a red draped background and prominent gold cross—was then given to the Jewish Community Center (JCC) and Johnson County Community College (JCCC) for use on their respective websites and in advertisements posted by their box offices. The thumbnail used for the production on JCC’s website was a set of balanced scales, and the image was also incorporated into the text of the play’s title enlarged above the initial photo. This addition was omitted from the banner posted on JCCC’s Performing Arts Series box office website.

My interest in the scales, however, was not so much in their promotional appeal as it was in their potential function as a dramaturgical metaphor. Again, to say that tipping scales best represent The Merchant of Venice is not necessarily original given their long association

8. A selection of marketing materials can be found in Appendix A of this thesis.

9. Robbins later left the production after accepting a role in Kansas City Repertory Theatre’s spring production of Angels in America. Because thousands of postcards had already been ordered, and letters featuring this photo had already been mailed to subscribers and potential donors, it was decided the photo would remain on promotional materials.

10. Since JCC and JCCC were co-presenters of the production, the two organizations were in charge of handling all box office sales and marketing materials distributed at the two theatres. Most of these choices were made to fit into their own season offerings, and therefore were often independent of HASF decisions.
with Shakespeare’s play. Rather than the scales’ use as a symbol of the play thematically, the image represented the balanced approach necessary when staging the production. Its use is not limited to current or future productions, as it can also serve as a way of analyzing past concepts and subsequent production choices made at theatres and festivals across the country.

In general, producing a “balanced” production of the play does not necessarily mean, for example, treating Shylock as a warm-hearted protagonist and Antonio as the cold-blooded villain. To do so would require a dramatic change in plot, which for many would mean not presenting the play as it was believed to be written. Balance may be achieved, however, in the way both of these characters are interpreted. Should the scales tip too much in Antonio’s direction, the production risks being a stark work of anti-Semitism rather than a play about anti-Semitism. Should the scales favor Shylock, the production may then sacrifice its comedy and become instead an alienating tragedy. As the play incorporates elements of both comedy and tragedy and follows the stories of multiple characters, favoring one character’s journey or depicting one character as more worthy of sympathy than the other has the potential to rob the production of its humor and its historical relevance.

To stay conscious of the “and” that unites the different plots was an important task of my work as production dramaturg. Serving as dramaturg meant ensuring the scales remained balanced between public opinion and scholarship, between the production team and the audience, and between textual evidence and artistic intent. Striking a balance for this particular production of The Merchant of Venice required making choices that were simple enough to explain and clever enough to work. I was involved in all production meetings and saw how certain production choices reflected this balance, but I was largely put in charge of
tasks independent from the production team. Dramaturgical responsibilities assigned to me
specifically included the program essay, the dramaturgy packet, a presentation on the play at
area libraries, input on the study guide, and contribution to the talkbacks following each night
of the production.

This thesis was written in the hopes of exploring *The Merchant of Venice*’s necessary
place in twenty-first century American theatre. I hope, too, that this thesis can contribute to
the conversation concerning dramaturgy’s necessity in this and every play’s production
process.

My passion for dramaturgy led me to this project. My interest in dramaturgy began
during my undergraduate career at the University of Missouri. It was during this time that I
learned how to define and apply dramaturgy within the production process for new plays and
classics. Working as dramaturg for *The Merchant of Venice* challenged me to refine my
definition in a way that can be easily explained to those not familiar with the production
process. All dramaturgs have different definitions for dramaturgy as a production role. Aside
from first-day preparations, which I explore in chapter three, some common dramaturgical
responsibilities include additional research, feedback as requested from the director, and
presentations during the rehearsal process on certain topics. With advancements in
technology and the growing presence of social media, dramaturgs may also keep a rehearsal
or production blog. As organizational models in theatres shift, dramaturgs have recently
stepped into roles as literary managers, artistic directors, and educational associates. In my
experience, dramaturgy has evolved into a interdisciplinary profession, demanding skills that
extend far beyond research and writing. It was my hope with this project to also explore the
interdisciplinary nature of dramaturgy as I documented my process with The Merchant of Venice.

As I wrote about The Merchant of Venice, I was reminded often of the advice I had received from other dramaturgs and professionals. In the spring of 2013, I attended the National Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) held in Washington D.C. As a dramaturgy fellow, I had the opportunity to meet with professional dramaturgs and literary managers who shared their experiences and industry advice with us over the course of five days. One of our session guests was Jocelyn Clark11, who told us that if we are in the room as a dramaturg, we need to be useful. If we are not useful, we are “dead” dramaturgs.12

Too often dramaturgs go “unused” in the rehearsal process once they have fulfilled their checklist of obligations. This production and subsequent reflection challenged me to make dramaturgy useful in the rehearsal room, during production meetings, through audience outreach, and with historical documentation. This thesis will explore my attempt as The Merchant of Venice dramaturg to make myself useful to the audience and the production through the writing of this historical narrative.

11. At the time of writing, Clark works as a freelance dramaturg and writer. He serves as the Theatre Adviser to the Arts Council of Ireland and is the dramaturg for the American Voices New Play Institute at D.C.’s Arena Stage. Most notably, Clark has written five plays for Anne Bogart and SITI company. Clark’s complete bio can be accessed at http://www.theatermitu.org/company/jocelyn-clarke/.

12. Author’s personal journal.
A note on abbreviations

I used abbreviations for the three organizations throughout this thesis to write more economically. While I have tried to reintroduce the abbreviations at the beginning of every chapter, I have provided a key here for reference:

HASF: Heart of America Shakespeare Festival
JCC: Jewish Community Center
JCCC: Johnson County Community College
CHAPTER 1
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

This chapter serves as a re-introduction to *The Merchant of Venice* and includes a brief plot overview and discussion of its major themes. Most of this chapter, however, is devoted to analyzing the use of *The Merchant of Venice* as propaganda in World War II to better understand the current 21st-century attitudes about the play. Many scholars share my belief that World War II was the period during which *The Merchant of Venice* became synonymous with anti-Semitism. I use this chapter to further explore the roots of audience perception of the play as such. I then explore how this association has affected the number of productions of the play in the 21st century, which will later help to address the lack of productions in the Kansas City area since the end of the nineteenth century.

**Brief Overview**

Evidence of *The Merchant of Venice* text first appeared in historical record in 1598 when it was entered in the Stationers’ Register. It was later published in quarto form in 1600, and was then included in the First Folio’s 1623 publication. Scholars generally accept that the author by the name of William Shakespeare wrote the play around 1597, though—as is the case with all of his plays—that date has been a point of contention in much of the scholarship written about the play and its playwright. For the purpose of this thesis, I accepted scholastic consensus and have used 1597 as the play’s date in my own writings and public lectures.
Many of Shakespeare’s five-act plays rely on complexity in dramatic action. *The Merchant of Venice* is no exception, as it weaves together two plots—one concerned with the law and the other with marriage—with a cast of over twenty characters spread out in two different Italian cities. Audiences split their time between the Rialto in Venice and Portia’s estate in Belmont. Half of the play’s action focuses on the wooing of Portia, “a lady richly left” (I.1, 161), by Bassanio, a broke bachelor who seeks his Christian friend Antonio’s financial help in his quest for wealth and love. The second half identifies the source of Bassanio’s loan and thus the source of much of the play’s conflict. Antonio enters into the “pound of flesh” contract with the Jewish usurer Shylock to secure funds for Bassanio’s travels. The consequences of this bond’s terms—loss of wealth, loss of daughter, loss of property, and loss of religion—are what make up the play’s tragic climax when Shylock and Antonio meet in the Venetian court. Shakespeare uses this trial scene to set up the necessity of the romantic resolution of act five to help drive the idea that *The Merchant of Venice* is, at its core, a comedy.

*The Merchant of Venice* relies on both the casket plot and the pound-of-flesh plot to advance its action, yet it is unclear at times how the two plots work together to form the play’s overall structure. The contrast of fate and justice, and of love and revenge, create a divide between characters and their religions from the top of the play. With Shylock’s downfall in the trial scene, Shakespeare paints one religion as victorious, reflecting the existing mentality of Elizabethan England. There was not a choice between Christianity or Judaism in the 1600s—there was just Christianity.

Shylock’s forced conversion at the end of the fourth act is often the plot point remembered most by contemporary audiences, but it is not the only one that occurs in *The
*Merchant of Venice.* The play is all about conversions—from Judaism to Christianity, yes, but also from daughter to wife, from poverty to wealth, and from intolerance to mercy. While it is a theme I find most fascinating about the play, an in-depth discussion of these conversions is a topic for another paper. Here, I simply want to acknowledge the complexity of change and role reversal in the text, as it became the focus of many conversations during rehearsals and at the audience talkbacks for the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival’s production. Analysis of these conversations will be addressed in chapter five of this thesis.

A few misnomers about the world of the play have clouded contemporary understanding of *The Merchant of Venice* in production. The merchant in *The Merchant of Venice* is Antonio, not Shylock. The misconception that Shylock is the title character is a common mistake made by audiences partly because of the amount of press, writing, and criticism Shylock receives in performance and in academia. Shylock is not a merchant but a usurer, one who issues loans with interest. Because usury was once considered a sin, Christians could not lend money and collect debt to make a living in Shakespeare’s time. Usury instead became the profession of the Jews, and their attempt to regain the debts owed to them led to an increase in Christian resentment and intolerance. This tension, and its connection to both the Jews’ expulsion from England in 1290 and later to the Holocaust of World War II, forms the root for contemporary interpretation of the play as anti-Semitic.

**The Merchant of Venice and WWII**

Understanding 21st-century responses to *The Merchant of Venice* first requires understanding the play’s place in the 20th century.
The use of theatre to further the Nazi political agenda has been well-documented since the war ended in 1945, especially with regard to the use of Shakespeare’s texts to appeal to the masses. Early on in the war, the Minister of Propaganda stated and the Reich Dramaturg reinforced the notion that Shakespeare was one of very few playwrights whose works were allowed in the theatre. This belief stemmed partially from the German belief that Shakespeare was a Nordic playwright, whose real literary home was Germany. At one point in time, more productions of his works were done in Germany than anywhere else—including England.¹ As the war advanced, the Nazis claimed that Shakespeare’s works were clearly “in line with Nazi racial ideology,” especially since some of his characters seemingly exemplified the need for a superior race.²

Some scholars assert that Shakespeare lost his well-established relevancy as the war progressed. Many cite an ever-decreasing number of performances in occupied areas. Though the numbers were shrinking, the reason was not because the Germans had found an alternative to the bard. Neither was it because the works themselves had grown unpopular. Rather, the number of Shakespearean plays approved by the Nazi regime for performance and educational purposes shrank, which inevitably led to fewer Shakespearean titles playing at the theaters.³ Popular comedies like Twelfth Night, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and The Taming of the Shrew received the most productions during the regime. Though not the most


popular of the comedies, *The Merchant of Venice* still made the cut for production on German-speaking stages. Although it was a surprisingly controversial text during the war, productions of *The Merchant of Venice* between 1939 and 1945 provide the strongest evidence for Shakespeare—and theatre in general—as an effective propaganda weapon in transmitting Nazi ideology to the masses.

The production repeatedly cited as the most “notorious” and “influential” example of this type of Nazi theatre propaganda is the 1943 production of *The Merchant of Venice* at the Burgtheater in Vienna. It is important to note that those involved in the production deliberately manipulated aspects of it to fit within the restrictions of Nazi propaganda and to reflect the beliefs of the regime. *The Merchant of Venice* staged in this way was not done to understand Shakespeare as he wrote it. Instead, the performance choices made under the influence of the Nazi regime can aid us in better understanding a society that manipulated the play and the characters in it in order to further its own political and cultural agenda.

One of the first steps in reshaping Shakespeare’s plays to achieve the propaganda goal of “disseminating Hitler’s racial policies” was to reevaluate the text. To be used as propaganda, the play itself needed to be edited for content that reflected certain beliefs. Small changes and omissions in Shakespeare’s texts were commonplace during the Nazi regime, and *The Merchant of Venice* text was not exempt from these “improvements”. Even though the play was given numerous productions between 1933 and 1945, *The Merchant of Venice*


5. Heinrich 235.
text was problematic for members of the Nazi party. Shylock’s impassioned “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech in III.1, for example, was seen as a means of garnering unnecessary empathy for the Jew and thus for the Jewish community.

The plot strand that needed the most revision, however, was that of Shylock’s daughter Jessica and her relationship with Lorenzo. As Jessica is a Jew and Lorenzo is a Christian, the relationship between the two characters blatantly violated the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, which prohibited inter-racial marriages. Hermann Kroepelin, a German writer and translator, suggested to the Propaganda Ministry that changes to the relationship should be made because, as he said, “If the Third Reich penalizes the mixing of Aryan and Jewish blood, the stage cannot allow these things to happen”6. After 1935, Jessica’s character tended to be altered in one of two ways: she either became an adopted child, a result of her mother committing adultery with a non-Jew, and thus deserving of Lorenzo; or, she remained Jewish and thus celibate, her relationship with Lorenzo not ending with marriage in the play.7 The 1943 Vienna Burgtheater production used a translation of the text by August Wilhelm Schlegel and was credited for having remained fairly truthful to the original text—outside of a few key omissions made to imply that Jessica was not Shylock’s daughter.8 Such a change was necessary to keep pace with changing policies of the times.

6. Ibid.

7. Strobl 20.

Such an alteration seems dramaturgically improper by contemporary standards, but it could arguably be equated with the numerous cuts imposed on modern productions of Shakespeare’s texts to better resonate with audiences today. The Heart of America Shakespeare Festival (HASF) in preparation for the March 2015 production cut over four hundred of the play’s 2,578 lines, which eliminated many of the references to different races in the text. While it is understood that the Prince of Morocco is of a darker complexion, HASF chose to cut Portia’s line at the end of II.7, following Morocco’s incorrect choice of casket: “Let all of his complexion choose me so.” Doing so prevented an unnecessary commentary on race relations, especially in consideration of growing racial tension in the United States. The difference between HASF’s choice and the ones made by the Nazi regime was that HASF looked to avoid unrest in audiences, rather than to further a mandated hatred promulgated by Nazi-party authorized productions.

Scholar James Shapiro claims that omitting Jessica and Lorenzo’s marriage was what threatened the Jewish culture when the play was staged during the Nazi regime. While I agree with Shapiro’s claim that this type of censorship is more dangerous than staging the play as it was originally written, I do not necessarily believe that the “success” of the play in the eyes of the Nazis hinged entirely on the omission of this intermarriage. The choice to change how Jessica is portrayed, while the result of an anti-Semitic policy, is not what I believe has primarily led critics and scholars to call the Nazi-regime productions of The Merchant of Venice—especially the 1943 production—anti-Semitic. That justification has principally come about because of the people involved in the play’s journey to the stage. For

the Bergtheater’s production, those with artistic power included Baldur von Schirach, Lothar Müthel, and most importantly, Werner Krauss, who portrayed Shylock. Looking at the power of their influence on the production’s reception is key not only to understanding the Bergtheater’s production, but also to understanding the persuasive power of intent in all productions of *The Merchant of Venice* that come after 1943.

All three persons—Schirach, Müthel, and Krauss—had ties to the Nazi party at the time of the production, and all three were aware of anti-Semitism’s influence in their lives. Schirach, the Gauleiter of Vienna at the time of production, was the person who ordered that *The Merchant of Venice* be staged at the Burgtheater in May 1943. Schirach had previously served as head of the Hitler Youth and was later tried for crimes against humanity after the war. Prior to Schirach’s ordering of the performance, he had been instrumental in extraditing “tens and tens of thousands of Jews” from Vienna. Schirach was unapologetic about his decision to deport and ultimately send to their deaths so many Jews. Schirach asserted that his doing so made “a positive contribution to European culture”.

The mere act of demanding a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* in light of this mass deportation was, John Gross believes, Schirach’s way of “decreeing a celebration” of the Jews’ exodus from Vienna.

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13. Ibid.
From a dramaturgical standpoint, the resulting performance was—in a horrifying way—successful in reflecting Vienna’s sociopolitical landscape. Müthel’s production choices eerily reflected what many living in Vienna at the time had experienced under the governance of Schirach. One scholar goes so far as to assert that the connection between genocide and the production is undeniable, because “not even the most indifferent member in the audience could be unaware of the disappearance of Vienna’s 200,000 Jewish inhabitants.”14 To produce a play that isolated the central Jewish character and ultimately expels him from his own religion mirrored the removal of the Jewish presence in not just Vienna, but in all of Europe.

Though not involved directly in Schirach’s policies and the atrocities of the Final Solution, director Lothar Müthel was favored among those in leadership responsible for “expulsion, deportation, and genocide” of the Jews.15 Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, appointed Müthel as the director of the Burgtheater in 1939, and Müthel would remain director until the end of the war. Müthel was determined to present The Merchant of Venice as a work of anti-Semitism from the beginning.16 In contrast to previous Nazi productions of the play, Müthel’s desire was to stage the play as he believed Shakespeare originally intended. This meant presenting Shylock not as a tragic character with human flaws, but as “a dangerous and cheating buffoon…with evil intentions.”17 His reasoning came


15. Ibid.


17. Ackermann 52.
from believing that the Jews—not Shakespeare—had influenced Shylock’s sympathetic portrayal, resulting in a character that demanded an unearned apology.

At this moment in the German-speaking theatre, there was no better choice for the role of Shylock than veteran actor Werner Krauss. The choice of Krauss as Shylock made sense given his history of performance during the Nazi regime. He was already a face associated with Nazi propaganda and with villainous characterization of the Jews after his playing thirteen Jewish caricatures in the 1940 Nazi anti-Semitic film, *Jew Süss*. The film was later linked to an increase in violence against the Jews after it was repeatedly shown in occupied territories. Krauss’s exposure in the film made him “an effective weapon for [the Nazis’] drive to manipulate the populace” because the audience had learned to associate him with the menacing nature of the Jews. Even three years later, seeing his face would trigger feelings of antipathy, disgust, and hatred all over again. Krauss’s general approach to acting made portraying a demonic character seem natural. It was the ease with which he presented this demonic nature that made him attractive to audiences, and thus turned him into “a tool to help [the Nazis] accomplish their goals,” one of which was winning over the masses.

18. Gross 322.


20. Elwood 93.

Under the influence of Müthel and Schirach, the Burgtheater production’s strong ties to Nazi propaganda manifested themselves in the physical choices Krauss made in his approach to Shylock. Krauss’s performance became the cornerstone of this production because of his unique interpretation of the Jew. Though seemingly paradoxical, his portrayal broke away from what was considered the “stereotypical” way of performing Shylock while harkening back to an earlier tradition of representation. His choice centered upon the use of a bright red wig, a costume piece which had been previously associated with Jews in the theatre up until Edmund Kean’s performance of Shylock in 1814. Further evidence for this divisive choice came from a reviewer who commented that Krauss’s performance was “a complete break with the representation of Shylock practiced for 50 years.” Already, Krauss had crafted a character that stood not just outside the world of this production, but was isolated completely from the most recent portrayals.

Perhaps the best evidence for the production as a successful tool for exploiting Nazi ideology came from the reviews themselves. Numerous reviews describe Krauss’s appearance as Shylock in ways that evoke the caricatures featured in Der Strümer. This National Socialist newspaper was known for its vicious editorial cartoons, many of which “depicted Jews as either ‘children of the devil,’ or as rat-like vermin whose ‘claws’ can stretch out and infect the entire globe.” Considering the above depiction and the


23. Bonnell 162.

24. Weyr 238.

25. Dempsey 85.
accompanying visual portrayal of the Jew, it was almost impossible to separate the caricature from the character described in the following review from the Nazi Party’s *Volkischer Beobachter*:

Words are inadequate to describe the linguistic and mimic variety of Werner Krauss’s Shylock…Every fibre of his body seems impregnated with Jewish blood; he mumbles, slavers, gurgles, grunts and squawks with alarming authenticity, scurries back and forth like a rat, though he does so the hard way—knock-kneed; one literally smells his bad breath, feels the itching under his caftan and senses the nausea that overcomes him at the end of the court scene. Everything demonic is submerged in the impotent rage of the little ghetto usurer; in the wobbling of his body, in the frantic blinking of his eyelids and the arching of his arms… An infernal puppet show.  

Krauss created a Shylock so devoid of humanity to insure that no audience member would sympathize with the character portrayed. In fact, very few audience members who saw the production considered Krauss’s Shylock to be human at all. One account of the production eliminated the use of human pronouns altogether, calling Shylock an “it” with “unsteady, cunning little eyes” which used “claw-like gestures,” characterizations that together evoked a figure that expressed both “inner and outer uncleanness.” Doing so put Krauss’s portrayal in line with one of the primary goals of the National Socialist agenda: to dehumanize Jews. Dehumanization of the Jews had previously been documented in newspapers, films, and posters of the day, but this production of *The Merchant of Venice* emphasized the success of the event’s execution and thus of its furthering of the ideals embodied by all forms of Nazi propaganda.


27. Gross 322.
What was most harrowing, and thus what I believe to be the best critical support in proving Shylock’s fundamental role in audience reception of the play, is a review by critic Siegfried Melchinger. Melchinger drew the clearest connection between the performance and the existence of concentration camps: “Behind the Jew there appears the wicked man of the fairy tale, the never earthly cannibal, the bogeyman, who at the end, like the witch, has to be pushed into the oven.”

Melchinger robbed Shylock of his earthly humanity, placing him in the realm composed of fairy tales and extraterrestrials rather than grounding him in reality. Most alarming about Melchinger’s review, however, was the disturbing picture he painted for his readers: the only way to handle such a base, dirty character—and therefore all those like it—was to dispose of it.

There was no record I could find of an increased violence toward the Jews after attendance at this particular performance as there had been with the airing of Jew Süss, but then again there were few Jews left in Vienna at the time who could be the targets of audience aggression. The aftermath of Schirach’s mass deportation—and the reality of widespread genocide that had now taken place over the course of the war—was present in this performance on stage. The production “ratified the pastness of the Jewish presence in Austria and Germany,” making audience members feel as if the Jew was a species that had merely gone extinct.

Again, we must remind ourselves of the principal function of critics during this time. It was their jobs as critics to ensure that audiences understood productions in a very specific


The impact of Müthel’s production extends past the handful of reviews referenced—or at least many critics imply there were far-reaching implications on the audience members who saw the production and then read the reviews. Many, I can merely assume when considering the efforts the Nazis employed to fill theatres, at least saw the play. The primary indication of its mass appeal comes from the somewhat lengthy run the play enjoyed once it opened. The production ran 25 nights and received a heavy amount of press coverage per performance.

The effect of the 1943 production solidifies the prominent role Shylock’s portrayal plays in manipulating audience understanding and interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*. While it is ignorant to not acknowledge the anti-Semitism seemingly inherent in Shakespeare’s original text, the Burgtheater’s production reveals that much of the audience’s interpretation of the play as such comes from specific production choices made in order to align the theatre with anti-Semitic ideas. Reviews and scholarship written on this particular production at the Burgtheater all focus predominantly on Werner Krauss and his Shylock. Very little else about the production’s 25-night run is mentioned when discussing the play as a work of theatre or as a platform for anti-Semitism.

Though difficult to digest, research on the use of Shakespeare during World War II at the very least has revealed the care theatre practitioners must take in bringing Shylock’s narrative into conversation with modern-day audiences. The key in separating contemporary productions from the manipulative propaganda of the Nazi regime is in the humanization of Shylock and thus of the Jewish community. To present him as a bumbling, idiotic comedic

30. Heinrich 236.

31. Bonnell 162.
pantomime may seem like the answer to presenting the play as a “comedy,” but it is detrimental to the social and political progress made since 1945. Instead, we must recognize that the Jew hath eyes, using the production as a way to see the world through them. The remainder of this chapter explores productions of and conversations about *The Merchant of Venice* in the wake of World War II.

**Framing post-WWII Productions**

Understanding the use of *The Merchant of Venice* as anti-Semitic propaganda helped address the longer gaps in its United State’s production history in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries following the end of World War II. The tendency is to assume that because *The Merchant of Venice* was staged during World War II by the Nazi party, it is therefore unfit for modern-day productions given its now-engrained association with one of the worst periods in the world’s history. There is a fear among artistic directors, producers, and artistic staff that staging Shakespeare’s problem play will undoubtedly cause more problems in their given community than if they chose to simply refrain from producing the play altogether. But doing so ignores a significant play in theatrical history. Not producing *The Merchant of Venice* out of fear is an act of censorship that stifles conversation. Instead, as past productions have proven, staging *The Merchant of Venice* has the potential to ignite a relevant, timeless discussion of the play’s theme and to address issues many communities still face in a postwar era.

