

The Social Stereotyping of Jews in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Arabian Nights*

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ABSTRACT

This study compares depictions of Jewish characters in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Arabian Nights* to reveal the opposing views the two works provide of the internal aspects of their Jewish characters and their behavior towards others. The comparison will focus on the nature of the social relations between the Jewish people and society at large and on the intimate relationships among the Jewish characters themselves within their families and communities.

Keywords: Arabian Nights, the Jews, The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare.

Introduction

The writings of William Shakespeare were powerfully influenced by the social and political conditions of England in the sixteenth century as well as by his own experiences. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare draws a picture of the social and economic life of the Italian city of Venice and selects a Jewish character to be the main protagonist in his play. Within the dramatic trajectory of the Jewish character in pre-modern literature, the depiction of this character in Shakespeare's play bears resemblances, on the surface, to the representation of Jewish characters in *the Arabian Nights* (*One Thousand and One Nights*), but the two works differ at a deeper level.

A Comparative Approach

From a social perspective, this study examines the different depictions of Jewish characters in two different literary works, one from the European Renaissance and the other from the medieval East. As can be seen below, both *The Merchant* and *The Nights* are almost similar in their depiction of the customs and traditions of their Jewish characters, but they are contradictory in their portrayal of the Jew's social behavior. Shakespeare's depiction of the Jew in *The Merchant* involves two dimensions: the external (or physical) and the internal (or psychological). With regard to the external dimension,

Shakespeare paints a general external image of the Jew and his traditions and customs, but then delves behind that external image to describe his internal negative attitude towards society. This essay argues that the external dimension of Shakespeare's Jew is similar to that of the Jewish character in *The Nights*, whereas Shakespeare's portrayal of the internal psychological dimension of the Jew differs substantially from that of *The Nights*.

An examination of the two literary works' depiction of the relations between the Jewish minority and the Muslim and Christian majorities among whom the Jews lived reveals how the Jews attempted to isolate themselves from the rest of society by creating their own private sphere in which to dwell. After that, the focus will shift to an exploration of the way in which the Jew interacts with his society and the nature of his negative interaction with the general public in *The Merchant*, on one hand, and the nature of the constructive interaction which draws together the Jew and his fellow Muslim citizens in *The Nights* on the other. Then, the argument examines the way the Jewish woman is portrayed in the two literary works to discuss points of similarity and difference between the two works in their depiction of the Jewess' relationship with her man in order to obtain a better understanding of the whole picture of the Jews in *The Merchant* and *The Nights*. Lastly, the conclusion explains the reasons for the similarities and differences in the way Jews are stereotyped in these two works.

Two points are worth noting here. First, in the old Arabic version of the *Arabian Nights*, I found the Jewish

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character occurring in only eight tales: The Hunchback's Tale, Jūdār the Son of the Merchant 'Umar and His Two Brothers, Wily Dalīla and Her Daughter Zaynab, Ali Zybaq the Egyptian, Aladdin Abu al-Shāmāt, Masrūr and Zayn al-Mawāṣif, Hāsib Kharīm al-Dīn (Jan shah), and Nūr al-Dīn and his Brother Shams al-Dīn. Second, the character of the Jew in *The Nights* may evoke more complex feelings within the reader than its counterpart in *The Merchant*. The image of the Jew in *The Nights* is more complicated than its counterpart in *The Merchant*. The positive stereotyping of Jews in some tales leads some critics to believe that "there appears to be a relatively secure place for Jews in the various religions of *The Nights*; so secure that the only non-Muslim who appears ... as the hero of a story cycle is a Jew" (Matar, 2008). Or it leads others to believe that "a study of the image of the Jew in *One Thousand and One Nights* yields no negative references. In that world-famous collection of folk tales and legends, the Jew appears mostly as sage" (Durán, 2001). On the other hand, the negative stereotyping of Jews in other tales leads some critics to conclude that "Jews in *One Thousand and One Nights* are portrayed in a stereotypical way, with predominantly negative connotation" (Marzolph, 2004). This complexity is due primarily to two factors; first, the history of the text, which proves that *The Nights* was written in different places and eras of the East; and second, the particular version of the text that was selected by the critics for analysis. To overcome these complexities, this essay relies on the old Arabic version of *One Thousand and One Nights* and avoids the translated, new or adopted versions.

