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Christianity versus Judaism in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice

By Andrea Oberheiden



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Essay from the year 2008 in the subject English - Literature, Works, grade: 2+, Harvard University (Department of English), course: Shakespeare and Modern Culture, language: English, abstract: In Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, the Jewish character of Shylock refers to the biblical story of Jacob tricking his uncle Laban (1.3.68-98) by tampering with the procreative process of Laban's flock of sheep (Genesis 30.25-43). In the following, I will try to point out why Shylock tells this story, and in which literary context he ruminates upon it. Besides a critical comparison of how his speech interacts with the original biblical story, I will furthermore discuss this analogy foremost in terms of its religious and dramatic functions within the play. Against this background, it will be made evident that 'usury' as a negative Jewish stereotype, presumed by the judging eyes of medieval Christians, is put in the centre of consideration here. It will be argued that as a general declaration in MoV, a superiority of the New Testament to the Old Testament, of Christianity to Judaism, can be derived, and that this conclusion is strongly linked with the majoritarian mindset in Shakespeare's times and cultural sphere, rather than with Shakespeare's personal attitude towards Jews or Judaism, an often supposed attitude of unprovable nature.



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Seit 2006 arbeite ich neben dem Studium als Dokumentarfilmerin. Neben einigen Kurzfilmprojekten und einem 75-min. Recherche film wird 2015 mein abendfüllender Dokumentarfilm "Auf den Spuren von Al Jolson" fertiggestellt werden. Meine Filme sind in den USA, England, Australien und Malta gezeigt worden. Seit 2010 halte ich auch internationale Vorträge zu meiner Filmarbeit und zu einzelnen Recherche feldern. Darüber hinaus arbeite ich als freie Übersetzerin (DEU/ENG) und erstelle ebenfalls freiberuflich Transkripte sowie Untertitel. Für die Jüdische Bibliothek in Vilnius, Litauen, habe ich seit 2010 Materialspenden organisiert und Imagefilme erstellt. 2004/2005 habe ich als Regie hospitantin am Theater Kiel gearbeitet, ein Arbeitsfeld, das ich nach dem Studium (Abschluss 2014) wieder aufgreifen möchte. Meine Websites: www.aj-images.com und www.oberheidenbrent.com

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