*The Merchant of Venice*’s production life during World War II certainly bolstered public attitude that the play was a vehicle for anti-Semitic behavior. Noted literary critic and
professor Harold Bloom refuses to see the play as anything but an anti-Semitic work.\textsuperscript{32} The first comments made in articles or reviews of \textit{The Merchant of Venice} tend to respond to a global wariness about the play’s subject matter. At various moments in the twentieth century, \textit{The Merchant of Venice} has been removed from school curricula because of its controversial nature. Even in 2015, HASF was aware of only one school in the Kansas City community where the play was still taught as part of a liberal arts curriculum: The Barstow School, a co-educational private school in Kansas City, Missouri. It is the only school that includes this play as a permanent part of its course curricula. Though the schools that attended the HASF matinee read the play in preparation for the production, it is my understanding that the play does not have a permanent place in these schools’ courses.

The idea that \textit{The Merchant of Venice} is an unreadable and thus unstageable work of anti-Semitism did not originate with Shakespeare or the people of Elizabethan England. The use of the word “Semitism” to describe the Jewish culture was a nineteenth-century invention. The use of “anti-Semitism” to express those who are prejudiced against the Jewish culture, and for some the idea of a Jewish race, did not have a traceable public record until the late 1800s. It is generally agreed upon that Wilhem Marr\textsuperscript{33} is the historical patriarch of “anti-Semitism,” first using the term in his 1879 writings, \textit{The Victory of Judaism over


\textsuperscript{33} Marr also founded the “Anti-Semitic League” in September 1879, a league formed out of Marr’s fear of the Jews. Moshe Zimmerman found Marr’s memoirs and correspondence and explores the origin of this term in his biography, \textit{Wilhelm Marr: The Patriarch of Antisemitism} (1986).
Germanism. The Oxford English Dictionary has the first use of “anti-Semitism” in a context similar to how it is used today recorded in 1935—only a few years before the start of World War II. Americans and Europeans have only had this term in our vocabulary for less than 100 years, yet it is used often when discussing *The Merchant of Venice*—a work that predates the term by over 300 years.

While the term “anti-Semitic” is a more recent addition to the English language, the vitriolic sentiment behind the phrase existed long before Shakespeare. Prejudice and hatred of Jews predates this terminology, and a full exploration of that historical conflict is the subject of many articles and books outside of this project. For the purposes of this thesis, I am interested in the association with the phrase “anti-Semitic” to conversation and scholarship that surrounds *The Merchant of Venice* in the twenty-first century.

As a dramaturg, I wanted to better understand where this notion of *The Merchant of Venice* as anti-Semitic originated so that I could better relate to our audiences. Certain donors and patrons loyal to HASF summer productions did not support or attend the production. HASF staff had to believe this was because of a deep-rooted belief—one that expanded beyond our audience here in Kansas City—in the play as problematic in a post-WWII society.

“Isn’t that play anti-Semitic?” seemed to be the standard response when the upcoming production of *The Merchant of Venice* was brought up in conversation before the production even opened. What I found in my personal conversations with company members and patrons seemed indicative of the perceptions held by production teams and communities.

nationwide. While many of them knew *The Merchant of Venice* had been called an anti-Semitic work and therefore called it one themselves, very few of them had actually read or seen a staged version of the play to see if this was proven true in the text.

I have to admit that the idea of staging *The Merchant of Venice* at the Jewish Community jarred me just as much as it did local community members, but I wanted to figure out if this was only because I had been taught to think that such a choice was inappropriate. What I realized was that my exposure to the play, and thus to the conversations surrounding it, had been limited until I began work on this production. If it had not been for a Shakespeare course I took my senior year of college, I realized I too would not have read or seen the play. I attended both a Catholic grade school and high school and learned only *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* in English classes and *Much Ado About Nothing* for the school production my senior year, in which I played Don John the Bastard.

Having grown up in the Kansas City area, I never had the opportunity to see *The Merchant of Venice* staged. I had never been to Southmoreland Park until I worked for HASF as an intern. No other theatre company in town had chosen *The Merchant of Venice* as part of their seasons. Kansas City Repertory Theatre has produced many of Shakespeare’s tragedies and comedies in its fifty-year history but has never staged *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare Festival St. Louis is the only other Shakespeare festival in the state of Missouri. In its fifteen-year history, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis has not yet produced *The Merchant of Venice*. Nebraska Shakespeare Festival, located on the campus of University of Nebraska-Omaha, presented *The Merchant of Venice* in 1993 in rotating repertory with *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Nebraska Shakespeare Festival was founded 1983, but has only produced *The Merchant of Venice* once in its thirty-two history. While it is the nearest Shakespeare festival
to Kansas City, I know very few from the area who are aware of the festival’s seasons and therefore who have been exposed to their productions.

I learned that my experience is typical of many who came to see The Merchant of Venice at both the Jewish Community Center (JCC) and Johnson County Community College (JCCC). Very few had been exposed to the play in high school or college; the few who had were often more than thirty or forty years removed from their high school careers. Those who had read the play independent of schooling had either done so repeatedly or did so in preparation for the performance. For the vast majority of the HASF audience, the 2015 staging was the first time they were seeing a production of The Merchant of Venice. For Kansas City natives, I quickly learned this was because of the lack of professional productions offered in the community over the last sixty-five years.
CHAPTER 2
KANSAS CITY PRODUCTION HISTORY

Kansas City audiences have not always been deprived of The Merchant of Venice in production. Just before the turn of the century, The Merchant of Venice enjoyed a healthy performance life in the downtown Kansas City theatre circuit. Between the years of 1890 and 1899 alone, there were thirteen Kansas City-area touring productions of the play that played there¹. The twentieth century’s production history even began with a touring production of The Merchant of Venice in 1900—the play was the opening performance of Sir Henry Irving and Ellen Terry’s three-day Kansas City engagement². After 1900, however, evidence of The Merchant of Venice on Kansas City theatre marquees is not seen until its brief reappearance in 1950.

Even when The Merchant of Venice returned to Kansas City, its appearances were limited in scope and brief in engagement. This chapter addresses the two Kansas City productions that make up the play’s production history between 1950 and 2015. At the time of writing, these were the only two large-scale productions known to have taken place in the Kansas City area prior to HASF’s run in 2015. Both productions took place on the University of Missouri-Kansas City campus, but were performed in two different theatre spaces. Because of the nature of the 1950 production, I assert in this chapter that HASF’s production


is the first entirely professional production of *The Merchant of Venice* seen in Kansas City since 1900.

**The University Playhouse 1950 Production**

The University of Kansas City (UKC) May 1950 production of *The Merchant of Venice* is the last professional-level production on record in Kansas City theatre history since 1900. The production ran for only six performances—May 1 through May 6—at the University Playhouse, a war surplus building that had been redesigned just one year earlier to accommodate 500 patrons for theatre performances. *The Merchant of Venice* was one of four major productions included in the University Playhouse’s second season on campus³. That production would not have been possible without the artistic vision and financial aid of Blevins Davis⁴.

A native of Independence, Missouri, Davis brought his experience as a producer and director to his home state multiple times between 1935 and 1950. After graduating from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1925, Davis returned to the Independence area to teach English at a local high school. While teaching, Davis’s interest in producing pageants and local theatrical productions grew—so much so, that Davis directed the first-ever play produced at the University of Kansas City in the 1930s⁵. Davis returned fourteen years later

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⁴. The State Historical Society located at the University of Missouri-Kansas City is home to the Blevins Davis collection. For more information on Davis and his theatrical work, browse their archival record at [http://shs.umsystem.edu/kansascity/manuscripts/k0031.pdf](http://shs.umsystem.edu/kansascity/manuscripts/k0031.pdf).

to guest direct the University Playhouse’s inaugural production of *Elizabeth the Queen*,

starring renowned Broadway veteran Jane Cowl.

Between his UKC appearances, Davis made a life-long career of producing pageants, writing radio plays, and touring stage productions both in the United States and abroad. Clarence Decker, UKC President from 1938-1953\(^6\), remembered Davis for “his firm belief that the fine arts speak an international language—that the ballet, theatre, music and the plastic arts should play a major role in our country’s foreign cultural relations.”\(^7\) Davis’s career path spoke to the significance he placed on sharing this international language of the arts. Before returning to the university in 1950, Davis ran his “Great Play Series,” a radio series focused on “tracking the development of drama from the Greeks to the present period”\(^8\) for a five-year period at National Broadcasting Company (NBC). He was an international correspondent for the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1937. With him as a co-producer, the acclaimed musical *Porgy and Bess* enjoyed international success in the 1950s. In 1949, Davis financially backed the first-ever American production of *Hamlet* at Elsinore Castle in Denmark. Its inclusion in the Danish Shakespeare

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Festival is said to have been “the first time the American theater has been recognized by the American Government as an instrument of cultural relations.”

It was on the *Hamlet* tour that Davis first met the man who would later play his Shylock in 1950. Clarence Derwent was no stranger to Shakespeare’s works, having worked with Sir Frank Benson’s Shakespearean Company and, over the course of his career, acting in all but three of Shakespeare’s plays. For the Danish audience, Derwent played Polonius opposite Robert Breen’s Hamlet and Walater Abel’s Claudius. Derwent enjoyed his experience in Denmark so much that he welcomed another opportunity to work with Davis in the United States. He would return to America after his engagement in Denmark regardless, as he was serving as the president of Actors’ Equity Association and was on the board of directors for the American National Theater and Academy (ANTA).

Derwent and Davis met over lunch at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City shortly after the *Hamlet* tour ended. For as much work as he did internationally, Davis remained committed to Missouri. During this meeting, Davis mentioned to Derwent that “he wanted each year to do something for the benefit of his home state,” which is primarily why his work received so much attention in UKC’s theatre history. He intended for his guest productions at the University Playhouse in both 1948 and 1950 to be a way of giving back to the local community. As Davis was planning his return to the University in 1950, he asked Derwent to come along with him. Featuring Derwent in a production would be Davis’s

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opportunity to reconnect Kansas City audiences to the professional theatre community, this time with a celebrated international actor and director.

Davis may have been financially responsible for The Merchant of Venice, but it was Derwent who made the decision to bring this play to UKC. Derwent had seen Sir Henry Irving play Shylock many times, noting that “the impression his Shylock had made on me as a tragic martyr and a symbol of an oppressed race was still fresh in my memory” at the time The Merchant of Venice was brought to Kansas City. Hoping to follow in Irving’s footsteps, Derwent wanted to bring his sympathetic portrayal of this controversial character to the university. Davis accepted Derwent’s challenge and, with Derwent confirmed in the role of Shylock, began making arrangements to bring a high-quality production of The Merchant of Venice to Kansas City.

With his experience producing, Davis made quick work of finding a version of Shakespeare’s play that would speak to his Kansas City audience while still representing the University Playhouse. The University Playhouse was a “University-Community venture,” with the work produced meant to “foster the great tradition of the theatre in the region” while using staff that represented both professional and non-professional talent in Kansas City theatre. The Merchant of Venice featured actors from Broadway and Hollywood alongside those from Independence, Missouri, and the university campus. Write-ups on Independence

11. Derwent 261.
12. Ibid.
talent helped generate attendance—many from the Independence area were in the crowd for the play’s “auspicious” opening night.

Davis set out to make a production that was later remembered as “spectacular and unforgettable,”15 one with a “calculated effect of opulence.”16 His production emphasized the value of “spectacle” by presenting *The Merchant of Venice* “as a Venetian fantasy, invoking a carnival, night-in-Venice atmosphere with ballet, music and lighting effects.”17 As the President of Ballet Theatre, Davis wanted to incorporate ballet into the play’s action to “portray the carefree minds of residents of Venice when they were in a festival mood.”18 The intent was effective, as one reviewer noted the ballet “contribute[d] much to a Venetian carnival scene.”19

What preview articles highlighted and what most spectators remembered were the elaborate details that transformed the University Playhouse into Venice. Much of the production’s opulence came from the design choices, including the “sumptuous and elaborate costumes.” Seventy new costumes were constructed solely for the production, using “1,000 yards of rich-hued fabrics, laces, crisp muslin and tarlatan.”20 Henry Scott, Chairman of UKC’s Department of Art, designed a set that “evoked a painter’s Venice.” The elements

15. Decker 166.
19. Ibid.
worked together to transport audiences to another place and another time—one that may have reminded audiences of the sixteenth century but was, one theatre critic mentioned, completely outside reality:

The tone throughout was chiefly one of fantasy and other-worldliness. The Venice in which Portia and Bassanio and Shylock had their being was a never-never world, one that had no existence in reality, a kind of luminous dream. There is much to be said for this atmosphere in which to set the story itself; it has elements of the märchen and the romance and they strike no discordant note when they are presented as part of a land of complete unreality.  

Presenting a play of this quality was not cheap. Financing the production cost Davis $20,000\(^2\), the equivalent of $199,000 today, which he paid out of his own pocket. He then turned the proceeds over to the university so that they could continue the great tradition of theatre in Kansas City.

Davis’s intentions with his *The Merchant of Venice* were not a secret. His production’s “thesis” and the choices he made because of it were spelled out for audience members right in their *The Merchant of Venice* programs:

In preparing the script for the production, Blevins Davis, guest director, has arranged the play into three acts instead of five, added a Prologue, eliminated the Prince of Arragon, dove-tailed the Prince of Morocco’s scenes, included a ballet at the opening of the second act to emphasize the Venetian carnival, and placed the accent of the drama on the injustice done to Shylock, maintaining the thesis ‘that the corruption of the Renaissance courts reached new and amazing heights when the Duke and the legal staff make a concerted effort to sidestep the law and gang up against Shylock.\(^3\)


22. Smith 293.

Although the program was full of information about the concept, Davis and Derwent both were forthcoming with their intentions prior to the show’s opening. Rather than keeping the five-act structure, Davis reduced the play down to three acts “to compress the action within the time to which most audiences are willing to remain in their seats.”24 Davis hoped to do more than keep audience members in their seats with this change. He hoped to concentrate the plot on the story he found most important: the injustice done to Shylock.25

Shylock, and Derwent’s interpretation of him, dominated the production’s write-ups and reviews. In a local feature piece published on his life and career, Derwent recalled the several times he had played Shylock before coming to Kansas City. Most notable about this interview, however, was Derwent’s comment on the upcoming UKC production: “[T]he portrayal of Shylock at the university is to be a sympathetic one. We are attempting to prove that Shakespeare didn’t write an anti-Semitic play.”26 His comment came in response to Decker’s concerns of public unrest about the play. As soon as Derwent and Davis arrived in Kansas City, Decker mentioned that the upcoming production faced opposition from the community—even weeks before it opened. The community’s resistance made it to the national press, with a Shakespeare Quarterly follow-up to the 1950 production noting that “there were strong local objections by liberals, Jewish leading figures, and businessmen that


25. Laird, “Davis Touch to Venice.”

Confident in his preparations and the choices he and Davis had made together, Derwent assured “there would be no objection once these people came to see the show.” Once the play opened, Derwent was proven right:

“All I asked was that [those who opposed] should be invited to see the performance. To their credit they responded to the invitation and some of them at the end came round to my dressing room with tears streaming down their cheeks, to tell me they withdrew every objection, realizing for the first time that the play was basically a powerful plea for tolerance.”

The design, the edits, and the press all aided in the production’s pursuit of sympathy. Care in the choices Derwent and Davis made in their presentation of *The Merchant of Venice* was integral to addressing and eventually squelching audience concern. Derwent was determined to pay homage to Sir Henry Irving’s inspirational portrayal, and audiences noted that Derwent picked up where Irving left off. Ever in Irving’s footsteps, Derwent requested that his Shylock costume be “a copy of one worn by the late Sir Henry Irving…when he played the role.” Costume designer Murrel Groves recreated the red brown taffeta and velvet costume after tracking down an illustration in a costume book. Derwent’s request came out of his noticing that too often Shylock was portrayed as “a drab and shabby creature,” which detracted from audience sympathies. His Shylock was the culmination of the Irving tradition and the realization of the production’s intention all along:

27. Smith 293.

28. Ibid.

29. Derwent 261.

30. Ibid.

Mr. Derwent’s portrayal of Shylock…shows the years of experience he has had on the stage, and the talent he possesses. He is a thoroughly believable Shylock, often bewildered, never detestable. You feel for the man in the loss of his daughter. You see that he hasn’t a chance against the odds that are against him. You are tempted occasionally to sympathize with him. That, in our estimation, was the aim of the interpretation, and it was achieved.32

Though Laird speaks to Shylock’s pathos, it is interesting to note his choice of words. Audiences were tempted to sympathize with Shylock. But it is clear that this reviewer, regardless of how much he liked Shylock, ultimately did not sympathize with him—and that may be indicative of the raw attitude of the community at a time not very far removed from the end of World War II. Laird’s review was a reminder of the fragile environment in which the 1950 production took place. The production came only five years after a period that seemed to permanently attach The Merchant of Venice with anti-Semitism. Although Davis succeeded in bringing the play to a Kansas City audience, The Merchant of Venice was still barred from school curricula and stage presentation in other parts of the country. Derwent’s Shylock was one worthy of tolerance, but tolerance, another reviewer pointed out, was still hard to come by in the decades following World War II.33

For a fleeting moment in Kansas City theatre history, however, audiences were given the opportunity to experience Shylock’s plight on stage. “[The Merchant of Venice] deserves capacity audiences and seems sure to have them,” claims Laird’s opening night review. It did—both public performances charged the regular admission price of $234, and sold out

32. Laird, “Davis Touch to Venice.”
33. Smith 294.
before the production opened\textsuperscript{35}. In his 1949-1950 annual report to Decker, University Playhouse Director John Newfield admitted that the Playhouse “gave up considerable possible income of general admissions for \textit{The Merchant of Venice} production by selling at least one too many benefit performances.”\textsuperscript{36} Of the six scheduled performances, only two were open to the public. The remaining four—three of which fell on weekend evenings—were for community organizations, including the University Women’s club and Kansas City Teachers club\textsuperscript{37}.

In the memoir he wrote three years after the performance closed, Derwent believed the UKC production of \textit{The Merchant of Venice} could have run indefinitely.\textsuperscript{38} While it was not possible to extend the life of the production, the play lived on in Davis’s scrapbooks and in his donation to UKC. One has to wonder whether Davis or Derwent anticipated the hiatus \textit{The Merchant of Venice} took from Kansas City after their show closed. It would be another three decades until the play came back to campus.

\textbf{The University of Missouri-Kansas City 1986 Production}

Over the 35 years that separated the 1950 production from the next production in 1986, the UKC campus experienced a significant cycle of change. In 1963, the university was integrated into the University of Missouri school system, and so UKC became


38. Decker 261.}
University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC). Five presidents and chancellors held office between Decker’s departure in 1953 and George A. Russell’s appointment in 1977. The University Playhouse was condemned in 1976, with only the stone fireplace façade left as evidence of the theatre’s once-prominent place on the corner of 51st Street and Holmes. By 1979, the Department of Theatre had a new home at UMKC in the James C. Olson Performing Arts Center (PAC).

In 1986, *The Merchant of Venice* once again played at the university, this time on the PAC’s Helen F. Spencer Theatre stage. In addition to the performance venue, there were marked differences between the 1950 production and the one that opened in the fall of 1986. The play ran for only four performances, from October 16 to October 19, with no benefit performances offered. Instead, students could purchase tickets to any performance for $5. Perhaps the most significant difference between Blevins Davis’s production and the one directed by faculty member Toni Dorfman was a marketing one. Rather than a “University-Community” collaboration, the 1986 production started the 1986-87 academic theatrical season, with the work completed exclusively by UMKC students and faculty members. The decision to include *The Merchant of Venice* in the upcoming season was made in the spring of 1986. The play was intended to be a “vehicle for two third-year Masters of Fine Arts program students, Carol Burton and Robert Brand.”39 Burton and Brand were the only two third-year students remaining in the M.F.A. acting program. Burton played Portia opposite Brand’s Bassanio.

Both Burton and Brand were still in the Kansas City area at the time of this writing, and both were gracious to contribute what details they remembered of the 1986 production to this thesis. Burton was working as the Administrative Services Director for the Jewish Community Relations Bureau in Overland Park, Kansas. Brand was a professional actor based in Kansas City who appeared frequently in productions around the city. A HASF veteran, Brand had also been cast in the 2015 HASF production of *The Merchant of Venice* as Antonio. Speaking with these two 1986 original cast members aided my understanding of the events surrounding *The Merchant of Venice* coming to UMKC, but also provided insight into the actors’ process in approaching this play in production. Burton’s and my conversation was limited exclusively to her experience at UMKC. Brand’s and my conversation explored both his role in 1986 and its influence on his experience with the 2015 production.

In the 1986 production, Burton was the oldest, both in school and in age, among a cast of undergraduate and graduate actors. She had moved to Kansas City to attend graduate school at the age of 33. For Burton, *The Merchant of Venice* was the focus project for her M.F.A. monograph and thus the culmination of her time at UMKC. “Everybody wanted to do Shakespeare,” Burton recalled, “and certainly Bob and I did because we both love it.” But when the school proposed *The Merchant of Venice*, she and Brand were surprised. “Bob and I were hoping for perhaps something else,” Burton mentioned with a laugh. “Not that it was a bad choice, but I think…those two roles [Portia and Bassanio] can be a challenge depending on—a real challenge, depending on a lot, I think, on the director’s approach, and what the overall theme, what the overall arc is going to be.”

40. Personal interview.
Director Toni Dorfman’s approach for the 1986 production focused on “the other.” In both her director’s note and her interview with the UMKC campus newspaper, Dorfman stressed that “[at] some point, every character knows what it is to be an outsider”\(^\text{41}\) in *The Merchant of Venice*. It was a commendable approach. The approach also made sense to Burton, especially for a play that had not been done for so long in the area. Dorfman, like many twentieth-century directors of the play, wanted to do her part in humanizing the play and shining light on the moral issues Shakespeare raised in his text. While the approach was valid, Burton felt that the execution of it was one of the biggest weaknesses of the production:

> The director…was very interested in the idea of “the other,” which could have been fantastic but I think that she…the place I think where the weakness was, was that it wasn’t conveyed strongly enough from the director not only to Bob and me but I think to the rest of the cast, the idea of the other, the outsider, that it’s not just embodied in Shylock…it’s embodied in Bassanio, it’s embodied in Antonio, in the other Jewish characters in the production. It’s embodied in Shylock’s daughter, it’s embodied in her lover, so I think a stronger message from the director to discuss that and really get the cast engaged in what that’s about was lacking…\(^\text{42}\)

Burton could remember a personal conversation she had with Dorfman during the rehearsal process about her character. For as much emphasis Dorfman put on “the other,” Burton admitted Dorfman glossed over the idea in their discussion. That kept Burton, and many of the other actors in the production, from fully engaging with the concept as the production evolved.

Burton also faced a unique challenge in production that many of her other cast mates did not. Burton grew up Jewish and yet she had to play a “nice white-bread woman of a

\(^{41}\) Farney 11.

\(^{42}\) Personal interview.
presumably Catholic family” who was just as guilty of isolating and demeaning Shylock as some of the other characters in the play. At the time, Burton did not think much of the irony, but admitted years of hindsight have helped her realize just how relevant Portia’s treatment of Shylock is to Shylock’s resulting behavior in the play.

Peter Sander, who was the director of Performance Training at UMKC and who played Shylock, was the only other actor involved in the production who was Jewish. Burton did not know what the process of being a Jew and playing “the Jewish guy, the iconic Jewish character” was like for Sander. What both she and Brand remember, however, was Shylock’s costume. Clarence Derwent had Sir Henry Irving’s costume recreated, but Sander donned the costume Morris Carnovsky had worn himself when he played Shylock at the American Stratford Festival in 1957. Sander hoped to emulate Carnovsky’s performance for many reasons. Sander had been a close colleague of Carnovsky, an American director and celebrated actor who was part of the 1931-1941 troupe at New York City’s Group Theatre. Together, Carnovsky and Sander had recently published an acting handbook, *The Actor’s Eye* (1984). Carnovsky’s memorable gift to Sander made an impression on Burton and Brand, but it also put an added pressure on Sander to follow in Carnovsky’s footsteps.

Critics believed Derwent had succeeded in bringing Sir Henry Irving’s legacy to the UKC stage. It is difficult to gauge whether Sander did the same in his Carnovsky-inspired performance because there was such little material written up about the 1986 production of *The Merchant of Venice*. As is still the case in 2015, very few people reported on the university’s academic theatre productions. The one review in *University News* mentions the
costumes and set, both designed by M.F.A. student Huang Qi-Zhi43, and the designs’ success in transporting audiences to Venice. I found no commentary, however, on Sander’s performance that shed any light on the audience’s reception of *The Merchant of Venice* at the time. Burton had difficulty remembering audience reaction as well, mostly because she was focused on her own role as an actor. Burton did remember Sander’s portrayal being “a disappointment in a way” because she and the other actors had difficulty understanding some of the choices Sander made in his handling of Shylock’s humanity.