Although several studies have been conducted on the Jewish character in *The Merchant*, none attempts to compare the image of the Jew in Shakespeare's play with a similar character in *The Nights*.

Points of Comparison

1 The Gap between the Jewish Minority and Majority

In both *The Merchant* and *The Nights* there is a discernible social distance between the Jew and his society, which in general makes the relationship between him and others more a utilitarian relationship than an emotional one. Even though in Shakespeare's work Shylock is one of the richest merchants in Venice, he always tries to maintain a gap between himself and his family, on one hand, and the Christian people of Venice on the other. For example, when he wants to leave his

house, he asks his daughter Jessica to lock the doors and not let any Christian enter. Moreover, his only friend in the city is the Jewish merchant Tubal. Shylock in describing him to Antonio says, "a wealthy Hebrew of my tribe will furnish me" (Shakespeare, 2006).

Similarly, the Jew in *The Nights* controls his isolation from society by living outside the city. Even though the Jewish 'Adhra's Market in the tale of *Ali Zybaq the Egyptian*, as only one example, is located in the center of Bagdad, 'Adhra prefers to live separately outside the city in order to control his isolation and to protect his family and palace from the people of Bagdad. Furthermore, the City of the Jews that is surrounded by Shabbat's river in the story of *Hāsib Karīm al-Dīn* seems to be an alternative solution to the Jews' dilemma of maintaining their isolation from non-Jewish society while conducting business with it.

Another indication of the social distance that is present between Jews and other members of society is the manner in which they were addressed. In both *The Merchant* and *The Nights*, people prefer to refer to the Jewish character by the adjective 'Jewish' before the character's name, such as the Jewish Shylock in *the Merchant* and the Jewish 'Adhra in the tales of *The Wily Dalīla* and *Ali Zybaq the Egyptian*, or by using this description instead of a name. It is surely meaningful in Shakespeare's work that "Shylock is addressed as 'Shylock' only seventeen times in the play. On all occasions he is called Jew and is referred to as the Jew" (Cohen, 1990). Similarly, of the twelve Jewish characters in *The Nights* four are referred to by their names in addition to the term "Jewish" while the rest are referred to only by the epithet "Jewish."

As with the term "Jewish" or "Jew" ascribed to the Jewish characters in both literary works as a means of reinforcing the Jews' "otherness," this tendency is also apparent with the reference to the Jewish character dressing in specific religious clothing. These clothes are referred to explicitly in *The Merchant* but implicitly in *The Nights*. For example, in Act III of Shakespeare's play, Shylock meets Solanio in the likeness of a Jew. Similarly, the reader can conclude that the Jews in *The Nights* dress in religious clothing from phrases such as "you will see a Jewish man" (Anonymous, 1999) in Jūdār's Tale, and "he saw a Jewish merchant" (Anonymous, 1999) in the story of *Hāsib Kharīm al-Dīn*. The deliberate choice of dressing in distinctive Jewish attire may indicate, in addition to the Jew's religiosity, the Jew's aim to

distinguish himself from non-Jews.

Additionally, this constant theme of social and physical separation may also be rooted in the social gap between the followers of Judaism and Christianity. Indeed in *The Merchant* this gap is represented in Shylock's conversation with the Christian Bassanio when he accepts his invitation saying:

Yes, to smell pork; to eat of the habitation
which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the
devil into, I will buy with you, sell with you, talk
with you, walk with you, and so following, but I
will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray
with you (Shakespeare, 2006).

Stephen Greenblatt points out that Shylock's words here are "manifestly the expression not only of Shylock's personal refusal of social, as distinct from economic, interaction with the gentiles - a refusal that he later contradicts, to his great cost - but also of his Jewish identification" (Greenblatt, 2012). This speech also indicates another factor that separates the Jews from the Christians in Shakespeare's play, which is food. As Greenblatt notices; "Observing kashrut, Shylock's words make clear, means that Jews must separate themselves from the ordinary fellowship of the gentiles" (Greenblatt, 2012).