For a production that occurred almost thirty years ago, it was also difficult to find any statements that helped identify or quantify the production’s audience. Perhaps the lack of evidence may indicate a shift at the time in audience attitude about the play. In contrast to the public unrest surrounding the 1950 production, neither Burton nor Brand could recall any community backlash to UMKC’s staging of the play. Burton admitted, however, that being a part of the theatre community did shut her and the others out from the rest of the world because of the time spent in classes, rehearsals, and performances. Since it was an academic production, the community stakes in the play did not seem to be as high.

The only audience comment Burton could recall happened during one of her performances:

I remember there was one performance I did and something happened during the “quality of mercy”...I had a blip, I don’t know why...you have something down pat but it’s such an important speech and I had a little blip and I had to add a word or two because somehow there was a word to two words suddenly were gone in my mind...and so I had to throw in other words and finish the sentence and then finish the speech. And I remember doing this and somebody in the second or third row, a

43. A feature piece on Qi-Zhi was published in *University News* shortly before the play’s opening. The piece can be found on pg. 9 in the October 12, 1986 issue. She is now professor Helen Huang at the University of Maryland-College Park.
man I think, as I got, I said it just past the error, I heard “oh.” Somebody commented on the fact that they obviously knew the speech and were expecting were the speech and damnit, he didn’t get it! Or he was sympathizing with me. Maybe. Or it was, “oh, damn. She did it wrong.” And oh my god that was on my mind, I mean it made an impression because you don’t usually get comments.  

Though a small moment, Burton’s experience with that man in the third row may illuminate more about The Merchant of Venice’s place in Kansas City at that moment than any article may have been able to do. That interaction speaks to a greater audience connection to the power of Shakespeare’s language. Audiences tend to think of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” or Juliet’s moment at the balcony when asked to think of iconic Shakespeare moments, but The Merchant of Venice carried a weight of significance all its own in 1986—and it continues to do so today.

The Merchant of Venice in 2015

In 2015, Heart of America Shakespeare Festival (HASF) was one of six Shakespeare festivals and theatres across the United States to produce The Merchant of Venice. In Kansas City, the HASF production was the first professional-level performance of the play in the area since 1950. It also was the first professionally-produced run of the show in recent history—most likely the first since 1900, given the lack of evidence of the play’s production in the twentieth century. Despite the high quality of the two previous productions in 1950 and 1986, neither had been the work of a professional theatre company. HASF wanted to address

44. Personal interview.

45. At the time of writing, the five other productions of The Merchant of Venice were scheduled at The New American Shakespeare Tavern in Atlanta, Georgia; Baltimore Shakespeare Factory; Cleveland Shakespeare Festival; Houston Shakespeare Festival; and Young Shakespeare Players Madison in Wisconsin.
this gap in Kansas City’s professional theatre history. HASF also looked to expand the play’s reach beyond its previous academic environment by connecting with audiences from around the Kansas City metropolitan community in both Kansas and Missouri.

It is important to understand the circumstances surrounding the HASF production in order to further explore *The Merchant of Venice*’s place in Kansas City theatre history. On the eve before Passover in 2014, Frazier Glenn Miller, Jr. opened fire just outside White Theatre on the Jewish Community Campus and then at the Village Shalom Retirement Community. Miller killed three Overland Park residents: fourteen-year-old Reat Griffin Underwood, his grandfather William Lewis Corporon, and Terri LaManno, who was visiting her mother at Village Shalom. Details about the shooting revealed Miller was an anti-Semitic white supremacist who intended to kill members of the Jewish community that day. The horrific irony is that Miller instead senselessly killed two Methodists and one Catholic. Miller’s actions were classified as a hate crime. Miller’s trial date was set on the first day of HASF’s rehearsals.

Sidonie Garrett and Krista Blackwood had decided one year earlier to stage the play at the Jewish Community Center’s White Theatre. It was important to both of them that the upcoming production of *The Merchant of Venice*, whose run was announced around the time of the shooting, was not seen as a response to or an exploitation of the April 2014 tragedy. Instead, Garrett and Blackwood pointed to the necessity of the play’s place in the Kansas City community, as the tragedy reinforced our need to address intolerance and facilitate a dialogue about acceptance, justice, and peace. Chapter 3 explores the production process in fuller detail.
Post-Script

It should be mentioned that The Alcott Arts Center, located in Kansas City, Kansas, performed *The Merchant of Venice* in 2013 as part of their “Shakespeare in the Parking Lot” series. This production, however, was not considered in the writing of this thesis for a variety of reasons. The production was removed from my consideration primarily because it took place at a community theatre. Although the Alcott Arts Center provides an important place for the arts in the Kansas City, Kansas, community, its audience is limited and its work is not part of the professional arts scene in the greater Kansas City metropolitan area in both Kansas and Missouri.
CHAPTER 3
PRODUCTION PROCESS

Process Overview

Bringing *The Merchant of Venice* to Kansas City was the result of two years’ worth of conversations and one year’s worth of production work. A preliminary design discussion followed the 2014 summer production’s post-mortem in July, as many of the designers who worked on *The Winter’s Tale* were hired to work on *The Merchant of Venice*. Because the production process was unusually quick and in unusual spaces, Sidonie Garrett hired many HASF veteran designers and local actors to help HASF tackle a two-show year.

Auditions for *The Merchant of Venice* were held early in August 2014, shortly after the 2014 summer production of *The Winter’s Tale* closed, to take advantage of traveling actors’ schedules and the transition in many of the Kansas City theatres from the 2013-14 season into the start of their 2014-15 seasons. In contrast to HASF’s traditional by-appointment general auditions, Garrett sent out invitations to about thirty actors—with all of whom Garrett had an existing working relationship—to attend an all-day callback. Since the role of Shylock had already been cast by this time, Garrett wanted to make best use of the limited audition time by focusing on actors reading from the script in specific groups that had been pre-determined before the audition day. Garrett was looking to cast only fourteen to sixteen actors, which was about half the cast size of a typical HASF summer show. Casting choices were limited by the non-traditional rehearsal and performance period. The entire process would begin and end in March 2015, which conflicted with the academic calendars of many young actors in town. Shortly after the audition, Garrett sent out offers to a total of
fourteen actors, almost all of whom were local. With the exception of the Prince of Morocco, Garrett had the cast confirmed by the creative team’s concept meeting on September 1, 2014.

“It’s topical. It’s now. This story should be told.” Garrett’s words set the tone of the concept meeting and thus of the whole creative process. During the first meeting, the creative team began thinking of ways to make the play accessible to a new indoor audience. Initial ideas included approaching the overall design as a Venetian Renaissance painting, with the set in low values and the characters in bright costumes. There was talk of using St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice as a reference point for the set. Garrett at one point mentioned that “Bassanio may be the worst character in this play” and that the team should work to explore the “gray” of each character through design.

Many of the concepts introduced on September 1 would resurface throughout the process. Set designer Gene Friedman used the façade of St. Mark’s Basilica as a rough outline for the unit set’s structure. Friedman also designed a versatile paint treatment that, under the lighting design of Ward Everhart, would reveal hues of red, blue, and yellow coming through a layer of muted gold and black. Costume designer Mary Traylor borrowed the color palette from Late Renaissance paintings in her creation of late sixteenth-century costumes. Composer Greg Mackender worked with Garrett’s “moodscape” to create a theme for each character that evoked Venetian Renaissance music while still speaking to different cultural influences.

From the very beginning, Garrett also made it clear that she wanted the heavy hand of Christianity to show itself at the end of the play. Garrett went into the process knowing she

1. A scene-by-scene breakdown of major plot moments that Garrett then describes with different emotions and corresponding tones to help give Mackender an idea of what she would like to create for the aural world of the play.
wanted to stage a tableau at the end to finish both Shylock and Jessica’s stories. The audience would see Shylock’s conversion and Jessica’s lament of her now-lost religion rather than just the “happy-ever-after” of the young Venetians. Doing so required a dominant visual. Garrett’s initial idea was to have a large banner bearing a Christian cross descend as Shylock re-entered. Garrett hoped for the presence of “Christian boots” to be both seen and heard in these final moments. The ending Garrett visualized was dark, but that was necessary because she saw it as a dark play rather than a comedy. Garrett felt that an important thread often gets lost in the story, and she wanted to find a way to pull that thread through to the end: it is not okay for anyone to change his or her religion.

The creative team met again three times before the first rehearsal: October 6, 2014; January 5, 2015; and February 2, 2015. During that five-month period, the company lost and quickly replaced a sound designer. The company had to adjust to losing Mark Robbins as Shylock and to adding Gary Neal Johnson into the role instead. Shortly after losing Robbins, the company again had to adjust its casting when Jessicé Datino, who was to play Portia, dropped out for another role; she was later replaced with Bree Elrod, an actor who had not previously worked with HASF. The idea of the cross descending at the end of the play had to be cut for practical and financial reasons, but a tenth-century iconoclast cross was made into a standard that could be carried in by a man of the Venetian court. Garrett discovered that if the production ended on Shylock, it should also begin with Shylock. That discovery led to bookend tableaus, with the opening moment revealing the commotion of Venetian street life and the physical tension between the Christians and the Jews. The exploration of that first tableau is where the rehearsal process would begin in March 2015.
Rehearsal Process

The HASF company had two and a half weeks of rehearsals, including technical and dress rehearsals, before the opening performance at Jewish Community Center (JCC) on Thursday, March 19, 2015. Although all performances would take place at the White Theatre on the JCC campus and at the Polsky Theatre in the Carlsen Center on the Johnson County Community College (JCCC) campus, rehearsals had to begin elsewhere due to scheduling conflicts at the first performance site.

The cast and creative team met for the first day of rehearsal in Fishtank Performance Studio’s newly acquired rehearsal space, a studio upstairs from the Fishtank’s black box theatre located in Kansas City, Missouri’s Crossroads District. The company rehearsed from 9:30 am until 6:00 pm in this space the week of March 3, with a design run held on March 8, which was also the company’s last day in the studio. Throughout the week, Garrett had to remind cast members that the actual performance spaces were much larger and that blocking would require some adjustment once the company relocated. The following week’s rehearsals moved to JCC’s White Theatre, where the company rehearsed until the first performance. Once performances at JCC closed, the company moved to JCCC’s Polsky Theatre and re-spaced the show for two days before the final four performances took place March 26-29, which included hosting the student matinee on Thursday, March 26, 2015.

The last time the full company was together before the first technical rehearsal was on the first day of rehearsal. All actors, designers, and administrative staff met for bagels, coffee, and introductions on the morning of March 3. This day culminated my preparatory dramaturgical work, but was just the beginning of my documentation of this production of *The Merchant of Venice*. The remainder of this chapter, and most of the content of chapters 4
and 5, focus on my work as a production dramaturg and explore my presence in the rehearsal room as the company prepared for opening night.

**Dramaturgy in Production**

*Context.* How often dramaturgs attend rehearsals is dependent upon the needs of the production and the relationship between the dramaturg and director. Some dramaturgs may only attend one or two rehearsals before attending opening night. For freelance dramaturgs who may not be able to travel, their presence may only be felt in the materials they send along for distribution or in the website they run from afar. Most dramaturgs attend the first rehearsal, and then work out a rehearsal schedule with their director; this has been the case in most of the production processes I have been involved in as dramaturg, and proved to be the case with *The Merchant of Venice.*

While it is tempting to be present at all rehearsals, it can be advantageous for the dramaturg to put some distance between her work and the work that happens in rehearsals. The dramaturg can best give notes when she sees a run-through or act work, where she sees the storytelling process in its entirety rather than in pieces. A dramaturg may be asked to make sure all parts of the story are working together; this is a difficult task if the dramaturg has been heavily involved in the detail work and not afforded the opportunity to take a step back and approach the production with a “big picture” mindset. It was this part of the production process that I looked forward to most, as I believed it was the best chance to advocate for both the production and the production’s potential audiences.

My role as HASF production dramaturg shifted once rehearsals began. Most of the work I had been doing in the months leading up to rehearsal fell under outreach and
education, both of which were based in research. Most of this preparatory work I completed prior to the start of rehearsals and often did this work alone. Conversations about *The Merchant of Venice* were limited to those I had with Garrett and Rapport; those conversations focused more on outreach surrounding the production rather than on the production itself. An overview of the outreach initiatives for *The Merchant of Venice* is discussed further in chapter 4.

Leading up to rehearsals, I talked with Garrett about how my role as dramaturg might evolve once in the rehearsal hall. Rather than doing so much work independently, I now felt that I was entering into a more collaborative part of the process. It was understood that my presence was always welcome, and that my time in rehearsal could be spent researching as well as observing. I informed the creative team and the acting company that I was hoping to document the HASF production, and therefore would be taking notes and conducting interviews as the rehearsal process moved along. Most all of those involved in the process were eager to share their thoughts and were happy to have me be a part of the conversations and choices that came up during the short rehearsal process. Being present also meant I could immediately answer questions that came up organically in rehearsal, such as one actor’s question about how much 3,000 ducats was worth today.²

I was unable to be at every rehearsal for the full eight-and-a-half hours because I was still enrolled full-time in graduate school. The first rehearsal was the only rehearsal at which I was present the full day. I was in attendance for most of the rehearsal time on Fridays, as I had already volunteered my Fridays to HASF as an Artistic Associate and was therefore able

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² At the time of writing, one ducat is equivalent to £100, or $150. 3,000 ducats would be worth roughly $450,000, which makes Portia’s offer to double the bond to 6,000 ducats equal to around $900,000, a fact that baffled many of the actors.
to dedicate those days to rehearsal. I then found opportunities to join rehearsal for three or four hours at a time, often coming in the mornings and leaving once the company broke for lunch. Although I was not able to attend all rehearsals, I still received rehearsal reports, which included a “dramaturgy” notes section. I made sure to check the reports daily and was able to either electronically respond to questions or prepare answers to bring into rehearsal if I was visiting the next day. Including dramaturgy in rehearsal reports made the questions that came up in rehearsal visible to the entire creative team, which made other designers aware of the conversations—including those that concerned the production’s period—that arose throughout the process. I have found that including dramaturgs in production correspondence has been advantageous to the creative teams that have chosen to do so, as it helps keep all involved in the process on the same page.

The Dramaturgy Packet. My first day in rehearsal meant my sharing of a dramaturgical packet I had created for this specific production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Creating a packet for distribution at the first rehearsal has become standard dramaturgical protocol. Dramaturgy packets vary in layout and length depending on the production and the dramaturg. In general, the goal of the dramaturgy packet is to clarify the text and to provide information pertaining to the playwright, the time, and the specific production. Some packets are a collection of relevant articles and function much like an annotated bibliography. If the production takes place in a particular period or references numerous historical events and figures, the packet might be more focused on understanding “given circumstances” and defining any archaic or unfamiliar terms. Overall, dramaturgs create the packet to help define the world of a particular play and to disseminate information in a way that is easy-to-read and accessible to all involved on the production. The packet is the one opportunity the dramaturg
has to help frame conversations and familiarize all actors and designers with basic information or historical research relevant to the play. I treat the dramaturgy packet as a resource tool, one that actors and designers can either reference quickly for clarification or delve deeper with questions and/or exercises that are character-specific.

I had once overheard an actor say that whenever he received a dramaturgy packet, he usually threw it into the back of his car and forgot about it. In my mind, I knew what kind of packet would prompt that response: a black-and-white photocopied packet that was over twenty double-sided pages long, with too few pictures and too much text without a narrative to guide the actor through the information. It was a packet I had received as an actor in the past, and one I had seen in other dramaturgy portfolios. While I took issue with this actor’s dismissive attitude—especially since it is an attitude I know many dramaturgs have struggled against in the past—I understood why he did not find packets like the one described above useful. These packets tended to feel generic and were often a collection of information that had not been synthesized but instead was thrown together in one large, overwhelming document.

My *The Merchant of Venice* dramaturgy packet was the ninth packet I made as a dramaturg, and it was the fifth I made using a template I discovered in the dramaturgy seminar I took during my first semester of graduate school. I had always considered the dramaturgy packet a work of art, but I have since learned it takes a certain level of creativity and brevity to keep the packet from ending up in the backseat of someone’s car. I created the template after discovering the “Publisher Layout” in my version of Microsoft Word, which allowed me more freedom in design. Instead of the traditional portrait format, I learned to use landscape, which turned the packet into a booklet.
In preparation for the first rehearsal, I considered which of my dramaturgical materials would be best to bring into the rehearsal process. Since I had been conducting research in the months prior, I had to decide what of the information I had already collected would best help actors craft their individual performances and what would help Garrett articulate the vision of the production to our audiences. Although I had prepared that information for use with a much different—and less informed—audience, the information itself was still relevant. Whatever I considered relevant to the text and to the circumstances surrounding our production was the only guideline Garrett gave me for the packet. What made the most sense to both Garrett and me, then, was to use the outline I had prepared for upcoming lectures and outreach engagements as a template for the packet.
CHAPTER 4
AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Outreach Overview

Lecture series and public forums often accompany productions of Shakespeare’s works, especially for those considered his “problem plays”—problems either in their classification or in their subject matter. For Heart of American Shakespeare Festival (HASF), audience outreach has long been incorporated into the summer productions with the ShowTalk series of preshow lectures given every performance evening by a local Shakespeare scholar. HASF had also taken part in a four-week lecture series at a local library, with the series serving as a gateway to the production that most attendees would see in the park later that summer. A program essay, usually addressing the plot of that season’s play, was included in HASF’s playbills. These scheduled lectures and publicity materials, however, had long been the only work HASF did to reach out to its audience in the days preceding the run of the play. Barriers to more expansive outreach efforts in the past have included the short rehearsal and production time, a limited number of staff members, and lack of funding allocated to outreach in the fiscal year budget.

Because this production of *The Merchant of Venice* involved partnership between three organizations and was marketed to an audience much different from the audience seen in the park every summer, HASF needed a well-structured approach to audience outreach. This proved particularly important in the attempt to facilitate a dialogue about the play and the production, especially with the audiences at the Jewish Community Center (JCC). HASF considered this audience, as well as those in area schools and in the Johnson County
community, when creating production-specific programming. The creation and distribution of much of the information that follows in this chapter were responsibilities assigned to me as dramaturg, though were moderated by Sidonie Garrett and Matthew Rapport.

**Program Essay**

The program essay was my first dramaturgical task with the earliest deadline. I asked Garrett early on in the process if I was expected to write an essay, as HASF generally leaves room for a 500-word dramaturgical essay in its programs for summer productions. HASF, however, was not in charge of piecing together *The Merchant of Venice* program. Instead, co-presenters JCC and JCCC created programs for each of their audiences so they could feature their own ads and donor lists. Since HASF did not have artistic license over the playbills, Garrett could not promise that JCC or JCCC would have room to accommodate a dramaturgical essay.

For a problem play like *The Merchant of Venice*, I was concerned that I may not have the opportunity to “speak” to the audience before the show. I received word shortly after Garrett and I spoke, however, that JCC and JCCC programs made room for a 750-word essay. From the day I received that news, I had only one week to write a final draft. A plot synopsis was already included in the programs, so I had the freedom to address whatever topic or question I desired in the essay.

“In Perspective: *The Merchant of Venice*” became my opportunity to share a bit about the production’s history in Kansas City. I felt that it was my duty as dramaturg and historian to preserve the 1950 production in writing while also reminding audiences of the play’s absence in Kansas City. I, too, was conscious of Garrett’s artistic decisions and of her pursuit
of a human, sympathetic telling of a difficult story. The play, I and many of company had to remind ourselves, was not just about Shylock. The play was about the flaws and favors of all characters, regardless of their religious preferences or occupation. The play was also a comedy that relied not on the mockery of Shylock for its humor, but on its wit, its clowns, and its romantic foibles. I did not want the comedy to get lost in the tragedy.

Of the handful of dramaturgical essays I have written so far, the stakes for the one I wrote for *The Merchant of Venice* were the highest. Not only did I have to address a Shakespearean play, I had to address the effects of this play on a twenty-first-century audience. I was reminded of this pressure on opening night, when choreographer Tracy Terstriep asked about my approach to such a difficult task. I felt a responsibility to not only frame our production, but to appeal to an audience of which I had a limited understanding. The full text of the printed essay is included in Appendix F.

On the first day of rehearsal, Emily Behrmann made a point to tell me how much she enjoyed my essay. When I attended a performance at both JCC and JCCC, I looked around and saw many patrons reading the essay before the show began. There is no better feeling than knowing your work is being consumed, and that your work has beat out the distractions many patrons carry with them. The program essay is a small part of the audience engagement process, but it has the ability to engage an audience member in a conversation that does not have to wait until after the show to happen.

**The Merchant of Venice Teaching Guide**

The limited run of *The Merchant of Venice* marked the first time HASF offered a student matinee performance. Because HASF’s seasons had always been in the summer
months of June and July, there had not ever been an opportunity to invite a student audience to a HASF production during the regular school year. A strategy for educational outreach seemed vital if HASF wanted to integrate a complicated, rarely produced play text into local area classrooms. Part of that programming involved the creation of a *The Merchant of Venice* study guide, which was distributed to instructors prior to schools’ attending the Thursday, March 26, matinee performance. The study guide was made available to participating schools and other interested instructors through email correspondence with HASF’s Education Department. HASF did not intend for the guide to be widely distributed to the general public or to other paying patrons, whether through online access on HASF’s website or through purchase at the two theatre spaces. The only publicity the study guide received was through an e-blast sent to HASF’s list of schools and instructors that regularly received Education Department updates.

Matt Rapport and I had frequent informal discussions about the study guide, about both the guide’s objectives and desired format, prior to our formal conversation in mid-February. HASF’s Education Department had already compiled materials and resource lists for past camp curricula, but did not have a template for a text-specific study guide to be used in conjunction with a HASF live performance. What took priority before any planning could occur was finding other company and festival study guides for *The Merchant of Venice*. The staff then synthesized ideas and pulled from HASF’s existing database of information for our final study guide. Garrett, Rapport, and I all searched for study guides from major festivals

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1. E-blasts are HASF’s primary marketing tool, and are used to virtually send list subscribers information about upcoming events, season announcements, and new programming. For *The Merchant of Venice*, HASF sent out e-blasts about educational programs as well as e-blasts with details about the performance venues and dates.
and theatres in the United States and the United Kingdom to better understand how information had been presented to students and teachers for productions of *The Merchant of Venice* that occurred during the last twenty years.

The first festival we looked to was Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF), as Rapport had heard the guide for *The Merchant of Venice* provided on OSF’s website was particularly good. Garrett also received OSF’s study guide in an email from Linda Fern, an Executive Associate for OSF. The guide is widely available in PDF form online in OSF’s Shakespeare Study Guides Archive, which is where I pulled the guide from for my own use. To locate other study guides electronically, a Google search for “merchant of venice study guides for schools by theatres” [sic] retrieved the most credible hits. Guides found this way included Royal Shakespeare Company’s “Themes in *The Merchant of Venice*”, The Guthrie’s “Study Guide: *The Merchant of Venice*”, and Stratford Festival 2013’s “Study Guide: *The Merchant of Venice.*” Additional guides can be found elsewhere, but the four listed above were chosen for the size and reputations of the theatres who distributed the guides, the types of information presented within the guides, and the variations in length should the guides be printed.

OSF’s “2010 Study Guide for *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare” was compiled by “[m]embers of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s Education department,” but does not list any members by name. Doing so makes the guide seem like the result of a collaborative effort rather than a compilation of individual research assignments. The study guide is nine pages, and presents a list of 49 questions with related resources intended for use before and after reading/seeing the play. When applicable, OSF provides links to websites that lead to additional research on, for example, the play’s historical context, the use of
certain symbols, and the meaning of key words and phrases. The grouping of resources by question replaces the traditional list of printed and online resources presented at the end of most study guides; instead, the resources are introduced at the end of each question with “These and other websites (and/or) resources provide information.” Many of the resources, too, are not exclusive to Shakespeare or to Shakespeare’s plays but instead pertain to broader themes and history that can be used as lenses to analyze a specific text.

As The Guthrie’s “Study Guide” is the longest of the guides pulled, I was interested in it primarily for its structure. Of the guides consulted, it is the only one to list a formal editor, who is also listed as the production’s dramaturg. The Guthrie’s is by far the most comprehensive guide, but only because of the exhaustive volume of information presented. Much of this information relates to the play and the play text, with almost two-thirds of the guide’s contents devoted to understanding the play’s structure, references, and themes independent of any particular production. Materials specific to the Guthrie’s 2007 production of *The Merchant of Venice* did not start until page 97, and comprised mostly interviews from artistic staff members. Most frustrating about the Guthrie’s guide was the lack of activities for instruction in the classroom. Suggested questions and activities made up only four pages of content and were placed in the back before the resource list; there was little attempt to integrate these questions into the bulk of the guide’s material. It appeared that the Guthrie intended their guide to be used as a comprehensive reference tool, presented in a way that

2. “Editor/Dramaturg: Michael Lupu”. Lupu was the production dramaturg for the Guthrie’s 2007 production of *The Merchant of Venice*, and served as the Guthrie’s principle dramaturg since 1981.