As for the behavior of the Jew in *The Merchant* and *The Nights*, we encounter a completely different image of the Jewish character in these two literary works. In contrast to *The Merchant*, *The Nights* reflects a far more congenial social relationship between the Jews and Christians or between the People of the Books. In the story of *The Merchant Masrūr and his Beloved Zayn al-Mawāṣif*, for example, the girls Zayn al-Mawāṣif's Jewish husband invites his Christian partner Masrūr to eat at his house one night in order to celebrate their association. By doing so, the Christian youth will become an associate of the Jewish merchant sharing in his money and trade. When the Jew's wife pretends not to sit with Masrūr because he is a foreigner, her husband denounces her behavior saying, "Why are you embarrassed by him? He is a Christian and we are Jewish; so, we can be companions" (Anonymous, 1999). So unlike the situation in *The Merchant*, this exchange shows how the Jew in *The Nights* deals with his Christian counterpart as a friend who should be closer than any other person.

In contrast to the Jew in *The Merchant*, who is

regarded as a foreigner, the Jew in *The Nights* is not depicted as a stranger or foreigner. The Jewish character in Zayn al-Mawāṣif's tale, as an example of the Jews in *The Nights*, clearly belongs to the place where he lives and is buried in the same city, which represents his eternal belonging to that place. *The Nights* also depicts the Jewish city as a part of the Islamic land. In the story of *Hāsib Kharīm al-Dīn*, Jan Shah starts a long journey looking for the city of Jews to be saved from the apes and to find his dream of his father's city, which can be found only through the Jew's city. In this city, he finds himself among a majority of Jews, within Jewish society. And so depicting the Jew as a citizen may indicate that the Jew believes in the unity of his fate with the fate of the land and society he resides in, in contrast to the Jewish stranger in *The Merchant*, who sees Venice as a place of commerce.

Despite this tendency towards isolation, the Jewish house in *The Merchant* appears closed to every non-Jew even if he is a vassal, while a similar Jewish house in *The Nights* is open to non-Jewish guests. When the vassal Lancelot, who should be one of the inhabitants of Shylock's house, tries to help his master to call Jessica, Shylock replies, "Who bids thee call? I do not bid thee call" (Shakespeare, 2006). Conversely, when Jan shah enters the Jewish home and tells the residents that he is a stranger in the Jewish city, they resolve the conflict between their desire for isolation, which makes them silent, and their desire to be hospitable, which encourages them to speak by using sign language to tell their guest Jan shah to drink and eat. This image of the Jew in *The Nights* breaking his isolation for a non-Jew's need may be considered an additional indication of his positive attitude towards the community.

Thus, we can conclude from these examples that *The Merchant* is similar to *The Nights* in the manner of characterizing the Jew's tradition and general life, such as his tendency towards isolation and his clothing, which makes him look different from others. However, these similar trends between the Jew in *The Merchant* and his counterpart in *The Nights* represent only a part of the whole picture, which includes differences between the two literary works' portrayal of the Jew. The differences between the two characterizations in the two literary works appear in the manner of depicting the Jew's individual behaviors, such as his good or bad will towards others. This dissimilarity in behavior between the two Jews becomes very obvious when light is shed

on their dissimilar ways of viewing their respective societies.

2 Society in Jewish Eyes

While both *The Merchant* and *The Nights* portray the Jewish characters as people who attempt to isolate themselves from their larger society, the two works differ in their portrayal of how these Jewish individuals view the societies within which they move. Shakespeare's play provides a picture of the Jew as a person who harbors ill will towards the society of Venice, whereas in *The Nights* an opposite picture emerges in which there is no significant allusion to a negative attitude of the Jew towards his community. These different images of the Jew in *The Merchant* and *The Nights* are reflected primarily in the Jew's religious and economic interaction with the community.

Shylock appears as a religious model for the Jews. As Marlowe notes, "Shylock regards his religion seriously. He is firm in his religious observance, as Barabas would never be. He is loyal to other Jews and desirous that Jessica should marry one" (Marlowe, 1994). The Jew in Shakespeare's play makes use of his religion as a justification for his hatred of the community. It is not by chance that the play typecasts the Jewish character as a person who reveals his faith in the devilish moments when he is taking his revenge, such as when repeating the Jewish oath of Sabbath to emphasize his desire to take Antonio's life. Moreover, "Shylock is repairing to his place of worship immediately after learning that he can now legally murder the good Antonio" (Cohen, 1990). Furthermore, when Antonio makes it a condition for Shylock to convert to Christianity to forgive him, Antonio does not want to increase the number of Christians in Venice society because, as Gobbo says about Jessica's desire to convert to Christianity, "we were Christians now before; e'en as many as could well live one by another. This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs" (Shakespeare, 2006); however, Antonio believes that, "The Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind" (Shakespeare, 2006), in other words, he believes the Jew will integrate within the larger society once the religious barrier is removed. Hence, in contrast to the Jew in *The Nights*, *The Merchant* gives a picture of religion as an important factor controlling the Jew's action against society.