3. Pages 4-78 make up “The Play” section, which includes a cast of characters, a two-page play synopsis, and a selected glossary that extends from page 16 to page 40. When printed, the guide is 114 pages in length.
allowed instructors to choose the historical information relevant to their own classrooms and to keep the rest on file for use as needed.

When Matt Rapport and I finally met to discuss HASF’s study guide, we first created an outline of content that reflected the concept of the production. Since Garrett repeatedly stressed the importance of Shylock’s portrayal, with emphasis on the forthcoming imposed change of religion, Rapport and I wanted to make sure the guide was in line with this particular production statement. Focusing on this concept helped to unify the content presented, which also made selecting material from resources and other study guides much easier. The 2013 Stratford Festival’s guide served as the model in terms of content, as it presented a wide variety of material—covering the Stratford production, the Stratford Festival’s history, the historical context, and various activities for classroom use—in an attractive, easy-to-read way. The length of OSF’s—five front-to-back—was the ideal target in terms of page numbers; we did not want a guide that was more than ten single printed pages. Since HASF’s guide was intended for use by instructors and not necessarily by students, I decided to call it a “teaching guide.” The completed teaching guide is located in Appendix D.

**SPARK Lecture Series**

A long-time partner of HASF’s outreach initiatives is a local not-for-profit organization committed to life-long learning. Barbara Hildner and staff members from Penn Valley Community College founded Senior Peers Actively Renewing Knowledge (SPARK) in 1993. Hildner was motivated to create SPARK after attending numerous Elderhostel (now
Road Scholar) courses on her own. Because Hildner often traveled for these courses, she was interested in creating a program “in which participants did not travel to another site but organized it in their own community, using volunteer instructors and having the program run by local volunteers with some assistance from the college.” SPARK is one of now over 300 Lifelong Learning Institutes (LLI) in the United States and Canada dedicated to providing affordable learning opportunities for older adults. As an organization, SPARK’s primary mission is “to promote, through shared learning and peer leadership, expanded intellectual, cultural and social horizons of persons 55 years of age and older regardless of educational background.” SPARK has had a permanent home on UMKC’s campus since 1997, and the university provides SPARK with resources and space when needed.

The range of courses offered by SPARK varies every “semester,” with the courses finalized by SPARK’s curriculum committee. Requirements for courses to be considered are not strict, but the topic must be interesting to SPARK’s demographic and a speaker must be available for either the entire course or for one session. While no subject is off-limits, most of the courses are in the humanities and can include genealogy, world history, music, and art.

4. “At not-for-profit Road Scholar, our mission is to inspire adults to learn, discover and travel. Our learning adventures engage expert instructors, provide extraordinary access, and stimulate discourse and friendship among people for whom learning is the journey of a lifetime.” For more on Road Scholar’s history, visit www.roadscholar.org.

5. Hildner, e-mail message to Jane Harrell, February 19, 2015.

6. SPARK’s annual registration fee is $40, renewed in January each year.

7. A complete SPARK 2015 course list can be accessed at http://spark.umkc.edu/.

8. “Classes are held four semesters a year, two hours a week for four to six weeks. There are no tests or exams. SPARK also offers several social activities throughout the year.”
Most lecturers are specialists or professionals in their respective fields, but volunteer their time to lead their sessions. SPARK distributes evaluations after most lectures, asking attendees to evaluate the course on the subject presented and on the speaker. Lecturers who do not just read from their notes but who actively engage attendees with the material give the most successful lectures, according to SPARK President Jane Harrell. Harrell also mentioned that attendees appreciate when lecturers can answer any question asked of them, which added pressure to my lecture preparation.

Since 2007, HASF has partnered with SPARK to offer a series of four lectures that prepare attendees to see a live production of that season’s Shakespeare play. The four lectures are held for four consecutive weeks, and are usually scheduled for Monday afternoons at the Kansas City Public Library’s Plaza location. Ardyce (Ardy) Pearson reached out to SPARK in 2007 because she wanted to provide “a way for the community to learn about the play” from four lecturers who are familiar with the chosen text, the production, or Shakespeare’s life and works. All attendees generally attend all four lectures, and then pick a date among them to see the show together in the park.

Since I had given a SPARK lecture for last season’s production of *The Winter’s Tale*, Pearson invited me back to lecture on *The Merchant of Venice* during a special SPARK Shakespeare series. Because HASF was producing two shows that season, Pearson decided to host separate lecture series in the spring and in the summer to give both


productions a place in the SPARK curriculum. This marked the first time SPARK had hosted HASF outside of the summer production schedule when, as Pearson mentioned in her introduction to my SPARK lecture on Monday, February 23, “it’s not 70, 75 degrees outside.” Despite the series being offered at an unfamiliar time in the year, around twenty\(^\text{12}\) people still attended my lecture and were eager to discuss the play and the HASF production following the presentation.

As Artistic Associate and Dramaturg for HASF, my goal was to give a lecture that generated interest in *The Merchant of Venice*. Since my lecture was the first of the four given in the series, it was my responsibility to introduce—or re-introduce—attendees to the text. Doing so included giving a plot summary, outlining the historical context of the Jews in Shakespeare’s time, and documenting key moments in contemporary critical reception of the play. All Shakespeare SPARK lectures are to be around an hour in length. My lecture was about forty minutes, which allowed about twenty minutes for questions. All twenty minutes were used to answer a handful of audience questions.

**Addressing Audience Questions.** The first question asked was about the reason behind the Jews’ expulsion from England in 1290. So much of my research had been, up to the day of my lecture, on past productions and the character of Shylock. This question made me realize I had gaps in my knowledge of history, particularly when it came to the Jews’ presence in England. My response focused on the growing tension between Christians and

\(^{12}\) Two of the twenty in attendance I had seen previously at other lectures and area theatres. One is a frequent volunteer at Unicorn Theatre, where I work as part of the front of house staff. She and I had been having conversations about *The Merchant of Venice* for months prior to the show’s opening, and I had mentioned the SPARK lecture to her. Another attendee had been in the audience for my lectures last summer, and it was encouraging to see him in the audience for the second series. His comment to me as he was leaving was, “Great, as always!”
Jews, which has long been the very basic explanation given for the expulsion. Another audience member jumped in to say she guessed it also had to do with the exchange and power of money. Her response made sense since Jews were the only people allowed to issue loans and to collect interest prior to their expulsion.

Her answer provided a nice transition into a discussion of other themes, which include money and its meaning in *The Merchant of Venice*. Part of the play is set in Venice, which at that time was a central commercial trading hub for Western Europe. The play’s structure revolves around a merchant and a usurer, who enter into a contract for a specific amount of money. Much of the play’s plot relies on obtaining or losing wealth. Bassanio asks for money from Antonio. Antonio asks for money from Shylock, and gives the money back to Bassanio. Bassanio uses that money to travel to Portia. Portia inherits money from her father, and later uses that money to try to pay off Antonio’s loan to Shylock. Shylock loses his money to Jessica. Jessica gives money to Lorenzo. Shylock forfeits the rest of his wealth to the court. The tendency for audiences to focus on racial and religious tensions between characters often distracts from this conversation about money. This question provided a great outlet to facilitate a dialogue about *all* of the play’s themes, rather than just the most obvious one of persecution based on race and religion.

The second question was also about the Jews, but was in response to the part of the lecture in which I discussed pivotal portrayals of Shylock, beginning with Edmund Kean’s 1814 performance. I mentioned that Kean wore a black wig instead of the bright red wig that had been the traditional choice for the more comic, villainous Shylocks of the seventeenth century. The question, then, was why the red wig had previously been synonymous with Shylock, because, as this attendee said, “there weren’t that many red-headed Jews.” I had to
admit that I did not have a satisfactory answer to that question, but that my understanding of the choice was that the red wig was much more noticeable on stage and was yet another way to separate Shylock physically from the other characters in the play.

This question then led into discussion of the red hat often used in modern productions. Conversation about the red hat also stemmed from an image shown and a comment I then made about a specific production choice that was inspired by this image. While discussing twentieth century Shylocks, I displayed the painted portrait of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Shylock, completed in 1914 by Charles Buchel.¹³ The portrait influenced color selection and costume choices made by costume designer Mary Traylor, especially when it came to designing Shylock. In the portrait, Sir Herbert Tree has a red cap on his head. In response to the previous question about red wigs, I had discussed the use of red caps to distinguish Shylock in performance rather than the red wig. I mentioned that Gary Neal Johnson would be wearing a red hat in the HASF production, following design choices that have been made in twentieth and twenty-first century productions.

The follow-up question then became about whether or not the red hat had been mandated in the Elizabethan period. Again, I became increasingly aware of my lack of knowledge about Elizabethan Jews. My answer ended up admitting as much, but also that prior to the sixteenth century, there had been some mandate in place that dictated Jews wear certain colors or pieces to separate themselves from Christians. I did not think this mandate originated during Shakespeare’s time, primarily because only 200 Jews remained in England, and they mostly lived in secret. The Jews in the play, though, were from Venice and lived

¹³. This portrait was included in the audience guide, a copy of which is located in Appendix E.
under restrictions different from those previously imposed on the Jews in England. The attendee who asked approached me after and thanked me for my talk, and mentioned that she was now going to do some research on her own about the red wig and red caps because of how curious the discussion made her.

Another attendee left with a quest of her own, too, when the question of the “pound of flesh” came up. She and other attendees were curious about the origin of the “pound of flesh” wager. Through my research, I had not encountered the phrase being used outside of The Merchant of Venice, at least in any legal documents. Since I had spoken with Carol Burton a few days earlier, I drew upon our conversation about this very part of the contract to answer this question. Burton suggested that, given Antonio’s wealth, repayment was a factor with which neither he nor Shylock was particularly concerned. The wager could be taken as—and has been in some productions—a joke, or an interest payment so ridiculous because of the certainty surrounding repayment. What I neglected to mention were alleged source materials, among which the fourteenth-century Il Pecorone includes the pound of flesh story line. Seeing the “pound of flesh” in an earlier-dated manuscript, either in Il Pecorone or in sources dated still earlier, could mean Shakespeare did not necessarily invent these terms but instead borrowed from an existing source.¹⁴

One of the final questions asked was from Pearson, who was curious about the Prince of Morocco. In the text, Morocco is described as “a tawny Moor all in white” (II.1) and is often played by a dark-skinned actor. Pearson was wondering if HASF had chosen to cast a black actor in the role, thus remaining faithful to the text as Shakespeare wrote it. I explained

¹⁴ For further discussion about “the pound of flesh”, see the audience guide in Appendix E.
that HASF had always intended to cast a black actor and did so for the upcoming production.\textsuperscript{15} Doing so, I said, meant also addressing other themes inherent in the play. Racial tension existed between the Christians and the Jews, yes, but it also existed between the Christians and most other races. The inclusion of Morocco was yet another opportunity for Elizabethan audience members to laugh at and mock a character, and thus a race, who was unlike them. Since this question was about casting, I also used this opportunity to list other actors and their roles in the HASF production, some of whom would be joining Sidonie Garrett during her SPARK lecture the week after.

As attendees left, another attendee approached me and asked about the promotional materials being used for the production. When answering questions, I had mentioned that Gary Neal Johnson would be playing Shylock, which was a recent change to the cast list. She knew of this change before the lecture, but was confused by the posters up around the city that depicted Mark Robbins as Shylock. This was a question that had come up frequently, especially when handing out postcards to visitors and updating information on websites. The photos taken of Robbins in the fall were the only publicity photos taken for the production, and were the only images available to distribute. Since Johnson was cast so late, additional photos had not yet been taken. The attendee understood that, but her question certainly highlighted the importance of accuracy when promoting the production. By having Robbins still be the prominent person associated with the show, it was misleading to those who had grown attached to the idea of him as Shylock.

\textbf{Reflection & Future Considerations.} Overall, the lecture fulfilled its initial goal of generating interest while also providing information not previously distributed in this

\textsuperscript{15} For the complete cast list, see the program in Appendix F.
manner. I made sure to include a few resources attendees could check out independently, knowing that all attendees were part of a LLI and had an interest in learning more. One of the resources I directed them to was John Gross’s *Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy* (1992), as it provides a thorough look at Shylock through the ages, but also covers Shakespeare’s life and the circumstances that went into the creation of *The Merchant of Venice* in great detail. Gross also writes in a manner that is easy to understand for those who may not have been exposed to previous Shakespearean scholarship or who know very little else about *The Merchant of Venice* as a play.

In a conversation with Matt Rapport after the lecture, I admitted feeling incredibly ignorant with the answers I gave. This was the first time I had presented the material to an audience, which included completing an accompanying PowerPoint. Doing so helped me organize my thoughts about *The Merchant of Venice* and gave me a chance to synthesize the information I had gathered up to this point. The lecture, and the question-and-answer period that followed, also identified where I needed to focus my research efforts before the first day of rehearsal and before I gave the next two lectures at other area libraries. It was evident that my research was not yet comprehensive enough to anticipate all potential audience questions. Rapport was encouraging when he said that neither I nor anyone else from the company can be expected to know all there is to know about the play or the HASF-specific production. The amount of research on *The Merchant of Venice* is vast, which is why the lecture series featured four lecturers rather than just one, with each lecturer specializing in a topic, a medium, or a character. What questions the production might answer would not be evident until rehearsals start, which would not be for another two weeks.
The questions also sparked conversation and sent a few attendees off on their own research missions, which pointed to the talk’s success in inspiring a further pursuit of knowledge. Rapport and I both conducted research on some of these questions to better prepare us both for the talkbacks. I made sure to have answers ready for the same questions—and other questions that might grow out of them—for when I gave the two lectures in the later part of March.

Rapport and I also had an extensive conversation the day after to finalize the study guide, but we took time to discuss some of the research Rapport had done the night before. One of the biggest questions Rapport had surrounded Pearson’s question about race. HASF did not color-blind cast the role, yet the text had been altered to remove negative comments about Morocco’s race in the HASF production text for *The Merchant of Venice*. Rapport and I discussed how care had been taken to avoid the race conversation between African Americans and Christians, yet the same care had not been taken when it came to the tensions between Shylock and the rest of the characters.

Prior to the start of rehearsals, Rapport and I revisited the ethics of cutting Portia’s line in II.7: “A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go. Let all of his complexion choose me so” (78-79). The point of the production was to facilitate a dialogue about difficult issues and yet it felt we were unfairly controlling the conversation by not giving voice to all forms of hatred in the play. I sent Garrett an email about this cut as I felt it was my responsibility as dramaturg to advocate for the text. Garrett later left the cut choice up to Bree Elrod, the actor who played Portia, who decided to keep “A gentle riddance,” but to otherwise abide by the initial cut.
ShowTalk Library Series

ShowTalks traditionally took place in the park two hours before the performance began, but Rapport envisioned a program that would travel to libraries in the area as a way to bring the play to patrons long before the play opened. In partnership with Kansas City, Missouri’s Mid-Continent Public Library (MCPL) system, Rapport developed a lecture series that would help address audience ignorance of Shakespeare’s plays. The summer 2014 production of *The Winter’s Tale* was the inaugural play for this lecture series, and I served as its inaugural lecturer. The series involved me traveling to a handful of MCPL locations to deliver a one-hour introductory talk on the play and its upcoming HASF summer production. Rapport, Garrett, and I created a list of objectives for the series, and I was given the freedom to design a lecture that achieved these educational and production-oriented goals. The success of the series led to Rapport and I discussing a potential series for *The Merchant of Venice*.

By winter of 2014, two lectures were scheduled at MCPL locations in North Independence and Oak Grove during March 2015 as lead-ups to the production’s opening. I adapted the SPARK lecture I gave at the Plaza Library back in February for both of these lectures. Because both ShowTalks took place after *The Merchant of Venice* had officially opened, I had the opportunity to share production photos and insight with those who attended. I had been unable to do so with the SPARK lecture, which was a gap both Rapport and I wanted to make sure I addressed. By this time, too, I had compiled my dramaturgy packet and written my program essay, two tasks which had given me more time with my research material and a better sense for how to convey this material to different audiences.
A total of four patrons attended the lectures: two at North Independence, who had attended *The Winter’s Tale* talk I gave at the same location the previous summer; and two at Oak Grove, one of whom had never before been to a HASF production. The lectures then turned into a more personal conversation prompted by slides in the PowerPoint. I would have enjoyed larger audiences, but I appreciated the opportunity to speak directly to patrons who had interesting questions about *The Merchant of Venice*. It was nice to see two familiar faces at North Independence. I asked if they attended *The Winter’s Tale* in the park last summer, and they said yes. They mentioned that my talk helped them better understand the production they saw, which gave me confidence in the lecture I was about to give them as well. I had an interesting conversation with the library staff member who assisted me at Oak Grove about the gulf in production between Shakespeare’s more well-known plays—*Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet*—and his lesser-known works, which tended to be his “problem” plays and later romances. The question period at Oak Grove returned to this conversation, and also explored why *The Merchant of Venice* is so rarely done in the Kansas City community.

The small audience size was indicative of the indoor production’s intimacy. The small turnout could be attributed to many factors, especially since this production opened at such a nontraditional time in the year. These lectures were also held at MCPL locations thirty to forty minutes east of downtown Kansas City. This distance already made for a substantial travel for a regular summer production. For a production happening in southern Johnson County, in a suburb twenty minutes south of downtown Kansas City, the patrons who attended these talks were not likely to make the now hour-long drive out to JCC or JCCC for the actual production.
While we hoped to gain new audience members through these outreach lectures, I wonder now whether HASF should have explored a program with the Johnson County Public Library system on the Kansas side for this particular production. The library systems in the Kansas City community were a vital outreach platform for many HASF productions. Since HASF brought a production into the Kansas community, it may be worth developing a relationship with the libraries on this side of the state line should HASF continue producing indoors and outside Southmoreland Park.

Audience Guide

Both Krista Blackwood and Emily Behrmann attended the first day of The Merchant of Venice rehearsals, and so both received the dramaturgy guide I had created for the company. After my dramaturgical presentation, I was approached by Blackwood and Behrmann with a request for this guide to be made available to audience members during the run of the show. I had never before had a theatre staff ask me for the wide-spread distribution of my materials. The only part of my research that had been circulated before were the essays I wrote for inclusion in the production programs. Blackwood and Behrmann were impressed with the depth and presentation of this information, however, and wanted me to share it with their audiences.

Modeled after the dramaturgy guide distributed on the first day of rehearsal, the audience guide was edited for distribution at the White Theatre and the Polsky Theatre as a supplement to the production’s playbill. I made a few changes to the document to make it more appropriate for an audience member who may have never before read about The Merchant of Venice. I also added a copyright notice to the front cover so that my work was
protected. Not included in the original version was the information on the back page. I took the opportunity to inform audiences about HASF’s educational programs and upcoming summer production of *King Lear*.

I sent the marketing departments at JCC and JCCC a PDF version of the guide so that the theatres could print the correct number of guides. Both theatres printed the guides on glossy paper and in color, which made the programs look polished and professional. HASF was not charged for the printing of these materials. On opening night at the White Theatre, I noticed that all the copies of the guide that had been made available that evening had been picked up by audience members. When I attended the performances at both JCC and JCCC, I saw numerous patrons reading the guide and overheard some discussing the guide’s contents. JCCC ran out of programs for the final performance, and so they started handing out my guides to all patrons as they walked into the theatre.

Though it was disheartening to see so many copies of the guide in the recycling bin at the end of that performance, it was remarkable to see such wide distribution of these materials made possible by request. When I was in the audience myself, it was encouraging to see audience members actually devouring the content provided to them. In a way, the guide became a personalized lobby display that audiences could take with them to their seats. Because the guide was made available free of charge, there was no barrier between audiences and the included information. Audiences also got a sneak peak at the information that helped inform choices made by the HASF company, as they received much of the same information that was given to the company on the very first day. The guide also helped spark conversation following the production, as it gave audiences an outline of potential topics and questions that the play addresses. During one of the talkbacks, a patron mentioned reading
about the expulsion of Jews in 1290 in the guide, and used the information provided to frame the question he asked the company. I hope that the success of this guide encourages these and other theatres—including HASF—to consider this and other ways of distributing material to audiences as a way to engage the audience as they come into a theatre space.
In his review of opening night, local theatre critic Robert Trussell labeled the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival (HASF) production of *The Merchant of Venice* an “unwieldy mess.” Trussell was quick to acknowledge that the play would be “a challenge for any theater company,”¹ but said little to commend HASF’s indoor attempt. The review suggested that *The Merchant of Venice* was just part of the HASF routine, another performance that aesthetically looked like it was taken straight out of Southmoreland Park. The review suggested that the challenges and the deep-rooted social problems of *The Merchant of Venice* were too large for the HASF company to tackle. Ultimately, the review suggested that the work done in White Theatre was a “hit-and-miss” comedy rather than a calculated interpretation of a play steeped in problem.

There is a level of protection that surrounds the production process, and it is jarring when one review seemingly dismantles the work of an entire company. Of course, Trussell was not involved in the production process to understand the choices made in meetings or to witness the characters as they evolved. Trussell’s job as critic was to review the play as it was staged by taking at face value the performances and design choices seen on stage that Thursday evening. What Trussell’s review failed to acknowledge was the production’s intent. This is an issue surrounding critical reviews not just of Kansas City productions, but of

1. Trussell, Robert. “‘Merchant’ is a hit-and-miss comedy with a serious theme.” *The Kansas City Star.* (March 20, 2015.)
productions done around the country, and it is a problem I hope someday to further explore. Trussell commented only on the production elements and the actors, failing to address what so much of his preview piece days before had brought to light: why HASF chose this play, and why HASF chose to produce this play now. Most critics ignore the audience response—what they say, what they laugh at, how much they applaud the show at the end—to instead focus on just the critic-production relationship. Doing so is not wrong. Doing so is conventional. However, doing so ignores a critical part of the production’s relationship to the community in which it is staged.

Regardless of the play’s success as a high-quality performance, *The Merchant of Venice* as a play was successful in igniting a powerful conversation around anti-Semitism and humanity’s treatment of “others.” To HASF’s knowledge, Trussell was not in attendance at the post-show talkback, and so he was not involved in the forty-minute conversation that grew out of the HASF production. I would encourage more critics to stay for talkbacks if the show they are reviewing offers one. Depending on the production, the talkback is an extension of the work done onstage. For *The Merchant of Venice*, the play began onstage but did not formally end until the conversation afterward came to a close. Should Trussell have stayed, he would have had the complete *The Merchant of Venice* experience. Trussell then would have had the power to continue that dialogue in his review.

My intent in this chapter is to discuss the necessity of audience engagement when staging *The Merchant of Venice*, as it provided an integral lens the HASF company used to frame the success of this production. To do so, I have chosen to structure my analysis of the

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production with answers to some of the most common questions asked during the audience talkbacks. I first will describe the talkback process and the nature of the HASF talkbacks. I then will identify key questions and comments from the seven talkbacks that best speak to production choices and critical social commentary.

**After-show Talkbacks**

Generally, HASF has had only to worry about outreach for the annual summer production. As previously discussed, two productions in the 2015 season provided additional opportunities for audience outreach. Incorporating outreach was particularly important given the controversial nature of the play and the difference in target audience demographic from the summer audiences. One of the reasons Sidonie Garrett, Krista Blackwood, and Emily Behrmann wanted to produce *The Merchant of Venice* was to ignite conversation surrounding anti-Semitism and other forms of hatred in the Kansas City community. In an interview for a local publication leading up to the opening of the show, Blackwood acknowledged that “[f]rom the Jewish perspective, this is a ‘problem play’…a play where the situation faced by the protagonist is put forward by the author as representative of a contemporary social problem.”³ So as to address some of these problems and bring the issues of Elizabethan England into conversation with twenty-first-century audiences, Blackwood mentioned that “[t]here will be after-show talks that will provide engagement and increase the educational tentacles”⁴ of the project. The production company, like those of so many other productions of *The Merchant of Venice*, understood that one of the biggest problems with this play is it

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4. Ibid.
being perceived as anti-Semitic. The talkbacks were a way to talk about that problem in a structured, community-conscious way that got “the corner conversations about anti-Semitism out in the open”\(^5\) and into the dialogue that continued outside of the theatre.

The talkbacks, as they were later referred to in promotional materials and pre-show curtain speeches, followed every one of the seven performances. *The Merchant of Venice* run marked the first time HASF had ever hosted talkbacks following any of HASF’s productions. These talkbacks were a vital part of audience outreach, as they were hosted on the largest scale of the strategies implemented. Early on in the planning process, Garrett wanted to invite either a local rabbi or someone affiliated with JCC or the broader Kansas City Jewish community to join the talkback panel, especially because neither Garrett or I—who would be present at all talkbacks—came from a Jewish background nor had a strong understanding of contemporary Jewish culture. Blackwood provided Rapport with a list of potential guests from JCC, and many of those Rapport contacted joined the talkbacks at both JCC and Johnson County Community College. Aside from these outside guests, a sign-up sheet was posted on the actors’ callboard, with six slots made available for each of the talkbacks. It was Rapport’s and my hope that we could limit the number of people on the stage to between six and eight in order to help keep commentary from the stage to a limit. Our intention was for the focus to be on giving those in the audience a platform for which to voice their opinions and ask questions.

The sign-up sheet went unused during the run because almost every actor joined the post-show discussion every evening. While not in line with the original structure of the

talkbacks, actors genuinely enjoyed the opportunity to hear responses from audience members. The fear that the conversation would be commandeered by the actors was largely unfounded, as the thirty to forty minutes of each talkback were filled primarily with the voices of those who saw the show.

“Can we anticipate indoor productions as now part of the HASF season?”

Before looking at some of the deeper questions that arose during the talkback, I wanted to start with first addressing the future of HASF. More than one audience member asked if *The Merchant of Venice* was the start of HASF producing more productions indoors and partnering with more organizations in the area. As she mentioned in response to the question above, Garrett hopes that the success of this collaboration will lead to future projects with other area organizations that fall outside HASF’s traditional summer performance calendar.

One audience member mentioned that seeing a performance in a smaller space indoors created a more intimate viewing experience by putting audiences closer to the work than they usually would be in Southmoreland Park. A typical HASF audience size on a nice summer evening can reach close to 1,500 patrons, who when amassed fill a seating space equivalent to the size of an American football field. In contrast, White Theatre sat a maximum of 500 patrons, and the Polsky Theatre sat 424 patrons. Rather than having to arrive early and claim a space on the lawn, all *The Merchant of Venice* patrons had their own seats—seats that, according to one patron I was near at JCCC, were much more comfortable than the seating options in the park.
Adding an additional production meant HASF reached an additional 2,370 attendees, many of whom had not before been to Southmoreland Park but who mentioned they would be visiting the park for *King Lear* in the summer of 2015.

“What prompted Jessica praying in Hebrew at the end of the play?”

This question relates to the opening and closing tableau scenes, which were the focus of conversation at one point during every single talkback session. Many audience members had never before seen a nonverbal depiction of the world of the play, especially of the world that governed *The Merchant of Venice*. The visuals in both of these moments stuck with audiences more than almost any other moment in the play. Much of this reason was because the tableaus gave a face to the anti-Semitic behavior referenced in the text. In the opening scene, Antonio spat on Shylock after they ran into each other in the street. Garrett told audiences that she took this visual straight from the text: “You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, and spit upon my Jewish gaberdine” (I.3, 108-109). Although Garrett created the moment, she rooted this artistic choice in the words given to us in Shakespeare’s script.

The closing tableau functioned in much the same way. The Duke ushered in two Christians and Shylock, and as they all knelt before the standard bearing the cross, the Duke taught Shylock how to make the sign of the cross. Rather than just hearing about Shylock’s conversion, Garrett wanted audiences to see the effects of Christianity on Shylock’s life, which also included his friend Tubal shunning Shylock shortly after. In this moment, audiences realized the full impact of Shylock’s plight: the loss of faith, the loss of community, and the loss of daughter.
Once Shylock left the stage, Jessica entered above and read the deed of gift left to her and Lorenzo upon Shylock’s death. In a moment of remorse, Jessica then took out a prayer shawl and spoke a few lines of a Hebrew prayer before the lights faded. This was Garrett’s way of ending Jessica’s story, as audiences saw a daughter who had run away mourn the loss of her father and the loss of her faith, too. Since Megan Herrera, the actress who played Jessica, was not miked, the actual Hebrew words were often lost to the audiences sitting farther back in the house. Many in the audience wanted to know what prayer Jessica was reciting.

Early on in the rehearsal process, Garrett asked me to find an appropriate Hebrew prayer of atonement that Jessica could whisper at the play’s end. The prayer I found was the prayer Herrera ended up using in that moment: the Ashamnu prayer, which was the confession liturgy from Yom Kippur, the Hebrew day of atonement. Though the prayer was often recited in a group during the High Holy Days, the Ashamnu prayer could also be a part of the Jew’s daily ritual6. The prayer was a confession of sin, which spoke to Jessica’s remorse of abandoning her faith and her father. Ending on Jessica’s prayer brought the question of religion and identity full-circle and avoided the traditional “happy” ending of the Venetian couples.

Almost all who attended the talkbacks thought these opening and closing tableaus were powerful reinforcements of the ideas and behaviors inherent in the play. One gentleman who attended the opening night performance believed the final moment weakened the play. Although it was a minority opinion, choreographer Tracy Terstriep understood the dissension

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and believed it helped facilitate a great conversation about the moment, which included Garrett’s explanation of the artistic choices she made in rehearsal.

“Was this play anti-Semitic during Shakespeare’s time?”

This question was asked in some form every evening. The question of the play’s anti-Semitism was one the company was well prepared for, especially when performing at the Jewish Community Center. Garrett made it clear from the beginning that we would not shy away from the anti-Semitism in the text. To do so would be ignoring a significant portion of what Shakespeare had written. Those who asked this question began by definitively stating the play was anti-Semitic in the twenty-first century; there seemed to be no question of this classification, which was echoed by many of the actors who entered this process believing the play was, and always has been, anti-Semitic. What audiences wanted to know was whether the play was anti-Semitic in Shakespeare’s day.

It was interesting that audiences assumed we had access to documents that reveal how Elizabethans responded to The Merchant of Venice. While we could not speak to sixteen-century reception, we could inform audiences of prevailing public opinion of the Jewish culture at the time, which may have shaped audience response to the play. Many audience members were surprised to learn of the Jews’ absence in England at the time Shakespeare presumably wrote The Merchant of Venice. There is little evidence to suggest that the man named William Shakespeare had any contact with members of the Jewish community, as the Jews who lived in England at the time were presumably conversos who had been forced to convert to Christianity following the Expulsion of the Jews in 1290. The execution of Dr. Rodrigo Lopez in 1594, a converso accused of conspiring to poison Queen Elizabeth, also
almost certainly colored public opinion of the Jews around the same time *The Merchant of Venice* received its first public performances. The history of the Jews’ presence in England was new information to many in attendance, but also to many of the cast members.

The fact that this question came up so often in the talkback sessions reinforces the ideas explored in chapter 1. Audiences assume that because we so often use the term “anti-Semitism” to talk about *The Merchant of Venice* today, it is the first term we think of when trying to understand the play in the context of its time. The talkbacks gave us an opportunity to remind audience members that the phrase “anti-Semitism” is a relatively new phrase in the English language. Given the sociopolitical environment of England at the time, the play would not have been considered anti-Semitic because audiences did not yet have a name for their prejudice and mistreatment of the Jewish culture. The behavior in the play was almost certainly not unlike the behavior of Christians at the time, and therefore would not have warranted classification as hateful or politically incorrect. The play’s content was a reflection, we believe, of England’s social atmosphere.

“Were the lines/laughs here at JCCC different from at JCC?”

I always caught the last ten minutes or so of the play every night when coming for the talkbacks, but I only watched the production with an audience twice. I saw the Saturday performance of *The Merchant of Venice* at the Jewish Community Center and then attended the closing performance at Johnson County Community College. Both experiences were remarkably different. JCC’s White Theatre was built as a community theatre, which made it the weaker production space for the play as it had poorer acoustics and a smaller proscenium. It also proved to be more technically challenging than the more professionally-equipped
space at JCCC. But the biggest difference between the JCC and JCCC performances were the audiences.

On the night I watched at JCC, the audience applauded every scene. When the music and lights shifted into the next scene, audiences wanted to recognize the work that had just been done, which made for a bit of a longer show but created almost a reverent atmosphere. There was a different level of appreciation among the audience at JCC for the play’s presence in their own community. I saw many men in yarmulkes. I heard discussion of the Jewish faith. I could overhear talk of those who identified as Jewish talking about their first time seeing this play in production. The audience laughed at the casket scenes with the Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Arragon, and they also enjoyed the ring exchange at the end of the play. However, there was less need for the audience to laugh because they were uncomfortable at the JCC than at the JCCC.

One moment in particular that received a very different response in the two theatres was II.9, when Salario and Salanio talk about Shylock learning his daughter Jessica has fled home with all of his wealth and jewels. Logan Black, who played Salanio, tried to make his depiction of Shylock as grotesque as possible when imitating Shylock’s reaction. Garrett did not want audiences to find what he did with his gross interpretation humorous; instead, Garrett believed it was one of the harshest examples of anti-Semitism in the play as it gave a visual to the most exaggerated stereotypes of the Jewish culture. There was little laughter during this moment at the JCC. At JCCC, however, there were small moments of laughter throughout Logan’s performance. As an audience member, it did not sound to me like it was laughter because what Logan was doing was funny. Instead, it felt like laughter that came out of a place of discomfort and seemed to be an automatic response to seeing such a heightened
caricature played out on stage. The same response happened during the trial scene, when Gratiano uses Shylock’s own words of praise to mock the Jew’s reversal in fortune. Matt Rapport, who played Gratiano was surprised at the laughs he and others received in the trial scene: “I was initially quite surprised…specifically for Gratiano, who says such ugly things to Shylock. I think those moments are an opportunity for the audience to release some tension, and also see the absurdity of that kind of blind hatred.”

Aside from the differences in laughter, there were also differences in other audible responses to more serious moments—like other parts of the trial scene—at the two spaces. The most noticeable moment was during the trial scene, when Antonio decrees that Shylock must “become a Christian” in order to keep his life. At the JCC, there was a sharp intake of breath at that moment; it felt like the air left the room upon Brand’s delivery of this line. At JCCC, the audience seemed to collectively sigh at this verdict, but clearly had a different investment in the significance of this moment. Actor Darren Kennedy, who played Salanio’s accomplice Salerio, was caught off-guard the first time he heard this response at JCC. It took him out of Salerio for a moment on stage. Kennedy found himself as a person briefly sympathizing with Shylock, abandoning the anti-Semitic character he had inhabited up until this point in the play. The audience response made the moment a powerful statement on religious intolerance that seemed to defy the play’s characters. It was a moment as an audience member I will carry with me for a long time.
“Playing characters of heightened intolerance, has that made you aware of more minor intolerance in your own life?”

Only a handful of times did the audience want to know about the effects this play had on the personal lives of those involved. It was one of the more relevant questions asked during the talkbacks, as it seemed to be a reflection of the small change in mindset I hope occurred among audience members. Asking this question signaled an awareness of this play’s ability to help identify even the smallest moments of intolerance in our own community. It became a charge for the company and for the community as a whole to carry *The Merchant of Venice* into our future work.

Once the production closed, I asked the company to think about how their perceptions of this play shifted from the start of the process through the end of the run. The responses I received pointed to the power this play had in changing the discourse surrounding the play. Almost every company member went into the play believing it was anti-Semitic. Almost every company member left the process with the belief that the play illuminated humanity and that rather than isolating the Jewish community, Shakespeare’s play was a veiled plea for tolerance. Sound designer Sarah Putts said:

Not everyone remembers that at the end of the day no matter the decisions we have made, rights or wrongs we have done, we are all human and we are to bound to make mistakes...For me, I see the world a little differently now, not in an extreme way but in a different light on how things are said and done, what favors you would ask of your friends and knowing when even though you deserve to get something sometimes the world and the rules will shift to deceive you.

All company responses point to *The Merchant of Venice* as being a complicated tale of humanity that is about much more than the mockery of one Jewish character. Bree Elrod, who played Portia, learned that “the antisemitism is only a part of the story this play is trying
to share.” Her female counterpart Nerissa, played by Kendra Keller, remarked that “the play is very complex, incredibly nuanced, [and] widely open to interpretation.” Again and again in audience response, we heard how relevant this play is to ongoing conversations about tolerance, bullying, identity, and family. It was remarkable to see a play over 400 years old impact contemporary audiences in such a profound way.

As I think about my own experience with this play, I am reminded of what one panelist said during the talkback: “Is [The Merchant of Venice] dangerous to present? No. It doesn’t give anyone license…it is in the silence that intolerance happens.”

“Have you found a lot of harshness about doing the production?”

There was little if any backlash from the community once The Merchant of Venice opened. The representatives from the Jewish Community Center said they had not heard anything dissenting or malicious from its members. In fact, most of the audience members who attended from Kansas City’s Jewish community were appreciative of the opportunity to get to see The Merchant of Venice in their own community, in what for many was their cultural “home” in the city. On reflecting back on the production, HASF’s partnership with the JCC was the only way this play could have been reintroduced to the Kansas City community after so long of a hiatus. One patron at the JCCC felt more comfortable seeing the production in the Polsky Theatre knowing that the JCC and the White Theatre endorsed the production. As the talkbacks emphasized, this was the right audience for the work.

What the company and I were amazed at were the comments of gratitude we received almost every night of the performance. Carol Burton attended one of the performances at the JCC and was pleased the production did not shy away from the anti-Semitism. A patron loyal
to HASF summer productions said she had been waiting for over 25 years for HASF to do this play—“thank you for having the courage to do it.” These comments made it clear that audiences did not understand why the play was so seldom done once they realized the potential the play had to facilitate such a meaningful dialogue. That was, after all, the intent behind bringing this production to the Kansas City community. In the wake of the tragedy just outside the White Theatre, in the face of ISIS, and in the aftermath of a major shift in political representation in D.C., the play initiated a conversation over sixty-five years in the making.

The comment that overwhelmingly resonated with almost all of the company’s members came from an older woman at the Jewish Community Center. This woman had been in Germany during Hitler’s reign of terror, and fled Germany because of the Nazis. “I am watching this play from an entirely different perspective,” she reminded us, “…to me, this play is the history of the Jews everywhere.” She then revealed that she had lost her entire family to the Holocaust. She came to the United States for refuge. She came to the production knowing it would upset her, but she came because she knew it was important for her, for the Jewish community, and for us not to forget.

“We are not a race.”

I end this chapter, and thus this thesis, with a comment rather than a question. On opening night, a younger audience member asked about the trial scene. She was curious whether Portia’s loophole in the pound of flesh concerning the spilling of “one drop of Christian blood” was in reference to the prevailing myth of blood libel as Jewish practice during Shakespeare’s time. This question came early on in the talkback, before most of the
actors were on stage. As the dramaturg and as the one on stage with the most knowledge of
the mythology surrounding the Jews in Elizabethan England, I answered her question. In my
response, I referred to the Jews as a Jewish race, as it was commonly believed in the
sixteenth century that Jews had an ancestry very different from those of the English
Christians. It was a phrase I saw often in books and articles written about the time, and so I
used the term when I spoke about the time, believing it was the proper way to do so.

It was a difficult question to have to answer so early on in the production’s run.
Already we were talking about an inaccurate depiction of the Jewish community as villains
who used Christian blood in rituals, a myth that had no basis for belief but was pervasive in
Shakespeare’s England all the same. I did my best to handle the question articulately and
quickly, but I knew I was letting the pressure of being politically correct fluster me.

At the end of the talkback session—which that evening lasted over forty minutes—
another woman from the audience approached the stage and called me over. She began by
saying she did not want to embarrass me in front of everyone, which is why she did not bring
up her comment during the larger talkback session. She then said, “The Jews are not a race.
We are a faith, we are a culture, we are a people, but we are not a race. Please take that word
out of your writing.” She continued to talk with me for over ten minutes about why the Jews
were not a race, in the hopes of addressing misrepresentation of the Jews in the dialogue that
came out of this production. It was an issue I could tell she was very passionate about, and it
was a mission I wanted to help carry out for her in the work that followed. I did ask if I could
explain my reasoning for using the term, and she understood that I did not speak from
ignorance, nor was I the only person who used that term in reference to the Jews. I was
simply her only point of contact and she hoped that I could help initiate change.
After speaking with her, I joined the company for an opening night toast with that conversation weighing heavy on my conscience. I had tried so hard to be politically correct, to educate myself and those involved in the production so that we would never appear insensitive or uninformed in our talkback sessions. I had spent so much time in my research, however, that I forgot about the real audience of this production. The work we were doing was for the people who came to see *The Merchant of Venice* over seven nights in March of 2015. We were doing this play for our community so that the community had an outlet for their thoughts, emotions, and concerns that grew out of seeing the live production. My interaction with this woman was a reminder of the humanity that surrounded this play. It was a call to be not only an advocate for the play and for the production, but for our audiences.
CONCLUSION

I have included the questions and comments of actual audience members in this thesis to preserve their voices in connection with The Merchant of Venice. While it is important to document the history of the play in Kansas City, I found it equally important to document the conversations inspired by this important moment in the play’s history. As theatre artists, we create our work in the hopes that someone in our community will engage with it. I hope this thesis serves as a testament to the engagement HASF had with those who encountered The Merchant of Venice in some way during the production’s limited run.

As this and other past productions have proven, staging The Merchant of Venice has the potential to ignite a relevant, timeless discussion of the play’s theme and to address issues many communities still face in a postwar era. While HASF may not be able to change audience perception of the play as anti-Semitic, HASF hopes that the audiences who came to see the play will help inspire a dialogue about the play as complex, diverse, and even humorous among their friends, families, and colleagues.

Dramaturgy plays an increasingly important role in shaping this conversation, as HASF’s outreach initiatives indicated. Without a knowledgeable advocate for the work, audience interaction with the company and with the production is limited only to the production they see on stage. I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to explore dramaturgy’s possibilities at HASF. What I have learned about dramaturgy I hope to share with Kansas City theatres as those who are interested in incorporating the dramaturg into their creative teams work to find a way to best bring dramaturgy to the table.
This production process has also illuminated the necessity of dramaturgy as an interdisciplinary profession. Dramaturgs have a responsibility to the production to which they are assigned, but they also have a responsibility to their community. Dramaturgs have the ability to be historians, researchers, educators, marketers, and ideal audience members. Finding the balance between these roles has been a challenging part in furthering my understanding of dramaturgy’s place in the American theatre. I look forward to the ongoing exploration of dramaturgy’s function in my post-graduate work.

Above all, this thesis was completed with the intention of preserving *The Merchant of Venice*’s Kansas City production history for the next generation of artists that bring the play to the Kansas City community. I write with hope that audiences will not have to wait another 65 years to see a professional production of the play in this community.
APPENDIX A:

1950 PROGRAM
THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS CITY PLAYHOUSE
presents
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

PLAYWRIGHT
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

GUEST ARTIST
CLARENCE DERWENT

GUEST DIRECTOR
BLEVINS DAVIS

1950
MAY 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
EIGHT-FIFTEEN O'CLOCK

The University of Kansas City Playhouse
Corner of Fifty-first Street and Holmes
THE PLAY

In preparing the script for the production, Blevins Davis, guest director, has arranged the play into three acts instead of five, added a Prologue, eliminated the Prince of Arragon, dove-tailed the Prince of Morocco's scenes, included a ballet at the opening of the second act to emphasize the Venetian carnival, and placed the accent of the drama on the injustice done to Shylock, maintaining the thesis "that the corruption of the Renaissance courts reached new and amazing heights when the Duke and the legal staff make a concerted effort to sidestep the law and gang up against Shylock.

"It is notable that while the bard, as a concession to the British prejudice of the day, had to make Antonio the nominal hero of the play, Shylock is the actual protagonist, to whom the chief interest of all the spectators is directed.

"Shakespeare had many similar plots upon which he may have built, ranging all the way from Giovanni Florentino's Il Pecorone and the Cursor Mundi, in which the creditor was a Jew, to the state trial of Dr. Rodrigo Lopez (1594), in which, as in the play, the enemy of Lopez bore the name Antonio.

"Although William Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice was played originally as low comedy, the character of Shylock loomed large in the imagination of such modern actors as Edmund Kean, Edwin Booth and Henry Irving, for they brought out the dignity and appeal of Shylock as the victim of the prejudice of his age, rather than as the would-be avenger of his own wrongs. Only the genius of Shakespeare could rise above his time and write that defense of the human quality of the Jew in the third act, when Shylock exclaims, 'Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, passions?' This is the logical sequence of the famous speech in the first act, when Shylock dwells upon the insults he is compelled to bear:

For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe;
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine.

"As one studies the speeches of Shylock, one feels how completely Shakespeare had become Shylock, so that he might more fully express what must have been the inmost secrets of his troubled soul. He towers above his enemies in the demonstration of his right to live and act—and suffer. He dominates the play, and even though balked of his revenge, he gains the sympathy of thinking heroes." — From the article on "Shakespeare" in The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia (edition, 1943)

THE GUEST ARTIST

Except for one performance some fifteen years ago in New York with Mrs. Richard Mansfield, it will be over thirty years since Clarence Derwent appeared in the role of Shylock. At that time he played the part in a tour of the State Theatres of Holland and Belgium, appearing in Amsterdam, Brussels, and Antwerp, among other cities.
Mr. Derwent started his career in England in the famous Shakespearean Company of Sir Frank Benson. During his five years with this company, which included five Stratford-on-Avon Festivals, Mr. Derwent appeared in every play of Shakespeare's except three. This was followed by two years in the first English Repertory Theatre, known as The Horniman Company in Manchester. Here he received a similar training in modern plays by Shaw, Galsworthy, Barrie, and other distinguished playwrights. With this experience behind him he felt ready to face London and spent several seasons there under the management of Sir Herbert Tree, Granville Barker, and others.

Coming to the United States he made his American debut with Grace George in Shaw's *Major Barbara*. He stayed two years with Miss George and since then has been a featured player on Broadway with such stars as Otis Skinner, Margaret Anglin, Walker Whiteside, Lionel Barrymore, Laurette Taylor, Helen Hayes, Frank Morgan, Katherine Cornell, Lunt and Fontaine, Ruth Gordon, Mary Martin . . .

Among the most successful productions in which he has appeared are *Topaze*, *The Late Christopher Bean*, *The Three Musketeers*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Lady Precious Stream*, *The Late Song*. His most recent appearance on Broadway was in support of Martita Hunt in *The Mad Woman of Chaillot*, which he left to go to Elsinore, Denmark, to appear as Polonius in the *Hamlet* production, sponsored by Blevins Davis and the State Department.

Mr. Derwent is also a director and has staged many plays in New York and London, including his own production of *The House of Usher*, in which he starred for eight months.

He is at present serving his second term of three years as President of Actors’ Equity Association. He is co-chairman with Moss Hart of the American Center of the International Theatre Institute and is a board member of the American National Theatre and Academy, commonly known as ANTA, which was granted a Congressional charter in 1935.

**THE GUEST DIRECTOR**

Fifteen years ago, almost at the beginning of the University itself, Blevins Davis served as Director of the University Theatre. After leaving Kansas City, he directed for six years the public service and educational programs of the National Broadcasting Company in New York. His "Great Plays Series," tracing the development of drama from the Greeks to the present period, were network features every Sunday for five years. His last radio assignments were those of commentator at the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth at Westminster Abbey in 1937, and, in 1947, at the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Lt. Philip Mountbatten.

Mr. Davis is a member of the Board of Directors of the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA). Last summer he produced *Hamlet* at the Shakespeare Festival at Elsinore Castle in Denmark. He is President of Ballet Theatre, seen in Kansas City last January, and will direct the summer and fall tour of the Ballet through ten countries in Europe.
THE PLAYERS

STEPHAN BLACK (the Duke) is the associate radio minister for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Independence, Missouri, and is heard regularly over KMBC. He has been a professional actor for many years in stock and repertory. He played in a New York experimental production of Trial of a Judge and The Playboy of the Western World, with the Roselyn Players in Long Island. He has directed the Westfield Players in New Jersey, the Resident Theatre in Kansas City, and the White Masque Players in Independence, Missouri.

DON QUINN (Morocco) has appeared in Taming of the Shrew, Juno and the Paycock, The Front Page and The Miser, all at Rockhurst College, Kansas City.

BARNARD GILFORD (Antonio) is a graduate of Rockhurst College, where he is now Instructor in English and Public Speaking and Director of Dramatics. His M.A. degree in Speech and Drama is from Catholic University of America. As actor or director he has been connected with such productions as Taming of the Shrew, The Front Page, Midsummer Night's Dream, Death Takes a Holiday and A Pair of Shoes, his own original play.

WRAY DAVIS (Bassanio) was seen at the Playhouse as Essex in support of Jane Cowl in Elizabeth the Queen. He played Laertes in Blevins Davis' Hamlet production in Elsinore, Denmark, last summer and worked in summer stock at Ridgefield, Connecticut. He is a graduate of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York and is at present working in television shows in Hollywood.

EDWARD LINCK (Gratiano) received his B.S. degree in Speech from Northwestern University and has a varied experience as actor in radio and community theatres such as K. C. Resident Theatre, Wilmette Illinois Community Theatre, N.B.C. University Theatre of the Air, C.B.S. Chicago, WDAF and KMBC, Kansas City.

WILLIAM BARNETT (Salanio) studied drama at Washington University, St. Louis, and has played Richard in Ab, Wilderness and The Boy in On Borrowed Time at the St. Louis Little Theatre as well as a part in the Resident Theatre production of The Bishop Misbehaves.