The Jewish characters that we encounter in the pages of *The Nights* are just as religious as Shylock; however,

they are able to separate the religious component from their dealings with society quite unlike Shylock, who hates the Venetian people because of their Christianity. The religious aspect of the Jew's character appears in such actions as the saying of the Jewish doctor when he sees the child at his door, "Oh Moses and the commandments, Oh Aaron, Oh Yashū' Ibn Nūn" (Anonymous, 1999). But, this religious affiliation does not prevent the Jews in *The Nights* from interacting with the larger society. When the Jewish goldsmith, for example, in the story of *Wily Dalīla and Her Daughter Zaynab*, realizes that Wily Dalīla has deceived him, he does not summon his fellow Jewish kinsmen; rather, he calls the good Muslims to come and help.

In addition, the tale of *The Merchant Masrūr and his Beloved Zayn al-Mawāṣif* depicts how the senior Jewish monk Danse and his patriarchs violate religious law by attempting to marry the beautiful woman, Zayn Al-Mawāṣif, when Danse asks her to stay in the temple for ten days; he then sends his forty patriarchs one after another to convince her to marry the senior monk. When each of these patriarchs sees Zayn Al-Mawāṣif, he becomes fascinated with her beauty and tries to marry her without mentioning the name of the senior monk and his request for marriage. This event provides an image of those who are often described as the most orthodox and orthopraxic adherents of Judaism as normal people who love beauty and women.

Besides depicting religion as an element that informs the behavior of the Jewish characters in the two literary works, these two works represent the nature of the Jew's attitude towards his society through his business interactions with the general public. In each work, the Jew is cast as a person who loves money; but his love of money in *The Nights* is within reasonable limits while his love of wealth in *The Merchant* is obsessive. Shylock is depicted as a greedy, money-hungry, and business enemy of society. He uses his money carefully to accumulate profit by making sure that he lends people money at a high interest rate. However, the image of the Jew dealing with money in *The Nights* reflects a much more favorable character. For example, when the Jew sees Jan shah lamenting his situation when being chased by apes, the Jew offers to let him to stay on his property until the next year. Moreover, when the Jewish merchant finds Ḥasan Badr al-Dīn chased to be killed in the tale of *Nūr al-Dīn and his Brother Shams Al-Dīn*, he offers Ḥasan one thousand dinars in return for one of his deceased father's

ships. Another example can be found in the tale of Masrūr and Zayn Al-Mawāṣif, when the husband of Zayn Al-Mawāṣif offers to share his money and trade with Masrūr. This sort of dealing with money emphasizes that the Jew's persona in *The Nights* is not built upon the unquenchable greed that we witness in the persona of his counterpart in *The Merchant*.

Upon further reflection, one can note that the image of the Jew and his relationship to money in *The Nights* may seem to have different interpretations. In *The Hunchback's Tale*,¹ the dinar's quarter is a charge in return for the Jew's work. Consequently, there is no reason for the doctor to be in a hurry after receiving his payment. However, depicting the Jewish doctor rejoicing and rising quickly when he sees a dinar's quarter motivates some critics to believe that "the reason he is hurrying is not out of concern for the supposedly sick child but out of greed, he wants to see if he can get more money out of the grieving parents" (Sautman, 1998). Indeed, despite providing a picture of the Jew in *The Nights* as a person who loves money, his love of money does not lead him to exploit the community's need of money as the Jewish character in *The Merchant* does.