LAWRENCE ROBERTS (Salarino), a professional actor, has been connected with Clare Tree Major's Children's Theatre and was in the road company of The Student Prince. As a radio actor he worked for stations in Oklahoma and California as well as for the Armed Forces Radio Division.

FAUCETT DALLAM (Salerio), a freshman at the University of Kansas City, won recognition from the National Thespian Dramatic Society while a student at the William Chrisman High School in Independence, Missouri.

ROBERT FALLON (Lorenzo) received his Master's Degree in Dramatic Arts from the Pasadena Playhouse and had major roles in such shows as Happy Birthday, The Enemy, The Glass Menagerie, and Trojan Women. He also
appeared in the Pasadena Playhouse production of *Elizabeth the Queen* which starred Jane Cowl, and was directed by Blevins Davis. On his return to Hollywood he will start work for Paramount.

**STUBERT STEPHENS** (Tubal), a senior at the University of Kansas City, has been an outstanding member of the University Players, participating in the following Playhouse productions: *Elizabeth the Queen*, *Faust*, *The Circle of Chalk*, and *Fair Helen*.

**JOHN MANTLEY** (Launcelot Gobbo) is a Canadian and a graduate of the University of Toronto; his MFA degree is from the Pasadena Playhouse School where he played leads in *The Hasty Heart*, *The Jest*, and *The Late George Apley*. He has been both director and actor in various radio and legitimate stage productions in Toronto, Canada, and was Supervising Director of the Niagara Playhouse and School of Theatre. He played Cecil with Jane Cowl in the Pasadena Playhouse production of *Elizabeth the Queen*, and is currently working in both television and little theatre in California.

**STANLEY SIEGEL** (Old Gobbo), a graduate of the University of Kansas City (Liberal Arts and Law), is now a practicing lawyer in Kansas City and is one of the foremost of the University Players, having been prominently connected with many Playhouse productions: *Elizabeth the Queen*, *Faust*, and *The Circle of Chalk*.

**MARY JANE CHILES** (Portia), a graduate of the University of Kansas City, took her MFA degree in drama at Yale University, has been on the faculty of the drama department at Allegheny College, Pennsylvania, and for four seasons an actress with the Cain Park Theatre in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. One summer with the South Shore Players in Cohasset, Massachusetts, and work with the Community Theatre in Asheville, N. C., are included in her professional career. Her home is now St. Joseph, Missouri, where her husband, Dr. John R. McDaniel, is a practicing surgeon. She played leading roles in *State of the Union*, *Blythe Spirit*, *Claudia*, *The Philadelphia Story*, etc.

**LEA BLACK** (Nerissa) worked as a leading woman with various stock and repertory companies and in the road company of *Dinner at Eight*. For more than two years she wrote the script and played the leading role on the Wayside Chapel program over KMBC. In the White Masque Players' productions at Independence, Missouri, she played the Judith Anderson role of Mary in *Family Portrait*, and the Ingrid Bergman role of Joan in *Joan of Lorraine*.

**ELIZABETH SHEA** (Jessica) is a graduate of the University of Kansas City and has been connected with many University Players' productions. Last season she played Gretchen in the Playhouse production of *Faust*.

**JEAN DOERING, JULIA DENNIS, CAROL KRAFT, DIXIE SELMAN, KAY STARNES and CAROLINE von MAYRHAUSER** are students at the University of Kansas City and have participated in previous Playhouse productions in leading parts.

**ROBERT ARNOLD** (Leonardo), **MELVIN BISHOP** (Stephano), and **TOM BARR** (Balthazar) are University students with varied experience in previous Playhouse productions.
THE CAST

Duke of Venice .............................................. Stephan Black
Prince of Morocco, suitor of Portia ......................... Don Quinn
Antonio, a merchant of Venice ........................ Barnard Gilford
Bassanio .................................................... Wray Davis
Gratiano ..................................................... Edward Linck
Salanio ......................................................... William Barnett
Salanio ......................................................... Lawrence Roberts
Salerio ......................................................... Faucett Dallam
Lorenzo ......................................................... Robert Fallon

Shylock .......................................................... CLARENCE DERWENT
Tubal ............................................................. Stu bert Stephens
Launcelot Gobbo, a clown .................................. John Mantley
Old Gobbo, his father ........................................ Stanley Siegel
Leonardo, servant to Bassanio .............................. Robert Arnold
Balthazar ......................................................... Tom Barr
Stephano ......................................................... Melvin Bishop
Portia, a rich heiress ......................................... Mary Jane Chiles
Nerissa, her waiting-maid .................................... Lea Black
Jessica, daughter to Shylock ................................ Elizabeth Shea
Lucretia, court musician ...................................... Virginia French Mackie
A Court Singer ................................................ Robert Parke
Ladies-in-waiting to Portia .................................. Julia Dennis, Carol Kraft, Dixie Selman,
Caroline von Mayrhauser
Maids to Portia ................................................ Jean Doering, Kay Starnes
Citizens of Venice, an Abbé, Girls, Street Vendors, Court
Attendants, Masquers, Gondolier, Court Clerk ........ Iris Caldwell, June DeVall,
Margaret Forman, Margaret Rogers,
John Barth, John Hargadine,
Robert Lytle, Kenneth Shons
Blackamoors .................................................... Masters James, Raymond and Russell Irving

THE BALLET

Colombina ....................................................... Virginia Hurst
Brighella ........................................................ Reed Bondi
Il Capitano .................................................... Don McRoberts
Lauretta ........................................................ Donna Reich
Ortensia ......................................................... (alternating) Sylvia Lindsay and Frances Levitch
Dancers ......................................................... Roberta Beierfeld, Beverly Lind Garber,
Nancy Giesler, Peggy McCaskrie
Pages ............................................................. Nancy Acheltree, Kay Bassin

Choreography by Dorothy Perkins.

There will be a ten minute intermission after Act I and a twenty minute
intermission after Act II. Coffee and sandwiches will be available in the
Kangarooost (Student Union) just east of the Playhouse.
THE SCENES

Time of the play: Seventeenth Century.

PROLOGUE

ACT I:

SCENE I: A Street in Venice. Morning.
SCENE III: Venice. A Public Place. Late Afternoon.

Ten Minute Intermission Between Act I and II

ACT II:

SCENE I: Venice. The Night of the Carnival.
SCENE II: Venice. A Public Place. Noon.
(Curtain will be lowered to denote the passage of several hours.)
SCENE IV: Belmont. The Casket Chamber, Portia's House. Late Afternoon, the Next Day.

Twenty Minute Intermission Between Act II and Act III

ACT III:

SCENE I: Venice. A Court of Justice. Mid-day.

THE PRODUCTION STAFF

Guest Director for this Production...................... Blevins Davis
Director of the Playhouse.................................. John Newfield
Assistant Director........................................... John Mantley
Scene Designer.............................................. Henry Scott, Jr.
Costume Designer........................................... Murrel Groves
Musical Supervisor.............................................. Virginia French Mackie
Choreographer................................................... Dorothy Perkins
Secretary of the Playhouse.............................. Elizabeth Heline
Box Office Manager................................. George Evinger
General Stage Manager............................. Janet Loring
Stage Manager................................................. Willis Daily, Jr.
Assistant Stage Managers......................... Jean Doering, James Lehaney,
                                          Kay Starnes, Dixie Selman
Assistant to Costume Designer...................... Patricia George
Light Control............................................ Don Jennings, Beatrice Peet
Painting Assistant......................................... Donovan Lindgren
Props..................................................... Margery Springer, Mary McWhorter
Sound..................................................... James Soetaert
Stage Crew................................................. George Bingham, Morton Katz,
                                          Vincent Loscalzo, Kenneth Rucinski
Paint Crew................................................. Sue Hofstott, Mary McWhorter,
                                          Kenneth Rucinski, Charlene Weldon
House Manager............................................ Lloyd Briggs
THE MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

Mrs. Virginia French Mackie, who supervised the music for this production and plays the virginal, is a graduate of Wellesley College and Columbia University. She studied piano with Bruce Simonds at Yale and the late Tobias Matthay in London as well as theory and composition with Mlle. Nadia Boulanger in Paris. She taught at Smith College and the Yale Summer School, and has been, for the last five years, on the faculty of the University of Kansas City department of music.

The virginal is loaned through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Hart Benton. This is a modern instrument (made by John Challis of Ypsilanti, Michigan) but is constructed exactly in the manner of those used in the time of Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare. The strings are plucked with a small leather jack. The virginal is the English version of the harpsichord or the French clavecin.

The order of the music is as follows:

RECORDED MUSIC

Siciliano
Aria di Corte ...................................................... 16th Century Italian dances for the lute
Italiana .......................................................... orchestrated by Respighi

Ballet Music ........................................................... Scarlatti
Allegro from La Sultane ........................................... Scarlatti
Toccata .............................................................. Frescobaldi
Ballet Music from Orpheus ........................................ Gluck

MUSIC PLAYED ON THE VIRGINAL by Virginia French Mackie

Aria ................................................................. Frescobaldi
Pavane .............................................................. Luis Milan
Passepied ............................................................ Campra
The Toye ............................................................. Farnaby
The King's Hunt ..................................................... John Bull
Soeur Monique ..................................................... Couperin
Forlane .............................................................. Lully
Moresque ............................................................ Monteverdi
Branle ............................................................... Gervaise
Gagliarda ............................................................. Galilei

SONGS

"Tell Me Where Is Fancy Bred" ................................ Arne
Sung by Robert Parke

"Good Day, Dear Heart" ........................................... di Lasso
Madrigal sung by Ardis Brown, Melvin Bishop, Robert Parke, Margery Springer
THE SETTINGS AND COSTUMES

The settings for this production were designed by Henry Scott, Jr., chairman of the University department of art, who also designed the Playhouse productions of *Die Fledermaus*, *The Mistress of the Inn*, *Circle of Chalk*, and *Fair Helen*. Mr. Scott is a graduate of Harvard University and taught art at Harvard and at the Universities of Rochester, Pittsburgh and Amherst College, where he designed several productions for the Amherst Players and also taught scene design.

Sculptural details designed and executed by Mrs. Edward Keith.

Set construction for this production was executed by Richard McGehee, with Dr. John Newfield as technical supervisor.

The costumes were especially designed for this production by Murrel Groves (Mrs. Dinwiddie Groves). She has designed the costumes for the following Playhouse productions: *Faust*, *Circle of Chalk*, and *Fair Helen*. Costuming plays began as a hobby with Mrs. Groves back in 1946 when she was asked to design costumes for the Junior League's first Cowtown Carnival presented during American Royal week. Since then she has designed costumes for the Junior League Children's Theatre in addition to her work for the Playhouse. Mrs. Groves has been assisted by Miss Patricia George and by the Mesdames G. Christy, M. E. Gott, E. Klecker and R. H. Reeves.

THE DIRECTOR OF THE PLAYHOUSE

Dr. John Newfield began his professional studies in Vienna with Max Reinhardt. Before the war he was associated as a director-producer with theatres in Austria, Italy, Czechoslovakia, the Royal Opera House in Rome, and the Salzburg Opera Guild. For two years he directed the Opera Guild’s tours in South America and the United States, which included performances in Kansas City of Mozart's *Cosi Fan Tutte* and Monteverdi’s *Coronation of Poppea* (1938).

From 1941 to 1944 he was production manager for the Dramatic Workshop of the New School for Social Research in New York. The following two years he was stage director of the New York City Center Opera Company whose production of Strauss's *Gypsy Baron* he brought to Kansas City in February, 1945. Since September, 1948, he has been the Director of the University of Kansas City Playhouse.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the loan of furniture the Playhouse is indebted to Mrs. Henry L. McCune and Miss Lucy Drage.
THE PLAYHOUSE BUILDING AND PATIO

Originally an auditorium at Camp Crowder, the Playhouse building came to the University through the liquidation program of the War Assets Administration. The exterior remains much as it was, but the interior has been completely re-designed by Hardy and Schumacher, architects, and the University's theatre staff. A half basement has been added to the original building. The building was erected by the Inter-State Construction Company.

The auditorium seats 504 persons. The working stage is 98' x 34'; the proscenium is 28' wide and 18' high; and the stage equipment includes 28 sets of lines (more than a mile of cable) for drops, curtains, and borders; a modern switchboard and complete lighting facilities with centralized control; and storage rooms for costumes, scenery, and moveable stage equipment. The stage settings for plays requiring changes are moved on wagons. The orchestra pit floor may be raised to auditorium or stage level. In addition, the Playhouse contains two large dressing rooms, five offices, a “Green Room” which also serves as the Lounge at intermissions, classrooms, and a laboratory theatre, 38' x 24', for rehearsals and small productions. The basement contains construction workshops, including a “paint slot” for moving scenery up and down while being painted. The actual cost of the Playhouse is approximately $300,000, but since much of the construction is salvaged material which was contributed by the Government, the building's reproduction cost would be much greater.

The patio, designed by W. Rickert Fillmore, is constructed of Arkansas stone. The fireplace is 16' high, 22' wide, and 5' thick. The burner part is 7' high, 4' deep, and sufficiently wide to take a 9' log.

THE BENTON MURALS

The ten large panel paintings, depicting early chapters in American history, were presented to the University in 1945 by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Hart Benton in honor of their son, Thomas P. Benton, who was a student before entering military service that year. They were painted by Mr. Benton between the years 1919-1924, marking the beginning of his career as a muralist, and they were originally planned as a complete history in painting of the United States, a project Mr. Benton had conceived while serving in the Navy during the first world war. They represent Mr. Benton's revolt against the abstractionist art of his contemporaries and a return to representative subject-matter dealing with American life.

Only twelve of the projected panels were completed and six others partially finished. The larger project was abandoned when Mr. Benton incorporated the original plans in the later murals commissioned for the New School for Social Research in New York (1930), for the Whitney Museum (1932), for the state of Indiana (1933), and for the state of Missouri (1935). The panels were originally exhibited by the Architectural League of New York in 1924, which later awarded Mr. Benton the Gold Medal for distinguished achievement as a muralist.
THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS CITY
1950 SUMMER SESSION

FIRST TERM: JUNE 7-JULY 19  SECOND TERM: JULY 24-AUG. 30

WRITERS' CONFERENCE (June 7-17)
MURIEL FULLER—editor, author of Junior Literary Guild selections—short story leader.
MARGOT JOHNSON—market counselor.
MELVILLE CANE—poet, authors' attorney.
CHARLES ANGOFF—managing editor, American Mercury—non-fiction leader.
VINCENT McHUGH—novel leader.
Workshop Groups—Individual Consultation.

MUSIC INSTITUTE (June 8-25)
Master classes, private instruction, and coaching in voice, piano, organ, and violin.

CARL WEINRICH (Church of the Holy Communion, New York) has been classed with Dupre and Schweitzer as one of the three greatest living interpreters of Bach's organ music.

ROMAN Totenberg (Mannes) has appeared in America, Europe, South America as violin soloist with major orchestras.

COENRAAD Bos (Juilliard) has coached and accompanied such singers as Farrar, Caruso, and Traubel.

CARL FRIEDBERG (Juilliard) has taught Grainger, Leginska, Ney, Schnitzer, and many other distinguished pianists.

MACK HARRELL (baritone, Metropolitan Opera) is a noted teacher and lieder singer.

CONCERTS by Friedberg, Bos, Harrell, Totenberg, Weinrich (June 11, 15, 18, 22, and 25).

HUMAN RELATIONS WORKSHOP (June 7-July 19)
"Dynamics of Inter-Personal and Inter-Group Relations" will be the topic discussed in this six-hour graduate course.

The leaders are Mr. Arthur Gilbert of the Kansas City Public Schools, Mr. Leo Shapiro of the staff of the Anti-Defamation League, and Miss Miriam Hayden of the Center of Human Relations, New York University, as well as professors from the University departments of Psychology, Sociology, Education, Economics, Philosophy and History acting as staff lecturers and consultants.

OTHER VISITING PROFESSORS

DR. SAMUEL HENRY EVERETT (June 8-21) Professor of Education, City College, N. Y.: "Student Needs and Interests."

DR. HAROLD E. MOORE (June 7-July 19) Sup't., Kansas City Public Schools: "School Administration" and "School Laws and Finance."

DR. GEORGE A. KELLY (July 3-15) Director, Psychology Clinic, Ohio State University: "New Trends in Educational Psychology."

OTHER SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Library Science Courses (Both terms.)
University Demonstration School (June 7-July 12.)
Laboratory Pre-School (June 7-July 19.)
Theater Workshop Courses (June 7-July 19.)

For information concerning these courses and for the complete Liberal Arts and professional curriculums offered in the Summer Session, address the Director of Admissions, University of Kansas City, Kansas City 4, Missouri.
EXITS—SMOKING—PARKING STATION

The Playhouse is fully equipped with an automatic sprinkler system. There are five exits from the auditorium—all clearly marked and lighted.

Smoking is not permitted in any part of the building except the Green Room, where ash trays are provided. Please do not throw any lighted material on the floor.

A free parking station is located directly northeast of the Playhouse. Entrance is from Rockhill Road. A short walk from the station leads directly to the Playhouse entrance.
APPENDIX B:

1986 PROGRAM
The Merchant of Venice
by William Shakespeare

Directed by Toni Dorfman

Set and Costumes Designed by Huang Qu-zhi
Lighting Designed by Johan Godwaldt
Sound Designed by Bob Marland
Original Score Composed by Marvin Sanders
Choreography by Jennifer Martin
Technical Direction by Douglas C. Taylor
Stage Management by Lisa K. Anderson

THE CAST
(in order of appearance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Actor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>Dan Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salerio</td>
<td>Nelson C. Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solanio</td>
<td>Dennis Murphy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassanio</td>
<td>Robert G. Brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorenzo</td>
<td>Martin English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratiano</td>
<td>Daniel Eisenhower*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portia</td>
<td>Carol B. Burton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nerissa</td>
<td>Jan Rogge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucetta</td>
<td>Christi A. Clenlons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shylock</td>
<td>Peter Sander*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prince of Morocco</td>
<td>Christopher Glaze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launcelot Gobbo</td>
<td>William G. Warren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Gobbo</td>
<td>David Brisco Luby*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Sally Frontman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prince of Arragon</td>
<td>Kent Cozad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubal</td>
<td>Christopher Glaze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jailer</td>
<td>Kent Cozad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Duke of Venice</td>
<td>Martin English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes actors appearing courtesy of Actors Equity Association

The action of the play occurs in Venice and Belmont in the year 1597.

There will be a ten-minute intermission between Acts I and II.
PRODUCTION STAFF

Assistant to the Director .......................................................... David Brisco Luby
Assistant Stage Managers .......................................................... Lisa Koch,
                                                               Nelson Williams, Alisa Carmack
Voice and Dialect Coach .......................................................... Lisbeth Roman
Shop Foreman .............................................................................. Chuck Saunders
Set Construction Crew .............................................................. Johan Godwaldt, David
                                                               Tidwell, Mark McCarthy,
Scenic Artist ................................................................................. Dan Robbins, Li Qu-zhi
Master Electrician ......................................................................... Joe Clapper
Light Board Operator ..................................................................... Shelley Bradshaw
Properties Coordinators ............................................................. Debbie Morgan, Antonia Sheller
Properties Construction .............................................................. Janice Grant, Brent Puglis
Properties Managers ................................................................. April Fletcher, Carolyn Rathbun
Costume Shop Coordinator ........................................................ Gayla Voss
Wardrobe Managers ................................................................. Kristine Hasenfranz, Bethanie Muel
Costume Construction Crew ...................................................... Carol Tucker, Gayla Voss,
                                                                 Vincent Scassellati, Gwen Walters,
                                                                 Huang Qu-zhi, Sheila Hoyt
Sound Operator .............................................................................. Sean Hametz
House Managers ............................................................................. Michael Goodyear, Steve Booton
Ushers .............................................................................................. Amy Southerland, Christine McCurdy

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Director, Academic Theater .......................................................... Dr. Jacques Burdick
Production Manager, University Theaters ..................................... Ronald Schaeffer
Faculty Advisor, Scene Design ..................................................... John Ezell
Faculty Advisor, Costume Design ................................................ Vincent Scassellati
Faculty Advisor, Lighting Design .................................................. Joseph Appelt
Faculty Advisor, Sound Design .................................................... Tom Mardikes

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The director acknowledges with deep gratitude the help of Jacques Burdick, Morris Carnovsky, James
Mobberly and the UMKC Conservatory of Music. Gustav Sperber and, as ever, Will Valk.
DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Reflecting the antisemitic sentiments of sixteenth-century London, Shakespeare might indeed have written an antisemitic play. In 1594, the Portuguese doctor Lopez, a Jew, was convicted of high treason and executed. Marlowe's play, The Jew of Malta (c. 1590), with its scurrilous portrayal of the Jewish villain Barabas, was very popular. Jews were executed mostly in absentia, however, since they had been banned from England in 1290. But the stereotype of the Jew — devilish, exotic, wanton — haunted English culture. It is a measure of Shakespeare's empathy and artistry that The Merchant of Venice (c. 1597) is peopled not by heroes and villains but by human beings. Shylock's strength, weakness, and need for love are as precisely evoked as Antonio's, as Bassanio's, as Portia's.

In his provocative study, The Stranger in Shakespeare, Leslie Fiedler names different kinds of outsiders: the woman, the Jew, the homosexual, the Moor. In this play, at some time or other, every character becomes an outsider.

To confront one's own capacity to hate is to recognize that hatred is ubiquitous. The mutual loneliness of the hater and the hated, of the lover and the beloved, is also ubiquitous. "Which is the merchant here? And which the Jew?" asks Portia in the courtroom. In our own era, after a Holocaust (and before another?), it is not possible to ignore two interlocking hypotheses: We are all merchants. We are all Jews.

—Toni Dorfman

The Merchant of Venice and Its Times

"The Merchant of Venice . . . is unusual in that hardly any relationship between two characters is left as solely emotional or erotic; all have some explicit economic or legal analogue."

— Lars Engle

On Jews and usury:

"The Venetian economy may, especially in the late sixteenth century, have suffered seriously from the failure to maintain a system of banks prepared to advance credit to entrepreneurs or to engage in commerce themselves. . . ." — Brian Pullan

"In a society which operates certain prohibitions, which regards as unlawful usury and even money-handling — the source of so many fortunes not only in trade — it is surely the social machinery itself which reserves to 'outsiders' such unpleasant but socially essential tasks. . . . Jews are as necessary in a country as bakers," declared the Venetian patrician Marino Sanudo, indignant at the idea of prohibitive measures against them."

— Fernand Braudel

"The truth was that usury was practised by the whole of society: princes, the rich, merchants, the humble, and even the Church — by a society that tried to conceal the forbidden practice, feared on it but resorted to it, disapproved of those who handled it, but tolerated them." — Fernand Braudel

"The devil is always the Other. . . ." — Fernand Braudel

"It is a curious coincidence that Shakespeare happens to give both of Antonio's closest friends names which have a strong Jewish flavor. The nearest actual parallel to Bassanio is Bassetano, which, in modern Italy, is considered characteristic. Similarly, Gratiano, under the form Graziano, happens to be a typically Italian Jewish name."

— Cecil Roth

On Venetian society:

". . . the grass at Venice called themselves nobles; more important than that, there were no genuine aristocrats, no grands to dispute their claims. The Doge, elected for life, saw his powers diminish as his magnificence increased. Real power lay in the merchant nobility as a group. . . . there was no appeal to the people." — Denny Hay

"Of particular interest . . . was the political explanation some French writers advanced for the moral permissiveness regularly attributed, with peculiar fascination, to Venice. Bodin saw it as a device on the part of the rulers of Venice to manage the populace: to make them more mild and pliable, they gave them full scope and liberty to all sorts of pleasures." — William Bouwsma

"Poria's music is an art which, more than rhetoric, approximates the supreme intellectual music of the spheres."

— Maurice Hunt

On the loss of ships:

". . . Venice had the doubtful privilege of being everyone's target. . . . Of the 250 to 300 ships plundered [from 1592 to 1609] which can be marked on a chart, we are reasonably certain of the identity of the aggressor in 90 cases. Modern corsairs carried off 94 prizes, northern (Dutch and English) 24, Spanish 22. So Christian and Moslem piracy roughly balances out. To set beside these 250 to 300 captures, there are 350 shipwrecks, so man was almost as destructive as the elements."

— Fernand Braudel
APPENDIX C:

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS
The Merchant of Venice
Produced by Heart of America Shakespeare Festival
APPENDIX D:
TEACHING GUIDE
MATERIALS INCLUDED:

- Historical Context
- Lesson Plan
- Timeline
- Discussion Questions
- Plot Summary
- Resources & Links

For use in conjunction with the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival’s production of The Merchant of Venice

Presented at the Jewish Community Center’s White Theatre
March 19, 21, and 22, 2015

Presented at Performing Arts Series at Johnson County Community College’s Polsky Theatre
March 26-29, 2015

To schedule a workshop or to receive more information, contact:
Matthew Rapport, Director of Education
mrappot@kcshakes.org
816-531-7728
Plot Summary: The Merchant of Venice

Setting: Belmont & Venice, both located in Italy
Portia and Nerissa live in Belmont, a fictitious city on Italy's mainland
Antonio, Bassanio, and Shylock live in Venice, a large port city

Antonio, a Venetian merchant, complains of melancholy; his friend Bassanio asks for a loan of 3,000 ducats to travel to Belmont to court the beautiful heiress, Portia. Antonio agrees, but says that he must borrow the money from one of the city's moneylenders because all of his ships are at sea.

Antonio and Bassanio approach Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, to ask for a loan. Shylock and Antonio hate each other, but Antonio agrees to the terms of Shylock's contract so that he can take out the loan for Bassanio. The contract states that Antonio must forfeit a pound of flesh to Shylock if he cannot pay in time. Shylock's daughter Jessica elopes with the Christian gentleman Lorenzo. Bassanio, accompanied by friend Gratiano, departs for Belmont.

Meanwhile Portia is also melancholy because, according to the terms of her father's will, she must marry whichever man chooses the 'casket' (box), out of a choice of gold, silver, or lead, which contains her portrait. If a suitor chooses incorrectly, he is condemned to remain unmarried forever.

The Prince of Morocco comes to Belmont and chooses the wrong casket; meanwhile, in Venice, rumors swirl that Antonio's ships have been lost at sea. The Prince of Arragon also chooses the wrong casket, and then Bassanio arrives at Portia's house. He and Portia fall in love, and he makes the correct choice (the lead casket), but their happiness (and that of Gratiano, who will marry Portia's lady-in-waiting, Nerissa) is interrupted by news that Antonio has lost all his money and failed to pay the debt. Because Antonio cannot repay him, Shylock demands his pound of flesh.

In Venice, Antonio and Shylock's contract is brought to trial. When Bassanio returns to Venice, Portia disguises herself as a man and secretly follows him. The Duke of Venice presides over the trial. When Shylock refuses to accept Bassanio's offer to repay the loan, the Duke announces that he has called on a legal expert to settle the matter. A letter arrives from the expert, saying that he has sent one of his brightest pupils to pass judgment; the pupil is Portia who arrives dressed as a young male lawyer. She reads the contract and declares that Shylock is entitled to the flesh. The moneylender praises her but Portia then adds that the contract says nothing about shedding blood, so Shylock must cut the flesh without making Antonio bleed or else be arrested for taking a Christian's blood.

Shylock angrily retreats and says that he will take Bassanio’s money, but Portia denies him this recourse, declaring that he has conspired against a Venetian citizen's life and thus his own life is forfeit. However, the court shows mercy - Shylock may keep half his wealth, but must convert to Christianity.

Not knowing that 'he' is his wife, Bassanio is persuaded to give the 'young lawyer' a ring that Portia had given him in return for the lawyer saving Antonio’s life. Gratiano also gives Nerissa (as Portia's 'clerk') a ring that she had given him, and the two women return to Belmont. When the men get back, they are accused of having given the rings to other women. Eventually however, Portia reveals the deception, news arrives that some of Antonio's ships have been recovered, and the company celebrates happily.
Chapter Three: Baradés?

Similar in which ways are they different? What if anything makes Shylock a more sympathetic
lover. Familial bonds and the Jewish faith, in which ways are the two play's treatment of those themes
Hate stories. Lesson: 4 sphere. How do students discuss the above and Shakespeare's treatment of money.

How students respond. The few of money and the character of Baradés. After reading of seeing

Questions to Consider:

contrast to Shylock

Christopher Marlowe's The Jew of Malta (1588) the play's villain Baradés provides a stark
depiction of the heat of Malta's The Jew of Malta.

The Jew of Malta

Cost of being Jewish in the Jewish. Why the has seen on stage - which most likely included the villainous

1621: The First Folio is published, which includes The Merchant of Venice.

A BRIEF TIMELINE

1600: The Merchant of Venice is published in quarto form
1605: The Merchant of Venice performed at the start of King
1598: The Merchant of Venice is entered in the Register of the Stationers' Company to receive
THE PLAY TODAY

Productions of The Merchant of Venice in the late 20th and early 21st century must address the concerns surrounding the play. Post-WWII, it is impossible to stage this play without first acknowledging the anti-Semitism inherent in the text. The way in which Antonio, Bassanio, and Gratiano talk to and about Shylock is anti-Semitic because of the comments that specifically target Shylock’s race. However, racism and prejudice exist elsewhere in the play’s text, making it imperative that productions facilitate conversations about all of the play’s themes.

Consider the themes listed below. Have students locate passages or key scenes in which these themes are most evident. How does Shakespeare handle these themes? What does Shakespeare do with his language to add multidimensionality to each of his characters?

- Prejudice and social injustice
- Revenge and forgiveness
- Money and usury
- Love and fate
- Justice and the law
- Bonds of friendship

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:
What do you think made the play successful during Shakespeare’s time?
What do you believe makes it so controversial today?
Why is it important that this play be staged today?
Who does the play speak to most?

There’s no question that The Merchant of Venice is a challenging play. It may be irrelevant whether or not Shakespeare was anti-Semitic but it’s clear that many of the play’s characters are. If students of the play choose to merely mouth the words of anti-Semitic characters without looking at the broader message of the play, hatred may well be the result. But, there’s plenty within the text to point out the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of those who hate Jews. And, by exposing the flaws of the Christian characters, Shakespeare questions the so-called superiority of Christian teachings and consequently, disapproves the stereotypes about Jews…The Merchant of Venice continues to provoke us to examine our own hatreds and prejudices, either as victims or oppressors. It also pushes us to acknowledge how each of us has participated in the creation of a world continuing war and violence.

Susan Hundertmark
An Invitation to Dialogue
Source: Stratford Festival
DID YOU KNOW?

The last professional-level production of *The Merchant of Venice* seen in *Kansas City* was in May 1950. It ran for six days at University of Kansas City (now University of Missouri-Kansas City). The production featured Clarence Derwent as Shylock and was directed by former president of the University Playhouse Blevins Davis.

Blevins Davis grew up in Independence, Missouri. The State Historical Society of Missouri in Newcomb Hall on the UMKC campus houses the Blevins Davis Collection, which includes 23 scrapbooks of material and his original plays.

Clarence Derwent later published *The Derwent Story*, in which he devotes a chapter to his time in Kansas City. A copy is available for rental from the UMKC library.

Derwent once served as president of Actors’ Equity Association. He was an internationally acclaimed actor, acting on stages in both the United Kingdom and the United States.

Derwent credits Sir Henry Irving as his inspiration in portraying Shylock. Irving opened the Lyceum Theatre in 1878, where he staged *The Merchant of Venice*. Irving later died in 1905 while on tour with *The Merchant of Venice*; it is believed he played the role of Shylock over 1,000 times.

The “turning point” in our contemporary view of Shylock is associated with Edmund Kean’s performance in 1814. Rather than sporting the traditional red hair used when playing a Jewish character, he donned a black wig. He then played the character not as a villain but as a victim.

Aside from the 1950 production, the only other recent staging of *The Merchant of Venice* in Kansas City was on Spencer Stage in 1986. The production was part of UMKC’s academic season.

Al Pacino played Shylock in the 2004 film version. The film was directed by Michael Radford. Other noteworthy Shylocks include Laurence Olivier, Henry Goodman, and Patrick Stewart.

“The merchant of Venice” actually refers to Antonio, not Shylock. Because of the attention Shylock receives as a central character, many mistake him for the merchant. Have your students research the difference between merchants and usurers.

In the First Folio, the play is included among the comedies, which has raised some questions among scholars and artists—in our day, the treatment of Shylock doesn’t seem comedic, but rather much more tragic. It’s also been listed as a “historie” as with its first quarto publication.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:
Consider what makes a Shakespeare play a comedy, a tragedy, and a romance. How does the play conform to comedy? To tragedy? To romance? To all? Which characters are comedic? Which are more tragic?
QUESTIONs TO CONSIDER:

Prejudice
Social Injustice
Intolerance
Anti-Semitism
Compromising Choices
Excluded

and meanings of each:

Before analyzing the character of Shylock, first look at the following terms and discuss their definitions:

Prejudice: Unfair, partial or skewed thinking.
Social Injustice: Sale of a product of the period he was living in and indoctrinated some of those isms he had suffered.

Alphonso’s character is a product of the period he was living in and indoctrinated some of those isms he had suffered.

Although Shakespeare is a writer of his own time, he was living in a period when he indoctrinated some of the isms he had suffered.

In the Merchant of Venice, Shylock is a Jew whose behavior is looked down upon by the other characters in the play. Shylock’s behavior towards the character of the Jew, and his actions make him evident in this play.

In the Merchant of Venice, Shylock is a Jew whose behavior is looked down upon by the other characters in the play. Shylock’s behavior towards the character of the Jew, and his actions make him evident in this play.
NEXT STEPS:
- Discuss the terms above in the context of The Merchant of Venice. What further meaning does the play give to these terms? How does the play explore these issues of inequality – both through Shylock and through its Christian characters?
- Discuss what drives Shylock’s actions in the play. Explore the motives behind his actions, using evidence from the play as support.
- Analyze Shylock’s speech from Act III, Scene I (below). What does it say about the common humanity between Jews and Christians? What parts of this speech are still relevant today?

SHYLOCK:
To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million: laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what’s his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humiliation? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

Act III, Scene I

An extended version of this lesson can be found in the Stratford Festival’s 2013 Study Guide for The Merchant of Venice, which can be accessed at http://www.stratfordfestival.ca/
RESOURCES

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE


Access The Complete Works of Shakespeare, including The Merchant of Venice, online: shakespeare.mit.edu

SHAKESPEARE IN PRINT


ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Folger Shakespeare Library’s Online Resources for Teachers
Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s 2010 Study Guide for The Merchant of Venice
PBS Masterpiece Theatre: The Merchant of Venice (2001)
Stratford Festival 2013’s Study Guide for The Merchant of Venice

CONNECT WITH THE FESTIVAL

Website: www.kcshakes.org
Twitter: @kcshakes
Facebook: Heart of America Shakespeare Festival
APPENDIX E:

AUDIENCE GUIDE
AN AUDIENCE GUIDE TO
THE MERCHANT OF VENECE
PRODUCED BY HEART OF AMERICA SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
DIRECTED BY SIDONIE GARRETT

Presented at
JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER
White Theatre
March 19, 21 & 22, 2015

JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
PERFORMING ARTS SERIES
Polsky Theatre
March 26-29, 2015

Audience Guide Compiled by Alyson Germainer, Production Dramaturg
Heart of America Shakespeare Festival
© 2015
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Special thanks to the State Historical Society of Missouri, the UMKC University Archives, and Miller Nichols Library for their assistance in conducting the research that aided in the creation of this guide.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A BRIEF TIMELINE:

1598: *The Merchant of Venice* is entered in the Stationers’ Registrar

1600: *The Merchant of Venice* is published in quarto form

1605: The first recorded performance of *The Merchant of Venice* takes place at the court of King James I

1623: The First Folio is published, which includes *The Merchant of Venice*. Little has changed from the quarto form when the text is included in the folio edition.

The exact date of *The Merchant of Venice* has always been contested by scholars and artists alike. Most agree that Shakespeare must have written the play around 1597 - which puts some distance between it and both Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* and the execution of Dr. Lopez in 1594. More information on Dr. Lopez can be found on pg. 6.

While not definitive source material, other folklore, poetry, and plays share similarities with *The Merchant of Venice*’s plot and characters. Even if Shakespeare was not writing in response to these works, it is speculated that Shakespeare was most likely aware of the following:

- The fourteenth-century collection *Il Pecorone* ("The Simpleton"), which has “the story of a pound of flesh, the story of a rich lady and her suitors, and the story of a ring which a lover swears to cherish forever and then finds himself forced to give away." (Gross)

- The Latin *Gesta Romanorum* and Masuccio Salernitano’s *Il Novellino*, which feature the casket riddle.

- Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* (1588), more information on which can be found on pg. 8 of this guide.
The most excellent
Historie of the Merchant
of Venice.

With the extreme crueltie of Shylocke the Jewe
towards the sayd Merchant, in cutting a just pound
of his flesh and the obtaining of Portia
by the choyse of three
chests.

As it hath beene divers times acted by the Lord
Chamberlain & his Servants.

Written by William Shakespeare.

AT LONDON,
Printed by I. R. for Thomas Heyes,
and are to be sold in Paules Church-yard, at the
signe of the Greene Dragon.
1600.

COVER OF QUARTO, 1600.

"The most excellent historie of the Merchant of Venice. With
extreme crueltie of Shylocke the Jewe towards the sayd Merchant,
in cutting a just pound of his flesh and obtaining of
Portia by the choice of three chests."
Jews in England: Before & After 1290

Prior to 1290, about 2000 Jews lived in England; after, only about 200 remained in secret. The Merchant of Venice grew out of and was written during a time of the Christians’ great mistrust of the Jews and those who practiced the Jewish faith. Historical events contributing to this mentality:

- The Statute of the Jewry in 1275, which forbade Jews from being moneylenders and mandated the wearing of a yellow badge. Usury was the Jews’ primary source of income because it was the only profession they were allowed to practice. Christians weren’t allowed to lend money with interest because doing so was seen—and was still seen in Shakespeare’s time—as a “grievous sin.”

- The 1290 Expulsion of Jews from England under Edward I. The expulsion followed the 1275 statute, as many Jews did not obey the restrictions outlined. The tension between the Christians and Jews was also coming to a head, especially when it came to debt collection. Records show Edward I may have been in debt, and expelling the Jews meant their wealth and property became his. Jews would not be legally readmitted to the country until 1655.

- The execution of Dr. Rodrigo Lopez, Queen Elizabeth I’s physician. Lopez was one of the few remaining Jews who had publicly converted to Christianity. Many believed he still practiced in secret, especially when he was accused of attempting to poison the Queen in 1593. Lopez was hanged in 1594.

- Rumors of blood libel, a practice wrongly associated with Jews because it was never witnessed. Christians started spreading the rumor that Jews murdered Christians in order to use their blood and flesh for religious rituals, such as Passover. The Torah forbids the eating and drinking of any form of blood.
Rodrigo Lopez was a "converso," a Jew who had been forced to convert to Christianity, yet who still practiced in secret. He made a living as a successful physician, and was eventually appointed physician-in-chief to Queen Elizabeth in 1586.

Yet in 1593, rumors surfaced that Lopez was conspiring to poison the Queen. Lopez pleaded innocence, but was brought to trial.

Despite there being no evidence to prove the accusation, Lopez was hanged, drawn, and quartered – the penalty for high treason – in June 1594.
"The Jew as poisoner, often the Jewish physician as poisoner...was a recurrent figure in the demonology of medieval Europe. During the Black Death, accusations of poisoning the water supply provoked massacres that cost innumerable Jewish lives."

THE JEW OF MALTA

Written by Shakespeare's contemporary Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta* dates back to the late 1580s. Scholars have placed its initial publication date around 1588-1590 - about ten years before *The Merchant of Venice* enters public record.

*The Jew of Malta* received its first performance in 1592, but enjoyed a lengthy revival following Dr. Lopez's execution.

Barabas, The Jew of Malta, stands in contrast to Shakespeare's Shylock in many ways. Barabas, whose name would have immediately associated him with betrayal and Christ's death in the eyes of Elizabethan Christians, was deliberately written to be a villainous caricature of the Jewish race.

It is speculated that Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice* as a partial response to Marlowe's play - especially given the differences in treatment of the central Jewish character.

Of note:
- Marlowe's Barabas owns many "argosies" (merchant ships) abroad - Shakespeare gives this trait to Antonio
- Barabas says himself that he poisons wells and murders children - reinforcing the stereotype being spread about Jews at this time.
- *The Jew of Malta* begins with a prologue that aligns Barabas with Machiavelli - a despised Italian poet Shakespeare evokes in *Richard III*, but not in *The Merchant of Venice*. 
The towns identified on the map are all places where Jews lived before the expulsion of 1290. Those in italics are locations that expelled Jews from the town prior to the mass expulsion - those towns included Newcastle, Derby, Leicester, Dury, St. Edmund, and Southampton.

*From the unedited full-text 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia*
The original Rialto bridge was built in 1181, spanning the Grand Canal in Venice. The painting above is of the wooden bridge built in the fifteenth century. The permanent stone bridge, seen below, was later built in the sixteenth century and was designed by Antonio da Ponte and Antonio Contino.
In 1516, the Republic of Venice mandated that all Jews could only live in Venetian foundries, or "ghetos" - the origin of the contemporary word "ghetto." The first ghetto established was the Ghetto Nuovo (New Ghetto), followed by the Ghetto Vecchio (Old Ghetto).

Major Jewish Communities ("Nations") in the Ghettos:

1. The German: the oldest of the three communities, this was the only community permitted to practice moneylending. Shylock is associated with this community because he is a usurer, but also because he mentions having business dealings in Frankfurt. Not all members of the community were immigrants, but this information ties Shylock specifically to Germany.

2. The Levantine: primarily seafaring merchants, specializing in foreign trade

3. The Ponentine, or Western: made up principally of Spanish Jews and Marranos (Portuguese), and were also merchants

Beginning in 1394, Venetian Jews had to physically distinguish themselves from the Christians. It started with a yellow badge, then later changed to a yellow hat. By 1500, Venetian Jews wore red hats - which is the hat traditionally seen on Shylock in production.

Photo: "The Sacrifice of the Jews" (1483)
THE POUND OF FLESH

Some believe Shakespeare invented the “pound of flesh” wager, but there were many instances of the phrase’s use documented before *The Merchant of Venice*. A few of the ones cited in history—some more credible than others, but no less interesting—are listed below:

Medieval Latin stories of the thirteenth century, with the creditor being a serf and the debtor a young nobleman. At this time, there was no connection to the Jews.

†

The anonymous Middle English poem *Cursor Mundi*, or “The Course of the World,” which is the first appearance of the motif in English. The poem features a Christian unable to pay his debt back to a Jew.

†

Middle Age and Renaissance plays, like *Moschus*

†

The belief that Jews practiced black magic, and obtained blood through the collection of flesh to be used for “supernatural purposes.”

†

Middle Age belief that Jews literally feasted on Christians. Some charges were brought against the Jews, but no proof ever was found to convict those brought to trial.

Others speculate that the wager was *ridiculous* on purpose. Even though Shylock and Antonio hated one another, there may have been little doubt that Antonio could repay Shylock given the amount of wealth he had in his argosies. When it came time to collect the wager, Shylock merely sought out the interest payment that was specified in the contract.

PHOTO: “SHYLOCK WITH BASSANIO AND ANTONIO”, (1884) FELIX DARLEY
A GUIDE TO ANTONIOS

Some scholars believe Shakespeare named Antonio after Portuguese Pretender Don Antonio, who was loosely connected to the conspiracy surrounding Rodrigo Lopez. But Antonio was a common Italian name, and Shakespeare used the name often in other works.

For more Shakespeare-related cartoons, including the 3-pane plot summaries for all of Shakespeare’s plays, visit goodticklebrain.com.
Did you know?
Sir Herbert Tree was one of Clarence Derwent’s managers when he toured in England as an actor.
CLARENCE DERWENT, 1950

Photo: The Derwent Story, 1953.
THE CAST

Duke of Venice ........................................ Stephen Mack
Prince of Morocco, uncle of Portia ........................................................... Don Quinn
Antonio, a merchant of Venice ................................................................. Bernard Gilford
Bassanio ..................................................... William Barnett
Gonzago ....................................................... Edward Locke
Salarino ....................................................... Wray Davis
Salarina ....................................................... Lawrence Roberts
Salario ....................................................... Raymond Gower
Lorenzo ...................................................... Robert Tully
Shylock .................................................... CLARENCE DERWENT
Tubal ......................................................... Stuart Stephens
Leonato, the Duke's brother ................................................................. John Munsie
Old Goldio, his father .............................................................................. Stanley Siegel
Leonato, servant to Bassanio ................................................................. Robert Arnold
Balthazar ....................................................... Robert Barnett
Stephano ....................................................... Melvin Bishop
Portia, a rich heiress ................................................................................. Mary Jane Chiles
Nerissa, her writing-maid ............................................................................ Lila Black
Jessica, daughter to Shylock ..................................................................... Elizabeth Shear
Lucetta, court musician ................................................................................. Virginia French Mackie
A Court Singer ............................................................................................. Robert Packe
Lady-in-waiting to Portia ............................................................................ John Dennen, Carol Kraft, Ella Schuman, Caroline von Mayrhauser

Maids to Portia ....................................................................................... John Dennen, Ray Stennett, Virginia French Mackie
Citizens of Venice, an Abbé, Gulls, Street Vendors, Court Attendants, Musicians, Gentlemen, Court Clerk, Sisters, Officers, Messengers, etc. ..................................................................................................................................................

THE BALLET

Colombina ....................................................... Virginia French Mackie
Beppo ................................................................. Reed Bondi
Il Capitano ................................................................................... Dan McRae
Lanzevit ...................................................................................... Danae Relph
Orestes (alternating) ................................................................. Sylvia Lindner and Frances Levy
Dancers ............................................................................................ Rosalind Bevanoff, Beverly Ann Carter, Nancy Gielde, Peggy McCordie

Paysan .................................................................................................. Nancy Atherton, Kay Bascom

Choreography by Dorothy Perkins.

There will be a ten minute intermission after Act I and a twenty minute intermission after Act II. Coffee and sandwiches will be available in the Kuglewic (Student Union) just east of the Playhouse.

CAST LIST FOR 1950 PRODUCTION OF

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE, UNIVERSITY PLAYHOUSE
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS CITY
Directed by Blevins Davis
1986 UMKC Production

Antonio: Dan Day
Salerio: Nelson Williams
Solanio: Dennis Murphy
Bassanio: Robert Brand
Lorenzo/Duke of Venice: Martin English
Gratiano: Daniel Eisenhower
Portia: Carol B. Burton
Nerissa: Jan Rogge
Lucetta: Christi Clemons
Shylock: Peter Sander
Prince of Morocco/Tubal: Chris Glaze
Launcelot Gobbo: William Warren
Old Gobbo: David Luby
Jessica: Sally Frontman
Prince of Arragon/Jailer: Kent Cozad

Directed by Tori Dorfman
Presented on Spencer Stage
UMKC Campus

Cast List courtesy of Carol Burton, who still lives and works in the Kansas City area.

Production photos and more information are housed at the University Archives in the Miller Nichols Library University of Missouri-Kansas City
FOR FURTHER READING

ON CLARENCE DERWENT’S LIFE & CAREER:

ON DIRECTOR’S INSIGHT FOR THE 1986 PRODUCTION:

ON SHYLOCK THROUGH THE AGES:

ON TEACHING THE MERCHANT OF VENICE:

ON THE JEWS IN ENGLAND:

ON THE EXPULSION OF 1290:

ON THE PLAY’S FUNCTION DURING WORLD WAR II:

ON ICONIC PERFORMANCES (VIDEO):
Patrick Stewart and David Suchet interviews for Playing Shakespeare, Season 1 Episode 4, 1984.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT:
The Folger Shakespeare Library and its extensive archives
PBS’s Masterpiece Theatre 2001 production information
Harold Clarke Goddard’s The Meaning of Shakespeare (1951)
Heart of America Shakespeare Festival offers year-round educational programming and acting classes for students and community members of all ages.

Camp Shakespeare programs offer a unique summer arts adventure for young people ages 5 - 18. The Festival is now taking enrollment for Summer 2015 camps.

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Contact Director of Education Matt Rapport
(816) 581-7728 or mrapport@kcshakes.org

Join us in Southmoreland Park this summer as we celebrate the Festival's 23rd season with a FREE production of King Lear. Performances are at 8 P.M. Tuesdays - Sundays,
June 16 - July 5, 2015

To learn more about the Festival, including how you can make a donation to support our programming, visit:
www.kcshakes.org
APPENDIX F:

DRAMATURGY PROGRAM ESSAY
In Perspective: The Merchant of Venice

When Clarence Derwent played Shylock in Kansas City in 1950, he spread the word in the community that he was following in the footsteps of the actors who chose to play Shylock not as a selfish villain but as a multidimensional human being. Sir Henry Irving, Edmund Kean, and Laurence Olivier all brought evidence of humanity to Shylock's plight, illuminating the necessity of sympathy when staging The Merchant of Venice. Derwent asked those who were understandably wary of the play to come and see the production before they judged it.

The Merchant of Venice's production history in Kansas City is brief. Guest artists staged the play in 1950 at the University Playhouse, when the University of Missouri-Kansas City was known as the University of Kansas City. Blevins Davis, former Director of the University Theatre and a native of Independence, Missouri, returned to guest-direct. Derwent, then president of Actors' Equity Association and an acclaimed actor of the British and American stages, played Shylock. The production ran for only six days.