In contrast to *The Merchant* that stereotypes the Jew as a bloody and murderous enemy of society, the Jewish character in *The Nights* succeeds in his dealings with society. He is part of the community, sharing and feeling what community members feel despite his tendency to desire separation. Jews share the same fears and uphold the same ethical commitment as their Muslim neighbors. For example, in the tale of *The Enchanted King*, Jews and Muslims live together in an Anonymous place, but are cursed by an evil woman who turns them into fish. As Nabil Matar points out about Jews, Christians and Muslims in *The Nights*,

the three monotheists are differentiated only in their invocations. The Jew swears by Moses, Aaron, and Yashū' Ibn Nūn; the Muslim repeats that there is no power except in God Almighty; and the Christian is on his way to *tasbīh* (evening prayer), fearful of the approaching end of the world. This difference among them does not deny any of them the important role each plays in the story" (Matar, 2008).

Furthermore, the image of the Jewish goldsmith when he is surrounded by Muslims rummaging around for the

trickster Wily Dalīla demonstrates how Jews share Muslims' sufferance from Wily Dalīla's cunning.

In addition, when the Jew in the story of *Nūr al-Dīn and his Brother Shams al-Dīn* finds Ḥasan grieving at his father's tomb and on the run from assassins, he tells Ḥasan that there are many more ships on the sea bringing back trade for his father. So, he offers him one thousand dinars for each ship. Then he gives him in return one thousand dinars for one of these ships although the ships are no longer the property of Ḥasan, and the new minister orders all of Ḥasan's goods, including his house and everything that belongs to him or his father, to be seized and sold. The behavior of this Jewish merchant emphasizes how the Jew in *The Nights* bears good will towards his society. Indeed, this sentiment is echoed in *The Hunchback's Tale*, which also represents the Jew's positive attitude towards the non-Jewish community.

Juxtaposing Shylock and the Jewish doctor in *The Hunchback's Tale* may clarify the disparity between the depictions of the social role of the Jew in the two literary works. *The Merchant* portrays the Jewish Shylock as a savvy killer who devises a diabolical plan to take the lives of Christians by starting out with a demand for a pound of flesh as security for a loan to Antonio with the hope that he will breach the contract resulting in a court trial that will end with implementing the terms of the ghastly contract, taking Antonio's life. In contrast, the Jewish doctor in *The Hunchback's Tale* works to save people's lives, which is entirely different from Shylock's grim pursuit. The doctor takes pity on the youth who had his hand amputated while Shylock refuses to take the pound of flesh except from nearest Antonio's heart. The dramatic difference between the two characters comes into view when the doctor sacrifices himself to save the Muslim steward's life declaring that he kills the Hunchback when he runs to save the child's life to knock him down in the dark, while Shylock refuses to have a surgeon in his charge stop Antonio's wounds to prevent him from bleeding to death. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that *The Merchant* depicts the Jew as a ruthless killer and a danger to the people of Venice in contrast to his counterpart in *The Night* who is even elevated to the position of savior.

The Nights does not depict the Jew as a person who conceals ill will towards society but rather it does, in some places, present a picture of him as a victim. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Jew is not an object because of his identity or because of being

Jewish, for in all stories in which the Jew appears as a target, we find another Muslim or Christian sharing his suffering. On the other hand, the law of Venice protects the Jew from being a victim, although Shakespeare's work represents his bad will towards Venetian society.

Even though some critics make an effort to argue that Shylock, who embodies the Jewish character in the play, is a victim of society, "it would be hard even, as Gross clarifies, for those critics who dismiss the Christians in the play as hypocrites to deny that Shylock is treated with considerable generosity. He will still be a rich man, in full possession of half his capital and receiving the income from the other half" (Gross, 1992). All these perks are being granted to him while his Christian counterpart Antonio is bankrupt. Moreover, the argument for portraying Shylock as a victim is illogical because of the law of Venice which, as Antonio says, "The Duke cannot deny the course of law: For the commodity that strangers have. With us in Venice, if it be denied, 'Twill much impeach the justice of the state; Since that the trade and profit of the city. Consistent of all nations" (Shakespeare, 2006).

This reference to the law made by Antonio then clearly demonstrates that Shylock's actions are not a reaction to social injustice. He attempts to justify his bad will toward Antonio as a result of Antonio's words and abuses against him; but, the play shows a different possibility, namely that Antonio's behavior against Shylock is a result of Shylock's behavior against society. This last point is especially observable when Antonio declares his readiness to change his attitude towards Shylock if the latter changes his attitude towards usury.

In sharp contrast, although the people of the Book (The Jews and Christians) were a protected category under Islamic law by a pact contracted between non-Muslims and the authorities of their Muslim government, *The Nights* depicts them as any other Muslims who can be targeted by either society or their own families. But there is no such law protecting the Jew in *The Merchant*. For example, when Zayn al-Mawāṣif lies to the Kadi and says she is a Muslim, and her Jewish husband has taken her money and married her without her consent, the Kadi stands by her, just as do the other three kadis, saying to Hobub, the maid of Zayn al-Mawāṣif, "Marry her to me and on me be incumbent manumission of my slaves and fasting and pilgrimage and almsgiving of all my good and I do you no justice on this dog and punish him for that he hath done" (Anonymous, 1999).

For many readers, as Burton points out, "The unfortunate Jew, who seems to have been a model husband, would find no pity... because he had been guilty of marrying a Moslemah" (Burton, 2008).

In addition, the tale of *Aladdin Abū al-Shāmāt* includes a similar representation of the Jew as a victim of al-Danaf, who killed a Muslim as well. When Ahmad al-Danaf finds two Jews, he asks them to pay the tax; they answer, "Why should we pay the tax?!"

al-Danaf replies, "I am the governor of this valley" (Anonymous, 1999). Thus, they give him the tax; then, he kills them to take their mules, riding one and giving the other to Aladdin. Of interest, too, is that, unlike *The Merchant*, which represents the Jewish man as an executioner of his family, *The Nights*, as can be seen below, represents him as a victim of his own family. Comparing the image of Zayn al-Mawāṣif's Jewish husband when he felt faint on account of hearing the deceit of his wife's death to the opposite image of his wife planning to bury him alive before marrying Masrūr emphasizes how the Jewish man and woman carry contradictory impulses and emotions towards each other in this tale in particular and in *The Nights* in general. All these images combined prove that one of the common serotypes of the Jew in *The Nights* is that he is an unfortunate victim of the female members of his family.

3 Jewish Man in the Eyes of the Jewish Woman

The relationship between the Jew and the female members of his family in both *The Merchant* and *The Nights* is complex. In contrast to the Jewish man, the Jewish woman in the two literary works tends to be involved with society for different purposes. In *The Merchant*, Jessica (the daughter of the Jewish Shylock) strives to liberate herself from her father's mistreatment, while in *The Nights* Qamar (the daughter of the Jewish 'Adhra) seeks to leave her father's house to pursue love and physical companionship. This discrepancy between the man's propensity for isolation and the woman's preference for inclusion causes a conflict inside the Jewish home in the two literary works. In *The Merchant*, Jessica attempts to find a way to connect with the community while her father prevents her from any sort of openness to people. This sentiment is embodied in his comments to his daughter to close everything, even her five senses saying, "Lock up my doors; and when you hear the drum..., Clamber not you up to the casements then, Nor thrust your head into the public street, to gaze

on Christian fools with varnished faces: But stop my house's ears, I mean my casements" (Shakespeare, 2006).

As a result of this repression, Jessica starts seeing her promised lover, the young Christian Lorenzo, as the only one who can rescue her from the hell of Shylock's house. Jessica "evokes sympathies with the audience for being treated badly by her father who, because of his Jewish origin, makes it hard for her to find her place in Venetian society" (Burger, 2007).

Likewise, in *The Nights* the Jewish woman rebels against her father to associate with society because of a desire for love. When Qamar, the daughter of the Jewish 'Adhra in *Ali Zybaq the Egyptian's* Tale, sees Ali for the first time, she falls in love with him. Then, she removes the buffer between herself and her desire by killing her father in order to become the fourth wife of Ali; and when the Jewish Zayn al-Mawāṣif meets Masrūr, she falls in love with him. Then she, much as Jessica and Qamar, makes use of religion to obtain her aim of separating from her Jewish man after converting to Islam, which suggests that the husband had to convert to Islam or she would not remain with him.

In sharp contrast to her male counterparts, the Jewish woman in the two works is well aware of the religious barrier that separates her from society at large; therefore, she prefers changing her religion rather than being isolated from the community. This sentiment is conveyed in Jessica's words: "Though I am a daughter to his blood, I am not to his manners: O Lorenzo! If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife; Become a Christian, and thy loving wife" (Shakespeare, 2006). Jessica's monologue emphasizes her belief that her religion is a social buffer. Therefore, marriage, as Janet Adelman points out about Jessica, "appears to occur to her largely as a way to escape her father's blood or, more exactly, as a way to end the strife between his blood and her presumably gentle manners" (Adelman, 2008).