Derwent went on to write a memoir, The Derwent Story (1953), about his life in the professional theatre. He devotes chapter 33, "Again Shylock," to his time in Kansas City while performing in The Merchant of Venice. The chapter is no more than four pages, a brief account of the play's journey to the Kansas City stage. Evident in Derwent's retelling is the humanity both performed and witnessed in the days surrounding the May 1950 production. When he accepted the role of Shylock, Derwent was aware of the conversation that has always surrounded the problematic play that is The Merchant of Venice.

Like many of those involved in bringing a production of The Merchant of Venice to their communities, Derwent expected the challenges he and the rest of the creative team faced. What Derwent did not expect were the visits he received to his dressing room following the performances. Those who had once voiced concern delivered instead messages of appreciation. They had, Derwent recalls, realized "for the first time that the play was...a powerful plea for tolerance."

Scholars and artists alike are careful not to deny the problems and the questions inherent in Shakespeare's original text. Such acknowledgement has grown increasingly important in the wake of World War II as hate, and the crimes committed because of it, still haunt our global society. To ignore the racial and religious tensions in the play would be partially robbing The Merchant of Venice of its meaning, but would also be failing to recognize the effects of current events on our perception of the play today.
As every production of a Shakespearean play reiterates, Shakespeare mastered writing about the human experience. Humanity, too, is at the heart of *The Merchant of Venice*. The play was written partly in response to Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*, a play that deliberately demonizes Judaism and those who practice it. Rather than giving an accomplice to Marlowe’s villain Barabas, Shakespeare created a foil in his Shylock, a usurer who pursues the justice rightly owed him.

*The Merchant of Venice* is Shylock’s story, but so too is it a story of Portia, Antonio, Bassanio, and Jessica. Through their gains and losses, Shakespeare gives his audiences a lesson in justice and a statement on intolerance. Shylock is not a perfect character, but neither are those who ridicule him. Despite the differences between the two religions, despite the division between Belmont and Venice, it was and still is unjust for anyone to have to concede who they are for the sake of what others want them to become.

Listed as both a comedy and a history, interpreted as both a romance and a tragedy, *The Merchant of Venice* dates between 1594 and 1598. When published in the First Folio of 1623, it was included among the comedies. The “comedy” comes not so much from Shylock’s pursuit of justice as it does from the lovers’ quests for and quarrels with each other. It is heard in the wit of a daughter whose romantic fate is not up to her but to her father and a set of caskets. It comes through in another of Shakespeare’s clown characters. While the play is about tolerance and acceptance, it is also about love. It is about the bonds of friendship. It is about the flaws and favors of not one but many characters, and through the eyes of both Belmont and Venice, shows how our flaws can cloud our perception of others.

Alyson Germinder
Production Dramaturg

live up
APPENDIX G:

COMPANY INFORMATION
The Merchant of Venice

Cast

The settings are Venice, Belmont, and a court of justice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Actor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antonio, a merchant of Venice</td>
<td>Robert Gibby Brand*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shylock, successful Jewish moneylender of Venice</td>
<td>Gary Neal Johnson*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portia, a wealthy marriageable young woman</td>
<td>Bree Elrod*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassanio, suitor to Portia, friend who borrows money from Antonio</td>
<td>Jake Walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratiano, friend to Antonio and Bassanio</td>
<td>Matthew Rapport*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salanio, friend to Antonio and Bassanio</td>
<td>Logan Black*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salerio, friend to Antonio and Bassanio</td>
<td>Darren Kennedy*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of Arragon, suitor to Portia</td>
<td>Scott Cordes*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nerissa, handmaiden to Portia</td>
<td>Kendra Keller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince of Morocco, suitor to Portia</td>
<td>Ty Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launcelot Gobbo, a clown and servant to Shylock</td>
<td>Andy Perkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorenzo, suitor to Jessica, Shylock’s daughter</td>
<td>Ben Auxier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica, Shylock’s daughter</td>
<td>Megan Herrera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tubal, friend to Shylock</td>
<td>Nathan Bovos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Venice, judge of the court case between Shylock and Antonio</td>
<td>Scott Cordes*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balthazar, servant to Portia</td>
<td>Nathan Bovos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jailer/Clerk, assistant to Duke of Venice</td>
<td>Ty Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonardo, servant to Antonio</td>
<td>Nathan Bovos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Creative Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Sidonie Garrett</td>
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<td>Scenic Designer</td>
<td>Gene Emerson Friedman</td>
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<td>Ward Everhart</td>
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<td>Dramaturg</td>
<td>Alyson Germinder</td>
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<td>Production Stage Manager</td>
<td>Jinni Pike*</td>
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<td>Assistant Stage Manager</td>
<td>Luci Kersting</td>
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<td>Chloe Robbins-Anderson</td>
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<td>Erin Ray</td>
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<td>Jon Fulton Adams</td>
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<td>Technical Director</td>
<td>Alex Perry</td>
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*Member of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

The Heart of America Shakespeare Festival operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.
Ben Auxier (Lorenzo) is a Kansas City native who works frequently with the Festival and other local venues such as the Living Room Theatre and Theatre for Young America. He is also a producer/teacher/performer with the KC Improv Company in Westport.

Logan Black (Salanio) Logan is very excited to be a part of this production and to be back with the Festival. His previous festival shows include Antony & Cleopatra and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Locally Logan has been seen at the KC Rep (Our Town/A Christmas Carol), the Unicorn Theatre (Seminar), KCAT (Journey’s End) and the Coterie Theatre (Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer). His regional credits include The Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Riverside Theatre, Pioneer Theatre, Oak Park Festival Theatre and Okoboji Summer Theatre. He holds an MFA in acting from UMKC and is a proud member of Actors Equity Association. www.logan-black.com

Nathan Bovos (Tuba! Balthasar, Antonio’s Servant) is proud to be a part of his third show with HASF. Nathan was previously seen as the Gaoler in this summer’s production of The Winter’s Tale, and as Lord Amiens in As You Like It. Nathan was most recently seen as Henri in MTH’s production of South Pacific. Past favorite roles include Beadle Bamford, Sweeney Todd (MTH), David, Tinyard Hill (Goodspeed Musicals), Billy Flynn, Chicago, (The White Theater). Nathan is also proud to be starting his fourth year as a teaching artist for HASF and working with the wonderful Conservatory and Team Shakespeare, the Festival’s apprentice acting troupe. Huge thanks to Sidonie and Matt for all the wonderful opportunities you have given me.

Robert Gibby Brand (Antonio) is delighted to be appearing in this exciting project. He has worked with the HASF on sixteen previous productions. Favorite roles include Feste in Twelfth Night, Lucio in Measure for Measure and Antigonus in last summer’s The Winter’s Tale. A familiar face on local stages, he has also appeared with KC Rep, the Lyric Opera, the New Theatre, Unicorn Theatre, Quality Hill Playhouse, Spinning Tree Theatre and the Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre.
Ty Carter (Prince of Morocco, Clerk) is proud to perform in his first HASF production, The Merchant of Venice. He graduated from Stephen's College, and has since been a puppeteer at the Coterie Theatre in Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, and King Tut for the King Tut exhibit at Union Station. He'd like to thank those who have been supporting him from the beginning, and especially his family and friends, the cast, crew, and director. Enjoy the show!

*Scott Cordes (Duke of Venice, Prince of Arragon) Mr. Cordes is proud to be a part of this first indoor production of the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival. A native of Nebraska, Scott has been a professional actor and director in Kansas City for more than 25 years. His KC acting credits include work with KCRep (Flea in Her Ear, Death of a Salesman, A Christmas Carol, House of Blue Leaves), Unicorn Theatre (The Exonerated, Take Me Out, Sideman), The Coterie Theatre (Jekyll and Hyde), New Theatre (The Foreigner, Harvey, Biloxi Blues), Actor's Theatre of KC (Hamlet/RE:G are Dead, Glengarry Glen Ross, Tally and Sons, Fifth of July, Good People), The Living Room (Blackbird), MET (Time of Your Life, Kimberly Akimbo, Rainmaker), American Heartland (Deathtrap, Moonlight and Magnolias) and for HASF (The Winter's Tale, Hamlet, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, The Tempest, As You Like It), just to name a few. A member of all three acting unions, Scott also works in commercials and film. For more, visit www.scottcordes.com

*Bree Elrod (Portia) Off- Broadway: My Name is Rachel Corrie (dir. Alan Rickman, Minetta Lane Theatre), Jump! Realism(The Kirk Theatre). Regional: The School For Wives( Two River Theatre) directed by Mark Wing-Davey, A Christmas Carol(Kansas City Rep.)Graved Water with Jason Sudeikis(Kansas City Improv Festival), Rock'n Roll(Huntington Theatre, Boston/A.C.T, San Francisco), Angels in America, Part I and II(Boston TheatreWorks, Elliott Norton Award Nominee, IRNE Award Nominee), Candida (Malibu Theatre), The Two Noble Kinsmen, Antony and Cleopatra(Old Globe Theatre, San Diego Theatre Critic's Circle Award Winner for Best Actress). Our Town, The Merry Wives of Windsor(Southwest Shakespeare). The Marriage of Bette and Boo, A Lie of the Mind, Measure for Measure, Ah Wilderness(NYU). Film: Shutter Island(dir. Martin Scorsese), Dark Feed, Dysopticon. She has appeared in several productions with New York City's 52nd Street Project. Bree has an M.F.A from N.Y.U.'s Graduate Acting Program.
The Merchant of Venice

About the Cast

Megan Herrera (Jessica) has truly enjoyed working on Romeo and Juliet To Go! this year with the Festival and is thrilled to be making her Heart of America Shakespeare stage debut in The Merchant of Venice. She has been onstage with the Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Unicorn Theatre, Musical Theater Heritage, The Living Room, Egads! Theatre, and the Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre. Favorite credits include Lyndria in The Death of Cupid and Sue Snell in Carrie the Musical. She has a BFA in Theatre Arts from Stephens College. Up next, Fiddler on the Roof with Spinning Tree Theatre. Special thanks to her family and friends for their incredible support. www.meganherrera.com

*Gary Neal Johnson (Shylock) has been a part of Kansas City’s professional theater community for more than 40 years, appearing here and elsewhere in more than 200 productions. Among his previous roles with Heart of America Shakespeare Festival are Lear in King Lear, Oberon in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and Capulet in Romeo and Juliet. Mr. Johnson has performed for all of Kansas City’s fine Equity theaters and, in November, the Kansas City Repertory Theatre celebrated his 100th production with them. Roles at KC Rep include Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman, Harry Truman in Give ‘Em Hell, Harry, Pizarro in Royal Hunt of the Sun, and Ebenezer Scrooge in A Christmas Carol. In San Francisco, Mr. Johnson was honored in 2005 with the Dean Goodman Award for Best Supporting Actor for his work in The Voysey Inheritance at the American Conservatory Theatre.

Kendra Keller (Nerissa) is returning to the stage after a hiatus taken while she lived in England for a few years (though she did perform speeches and sonnets for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-Upon-Avon). Kendra is in the cast of the Festival’s touring production of Romeo & Juliet To Go! She’s grateful for the opportunity to work with such a respected company and is thrilled to be part of this historic production.
About the Cast

*Darren Kennedy (Salerio) Darren was born and raised in Colorado, spent time in Chicago doing theatre and commercial work, and relocated from Los Angeles where he performed in theatre, film and television. TV credits include CSI, Without a Trace, Just Shoot Me, Gilmore Girls, Pretender and a recurring role on General Hospital as Dr. O'Donnell. Film credits include Breakdown, Sam Steele and the Junior Detective agency with M. Emmett Walsh and Luke Perry and Rook. Theatre credits include Once in a Lifetime and Welcome to the Moon with Theatre Neo in LA, Busybody at the New Theatre with Jamie Farr, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, Mauritius, the world premiere of Green Whales and The Mother***er with the Hat at the Unicorn Theatre and Perfect Wedding and I'll Be Back before Midnight at the American Heartland Theatre.

Andy Perkins (Launcelot Gobbo) Andy is thrilled to be clowning around once again with HASF. A graduate of Avila University (BFA) and Purdue University (MFA), he has appeared in previous Festival shows, As You Like It (William), The Winter’s Tale (Clown), and Romeo and Juliet TO GO! (Romeo). You may have also seen him perform around Kansas City at the Fishtank Performance Studio, The Living Room, the MET, TYA, the Fringe Festival, as well as the KC Improv Company. Recently, he spent four months touring Argentina, Chile, and Mexico with ArtSpot in a show meant to help students learn English called The Tower. He would like to thank Sidonie for this opportunity, the cast and crew for all their hard work, and his parents for their continued support.

*Matthew Rapport (Gratiano) Matt is delighted to be a part of this historic milestone for the Festival. Recent Heart of America Shakespeare Festival credits include Autolycus in The Winter’s Tale, Oliver in As You Like It, and Bottom in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Matt has also appeared locally at the Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Unicorn Theatre, The New Theatre, The Coterie, Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre, Theatre For Young America, and others. In addition to acting, Matt is a busy teaching artist as well as the Director of Education for HASF.

Jake Walker (Bassanio) is a Kansas City native and has been a professional actor here since 2000! In that time he has worked for the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival for six seasons, Unicorn Theatre, Coterie Theatre, Kansas City Rep, Theatre for Young America, The Fishtank and Stone Lion Puppets. Mr. Walker lived in Denver for five years, working as an actor at the Denver Center Theatre Company, Curious Theatre, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Arvada Center and Creede Repertory Theatre. Jake lives in midtown and is so grateful to be a part of this wonderful community.
Ward Everhart (Lighting Designer) Ward has been HASF's Production Manager and Lighting Designer for 22 seasons. Ward's history with the Festival began in 1991, prior to the first season of HASF, when he was Lighting Designer for the Festival Gala, starring Kevin Kline. With Marcus Abbot, he was the Festival's Co-Production Manager and Lighting Designer for the first season and the two of them served as co-production designers for Shakespeare Festival of St. Louis in 2001's inaugural season and their production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Kansas City audiences are familiar with Ward's Production/Lighting design work for the Folly Theatre, Friends of Chamber Music, the Harriman Arts Program at William Jewell College, Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey, Heart of America Youth Ballet, Lyric Opera of Kansas City's education touring productions of *Charlotte's Web* and the world premiere of *The Giver* and the Kansas City Symphony's *Magic of Christmas*.

Gene Emerson Friedman (Resident Scenic Designer) is pleased to return for his 19th year with the Festival. His previous Festival designs include *The Winter's Tale*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The TAMING of the Shrew*, *Measure for Measure*, *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2012 and *As You Like It*. Gene teaches scenic design and the history of design at UMKC where he is an Associate Professor. His other design credits include Arizona Theater Company, Second City and Noble Fool Theatre Company of Chicago, Historic Ford's Theatre in Washington D.C., Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Great Lakes Theatre Festival, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Stages-Saint Louis, and Kansas City Repertory Theatre. Currently, Gene serves as Architectural Historian of the *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (1629) and as curator of the *Casa de Santo Niño* in Zuni, New Mexico. *Stages of Conversion; The Santero Shrines of Gene Emerson Friedman* debuted at Thornhill Gallery in January 2014, with an exhibition of 320 assemblage shrines and two full-scale altar installations.
Sidonie Garrett (Director) is the Executive Artistic Director of the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival where she directed Twelfth Night, The Taming of the Shrew, Hamlet (awarded Best Play by Pitch Magazine), Julius Caesar, Much Ado About Nothing, King Henry V, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, The Merry Wives of Windsor, King Richard III, Macbeth, our two-show repertory productions of Antony and Cleopatra and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, As You Like It and last season’s The Winter’s Tale. Prior to joining the Festival, Sidonie worked as a freelance director. Her experience working with new plays took her to New York City, where she directed the off-off Broadway production of Thanatos. Sidonie also assisted directed the off-Broadway premiere of the interactive Aunt Chooch’s Birthday Party. Locally, she directed I’ll Eat You Last, Other Desert Cities, The Motherf**cker With the Hat, Time Stands Still, In the Next Room: the vibrator play, Faith Healer, Rising Water, Iron Kisses, Retreat from Moscow, Omnium Gatherum, the world premiere of Thanatos, SubUrbia, The Waiting Room, Desert Holiday, Spinning Into Butter, SantaLand Diaries and co-directed Light/Damage with Cynthia Levin, at the Unicorn Theatre. At The Coterie she directed The Macbeth Project: In Spite of Thunder, the U.S. premiere of After Juliet, Mr. A’s Amazing Maze Plays, Little House on the Prairie, Little House by the Shores of Silver Lake, Of Mice and Men, Playing for Time and co-directed The Hobbit. Sidonie directed Rosa’s Dilemma and Greater Tuna for the American Heartland Theatre, Reckless and Too Clever By Half for UMKC’s Rotating Repertory, and co-directed Tony & Tina’s Wedding (Kansas City and St. Louis) for Fourth Wall Productions. She directed Jason Chanoos as Hamlet, in the Kansas City Symphony’s Supremely Shakespeare concert, and was the stage director for four seasons of “Magic of Christmas” and How the Symphony Saved Christmas. Sidonie was the stage director for Kansas City Civic Opera’s productions of The Marriage of Figaro and Falstaff. In fall 2012, with Elizabeth Suh Lane she co-created and directed Play On! a collaboration of music and words. In summer 2015, she will direct King Lear for the Festival.

Alyson Germinder (Dramaturg) is also the Festival Associate, having interned for As You Like It and recently serving as Associate Dramaturg for The Winter’s Tale. Past Kansas City dramaturgy credits include Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo, Seminar (Unicorn Theatre); Eleemosynary (FishTank); and Journey’s End (Kansas City Actors Theatre). She looks forward to joining the Festival again this summer for King Lear. This year, Alyson will finish her M.A. in Theatre at UMKC, where she studies dramaturgy and theatre history.
Greg Mackender (Composer) has been composing for the Festival for 22 seasons. Last summer he had the privilege to lead a group of players performing live music with the acting ensemble in the Festival’s summer production of *The Winter’s Tale*. Summer of 2013 featured his music in a very spirited version of *As You Like It* for the festival, set in the 1960’s. Greg is a founding member of the Kansas City Actors Theatre, and last summer composed for *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and the prior summer’s season openers: *Picnic* and *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. In 2013 he was delighted to compose the music and design sound for the Unicorn Theatre’s production of *Grounded*. His score for *Othello* was featured in the 2012 St. Louis Shakespeare Festival. He is a professor in the theatre department at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, where he has taught sound design and composition since 1994.

Deborah Morgan (Props Master) Deborah likes to call herself a professional scavenger. There is nothing like the smell of an antique mall to bring her blood pressure down and a smile to her face. She’s been propping around KC at Missouri Repertory Theatre (now KC Rep) and now at the Lyric Opera of Kansas City. In between shows, she’s propped for *The New Theatre Restaurant*, *The Coterie*, *The Unicorn*, and *Starlight Theater*. She is also a founding member of S*P*A*M*, the Society of Prop Artisan Managers. SPAM was formed to create a national communication and support network of professional prop managers. She also does some freelance commercial work; from shopping and scavenging to set dressing. When not shopping or crafting, you can find her on the golf course or the ski slopes.

*Jinni Pike (Production Stage Manager)* is happy to be back in Kansas City and “home” with HASF. Jinni has been the PSM for Shakes since 2011 and has stage managed *The Winter’s Tale*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Macbeth*. Other KC credits include: over 25 productions at Unicorn Theatre, Kyle Hatley’s *Head, Death of Cupid*, and *Watering the Grass* for KC Fringe, and KC Rep’s *A Christmas Carol*. Jinni now resides in Chicago where she has stage managed *Danny Casolaro Died for You*, *The How and The Why*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Wasteland* for TimeLine Theatre, assistant stage managed *Tommy* at Paramount Theatre and worked as a sub stage manager for Million Dollar Quartet.*
Sarah B. Putts (Sound Designer/Engineer) Sarah has worked with the Festival for the past two years as an Engineer and A2 on As you Like It and The Winter's Tale as well as Team Shakespeares' Hamlet and Taming of the Shrew. She is thrilled to be debuting as a designer on The Merchant of Venice and can’t wait for another great summer in the park! Sarah is currently a 3rd year MFA in sound at UMKC with an expected graduation in May. Her recent design credits include Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo (Unicorn Theatre), Violet (Spinning Tree Theatre), Hamlet and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (Kansas City Actors Theatre), Afflicted: Daughters of Salem (Coterie Theatre), Street Scene (UMKC Conservatory), and M.Butterfly and How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying (Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre). She will be designing Freedom Rider in collaboration with Crossroads Theatre on the Spencer Stage in May. Many Thanks!

Tracy Terstrie (Movement Coach/Choreographer) Performance highlights: original Broadway casts of The Producers, Fosse, A Christmas Carol. National Tour and Regional highlights: Chicago, Will Rogers Follies, Funny Girl, Pippin, A Chorus Line. Tracy has choreographed for stage, film and television including PBS' Emmy-nominated Winter Dreams: the F. Scott Fitzgerald Story. Tracy currently teaches Movement for Actors in the UMKC MFA Acting Program, and at The Kansas City Ballet. A degree in English (UCLA) whet Tracy's appetite for Shakespeare; actor training at The New York Shakespeare Festival invited her to the feast. She is delighted to be at the table of HASF for a third season.

Mary Traylor (Costume Designer) is a Kansas City designer who has been creating costumes for the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival for 18 years. Her designs for opera have appeared at the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Washington National Opera, Michigan Opera, Calgary Opera, Minnesota Opera, and opera companies in Austin Texas and Orlando Florida. Locally she has done costumes for the University of Kansas Opera, UMKC Conservatory Opera, Coterie Theater, Unicorn Theatre. She also designs for the New Theatre Restaurant and has the pleasure of clothing Marion Ross, Jamie Farr, Dyan Cannon, Haley Mills, Don Knotts, Sally Struthers among other fabulous actors.
APPENDIX H:

COMPANY QUESTIONNAIRE
Questionnaire for *The Merchant of Venice* Company

1. **What perception did you have of the play before beginning work on this production?** How did your perception shift as the process evolved? **How does your perception of the play differ now that the production has closed?**

2. **What was the greatest challenge you faced during the process, either artistically, technically, or personally?** What helped you to overcome or address this challenge?

3. **Describe a memorable moment, either from the process and/or the production.** Did you make a significant discovery? made a choice in rehearsal that greatly influenced your character? had a particularly great moment on stage?

4. **If you attended any of the talkbacks: which audience comment during the talkbacks resonated with you the most?** Why?

5. **What will you take away – about the theatre, about Shakespeare, about yourself or those you worked with – from this experience?**

6. **What part of the dramaturgical work aided you in your own process the most?** How could the dramaturg-actor/director/designer relationship be strengthened in future processes – either at HASF or at other theatres?

7. **Other thoughts, comments, or questions that weren’t mentioned, asked, or addressed during this process that you’d like to share.**

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with me!
WORKS CONSULTED


Denesha, Julie. “[VIDEO]: In This Scene…”The Merchant of Venice”.” KCUR. September 13, 2013. Web.


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http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/stage/2013/08/16/stratford_festivals_merchant_of_venice_gets_a_lot_right_review.html


http://www.roadscholar.org/


http://spark.umkc.edu/history.asp


VITA

Alyson Germinder is a Kansas City native. Born in 1990 on the Kansas side of the state line, Germinder spent her most of her life learning and living in Johnson County. She attended Bishop Miege High School, where she was active in debate and forensics. It was in high school that Germinder explored her love for speech and the stage, which inspired her course of study in college.

Germinder graduated from Bishop Miege in 2009 and went on to receive her undergraduate degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia. In Columbia, Germinder grew increasingly active in the theatre community. It was during her junior year that Germinder learned about dramaturgy. After working with Independent Actors Theatre and on a school production of Medea, Germinder found that her passion for education, outreach, and production could co-exist in her pursuit of dramaturgy as a professional career.

In 2013, Germinder was awarded the KC ACTF Region V National Dramaturgy Award for her work on Medea, which sent her to a week-long fellowship at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. That week spent with dramaturgs and literary managers from theatre companies across the country validated her choice of dramaturgy as a career. Germinder went back to Columbia with a renewed interest in her future in the theatre. She graduated Summa Cum Laude with a B.A. in Theatre Performance in 2013, with a minor in English.

Germinder began coursework for her Master of Arts in Theatre at UMKC in the fall of 2013. While completing graduate studies at UMKC, Germinder has been active in the Kansas City theatre community as a dramaturg and as an advocate for plays and productions. Germinder has worked as a dramaturg for Heart of America Shakespeare Festival, Unicorn
Theatre, Kansas City Actors Theatre, and Fishtank Performance Studio. After graduation, she hopes to remain active in the theatre community as a dramaturg while helping make theatre happen across the city.