Echoing the feeling of Jessica, in the tale of *Ali Zybaq the Egyptian*, Qamar says to Ali, "O Ali, because I love you, I bring ... the head of my father the Jew, I myself have adopted the faith of Islam, there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah" (Anonymous, 1999). In fact, she tells him that she removes the hindrance of her religion to break her isolation from society and to be his wife. Similarly, the Jewish Zayn al-Mawāṣif converts to Islam to be separated from her Jewish husband and married to Masrūr. Thus, the Jewess in the two literary works is not as attached to

her religious heritage as the Jewish men but sees it as a hindrance that she readily discards in order to be with the man she loves and thus to overcome the isolation that had been imposed upon her. In fact, the motivation of woman's behavior in *The Merchant* is, to some extent, dissimilar to her analogue's motivation in *The Nights*. The Jessica's circumstances may resemble those of Qamar, the daughter of 'Adhra the Jew, in the Tale of *Ali Zybaq the Egyptian* superficially; however, it differs from that story on a much deeper level.

'Adhra and the husband of Zayn al-Mawāṣif's positive behaviors toward women in *The Nights* are quite the opposite of Jessica's situation with her father in *The Merchant*. 'Adhra gives his daughter Qamar the most expressive suit in the city-crown, girdle, and pantoufle of gold-which are the desire of all the burglars of Bagdad. Similarly, a clearer depiction of the great disparity between the ways the Jewish characters treat their families in the context of living as minorities is seen in the situation of Zayn al-Mawāṣif and her husband in the story of *The Merchant Masrūr and his Beloved Zayn al-Mawāṣif*. As Shylock's house is depicted as an earthly hell, the house of Zayn al-Mawāṣif's husband is depicted as an earthly paradise. The residents of the first house are not allowed to interact with society whatsoever. They are not allowed to open the lock, to meet people, to open their ears to listen to Christian music, or even to open their eyes to see people through the windows. They must close their five senses so as not to engage with society. At the opposite extreme, Zayn al-Mawāṣif's husband leaves his house open when he wants to travel instead of locking it as Shylock does. The song that leads Masrūr to the house constitutes an image that is opposite to that of Jessica when her father asks her to close her ears so as not to hear Christian music. Then, when Masrūr looks inside, he sees a magnificent garden and a beautiful pubescent girl surrounded by four damsels. Comparing this pleasant image as an example of the husband's positive action towards his wife to her negative reaction against him may emphasize that the character of the Jew in *The Nights* is a victim of the society within his family in addition to being a victim of the society outside his family, contrary to his counterpart in *The Merchant*.

It is evident from this examination of the image of the Jewess in her relationship with her man that there is a significant similarity between *The Merchant* and *The Nights* in their portrayals of the Jewess's hatred towards her father and her use of cunning to separate herself from

him. Both women think of changing their religion as the best solution to obtain their purposes. Yet again, Shakespeare's play in its depiction of the Jew resembles *The Nights* externally and in how his daughter attempts to separate herself from him. However, unlike *The Nights* in which the Jewish man plays the role of his wife's or daughter's victim, *The Merchant* uses this image in a different context to represent the Jewish woman as oppressed by her father.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show the depiction of the Jewish character in each literary text by demonstrating how the two literary works are, on one hand, similar in representing the fictional Jewish man as a person who tends to be isolated from the society within which he lives and as moneylender, and how, on the other hand, they differ in certain respects such as when Shakespeare's play reflects the stereotype of the Jew who harbors ill will towards the community even though the law prevents him from being victimized by that society, whereas *The Nights* mostly reflects the Jewish character as a victim of society as well as of his own family.

Taking a deeper look at the points of similarities between the two works in their portrayal of Jews, we notice that these points are related to the social customs and traditions of Jewish life in the Middle Ages through their work and dress in the medieval east and the Renaissance west as well as in the kind of complex relationship between Jewish men and women. However, the points of difference are related to the Jews' conduct, such as their intentions and emotions towards others, which are personal attributes.

The major difference between the image of the Jew as executioner in *The Merchant* and as a regular person who can be targeted as others in *The Nights* might be interpreted as a result of a number of social and personal factors. Firstly, unlike the medieval Islamic east in which the Jews were given the status of 'dhimmi' and had assured rights as "People of the Book," the relationship between the Christians and the Jews of Renaissance Europe was mostly troubled (Chazan, 2006). So, the differences can be interpreted as a reflection of the way in which people of the medieval and Renaissance eras were accustomed to seeing Jews. Secondly, although there is no clear evidence from Shakespeare's life to prove that he personally was anti-Jewish, his plays and his being a member of English society in the Elizabethan era, which

has been described as anti-Jewish (Burrin, 2005), may suggest his negative attitude towards Jews. Conversely, the equivocal way of portraying Jews in *The Nights* may partly support the argument of some literary critics, such as Jamāl Al-Badrī, who believe that the Jews had a major role in writing *The Nights* (Al-Badrī, 2000).

As for the points of similarities between *The Merchant* and *The Nights* in their portrayal of the Jew, it is important to keep in mind that the Jews during Shakespeare's era had no place in England because "in 1290, King Edward I had expelled Jews from England and they were not officially allowed back until the middle of the seventeenth century" (Loomba, 2001). Thus, Shakespeare's depiction of the Jewish character in his *Merchant of Venice* that was written at the end of the 16th century (Mahon, 2006) and belongs to Renaissance period cannot be interpreted as merely direct experience with Jews but rather it could also be attributed to an imitation of other contemporary or prior work(s) in their ways of stereotyping the Jews more than a real life experience. Critics go in different directions in their opinions about the literary works that had a major influence on Shakespeare.

Some critics argue that *The Nights* has a significant influence on the English novel. Conant says, in a seminal study, "the *Arabian Nights* was the fairy godmother of the English novel" (Conant, 1966). Al-Dabbagh also points out " 'Alf Layla wa Layla (The Thousand and One Nights) is one of the key texts, perhaps second only to the Bible, through which the 'East' speaks to the 'West'" (al-Dabbagh, 2010). So, it is possible that Shakespeare may have been indirectly influenced by *The Nights* in his way of depicting the external image of the Jew as it is represented in *The Nights* and used it in different context. However, any argument of the impact of *The Nights* on Shakespearean works should consider the fact that the first European translation of *The Nights* was into French by Antoine Galland during the period of 1707-17. (Ghazoul, 2014), which was a century after Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant*, (1596-98). Other critics, however, argue that Shakespeare inherited many of his characters and ideas from the medieval precedent (Shelley, 2008). Hence, it is likely that he was influenced by that literature in the way of stereotyping the external image of the Jewish man.

The result of this study has been to shed light on the points of similarities and differences between *The Merchant* and *The Nights* in their portrayal of Jews,

precisely in the depiction of the external and internal images of the Jew and the relation between the Jew and his society and his woman. However, several other aspects of the relationship between Shakespeare's plays and *The Nights* and some implications such as the technique of 'a story within the story' in Shakespearean works and *The Nights* still await a sustained consideration. A considerable number of problems also remain to be solved. Whether the difference between the

two different experiences of Jews in Renaissance Europe and the medieval Middle East are reflected in the literature of each culture, or whether the literature of each culture reflects the stereotype of Jews regardless of their social behavior, is still open to discussion. There is also the social aspect of *The Merchant* as a model of European literature and *The Nights* as a model of Middle Eastern literature, related to the difference between the Jewish man and woman in their participation in society.

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التصوير النمطي الاجتماعي لليهود في تاجر البندقية والليالي العربية

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ملخص

تقارن الدراسة المقترحة بين طريقة تصوير الشخصية اليهودية في تاجر البندقية وقصص الليالي العربية؛ لتبين كيف اختلف العملان الأدبيان في تصويرهما للجوانب السلوكية في تعامل الشخصية اليهودية مع المجتمع من جهة، وكيف تشابها في تصويرهما لشكله الخارجي من جهة أخرى. وسيركز البحث على طبيعة العلاقة الاجتماعية التي تربط اليهود والمجتمع الذي يعيشون فيه، والعلاقة التي تربط اليهود أنفسهم داخل عائلاتهم ومجتمعاتهم. الكلمات الدالة: الليالي العربية، تاجر البندقية، شكسبير، اليهود.

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