

Narratives of Jews in Shakespearean England and National Anxiety

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How to cite this paper: Shi, X., & Liu, L. H. (2023). Narratives of Jews in Shakespearean England and National Anxiety. *Advances in Literary Study*, 11, 279-295. <https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2023.113019>

Received: June 3, 2023

Accepted: July 16, 2023

Published: July 19, 2023

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Abstract

The globalization and trade boom brought about by the Age of Discovery not only provided economic growth opportunities for various countries, but also brought about social and early mobility disruptions. After Elizabeth's ascension to the throne, while England experienced domestic religious turmoil and foreign political crises, the government began to consider the readmitting of the Jews as a new breakthrough in overseas trade, given their advantages in lending and commerce. In an age of economic expansion, the contradiction between the trade temptation and the anxiety about nationality and identity, caused by early "modernity", was fully reflected in this dispute, and the Jews became the real projection of the British people's fear of "mobility" and change in early modern society. The playwrights of this period, through the depiction of exotic geography and transnational trade, participated in this political debate through public performances, and sparked a series of discussions on national maritime affairs, domestic economic balance, and national security anxieties. Thus, scriptwriting became their flexible space for releasing anxiety and expressing political demands.

Keywords

Narratives of Jews, Local Economy, National Security, National Anxiety

1. Introduction

From the reign of Queen Elizabeth to the readmission of Jews in England, a period of nearly a hundred years, there were a total of nine plays involving Jewish characters¹. Most of these plays were written between 1570 and 1620. This time-

¹The nine plays are as follows: *The Three Ladies of London* (1581) by Robert Wilson, *The Jew of Malta* (1589) by Christopher Marlowe, *Selimus* (1594) by Robert Greene, *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-7) by William Shakespeare, *Englishmen for My Money* (1597-8) by William Haughton, *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607) by John Day, *A Christian Turn'd Turk* (1612) by Robert Daborne, *The Raging Turk* (1613-1618) by Thomas Goffe, *The Custom of the Country* (1619) by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger.

frame coincided not only with the early stages of England's overseas economic expansion but also with a surge in anti-trade and xenophobic sentiments. Moreover, the Jewish characters in these plays were often portrayed as merchants or moneylenders associated with trade. As a result, the economic themes in these plays involving Jewish characters started to draw attention from scholars. For example, Jonathan Baldo explored how Shakespeare and Heywood employed foreign characters, including Jewish merchants, to address or reflect issues of economic nationalism in their respective countries (Baldo, 2016). Shormishtha Panja focused on how Shakespeare and Marlowe used Jewish characters and plot settings to construct Venice and Malta as representative early modern trading cities (Panja, 2019). However, few scholars have explored this topic within the historical contest of economic expansion and the readmission of Jews in the late 16th century. Rabbe pointed out that the first stage of England's overseas expansion should be considered to have occurred between 1575 and 1630. The period from 1575 to 1600 can be seen as a crucial starting phase in preparing for the rapid development of overseas trade in the 17th century (Rabb, 1967). It is precisely during this period, as England intensified its overseas trade expansion, society began to show a more accepting attitude towards the Jewish community due to their advantages in transnational trade and lending industries. What were the characteristics of Jewish representation in drama during this period? Were these portrayals influenced by the softened attitude towards Jews at that time? How did playwrights express their political views and attitudes towards the economic expansion and the proposal of readmitting Jews to England? This paper aims at solving these problems.

2. The Exaggerated Portrayal of Jewish Magnates and Local Economic Anxiety

Those plays about Jews in Shakespeare's time almost all to some extent exaggerated the Jews' wealth. In the opening scene of *The Jew of Malta*, we see how wealthy Barabas is:

Barabas: As for those Samnites, and the men of Uzz,
That bought my Spanish Oylesm, and Wines of Greece,
Here have I purst their paltry silverlings.
Fye; what a trouble tis to count this trash.
Well fare the Arabians, who so richly pay,
The things they traffique for with wedge of gold,
Whereof a man may easily in a day
Tell that which may maintaine him all his life.
(*Jew*: I. i. 4-11) (Marlowe, 1995)

In the eyes of this wealthy Maltese businessman, silver coins were already trash that couldn't catch his attention. The only thing he valued was the Arab "wedge of gold". Kermode pointed out that when Marlowe introduced Barabas by placing him in a "counting-house, with heaps of gold before him", it was al-

ready “a blatant taunting device” (Kermode, 1995).

Similarly, in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, written around 1597, he deliberately exaggerated the commercial skills and wealth of the Jewish usurer, Shylock. When Shylock mentioned his feud with Antonio, he specifically said, “He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million” (*Merchant*: 3.1.43) (Shakespeare, 2003). In Shakespeare’s time, the common currency in Venice was ducat, and when the play mentioned money elsewhere, it was measured in ducats. Therefore, Shylock should refer to “half a million” ducats here. The gold content of one ducat is 3.494 grams². Although the play did not explicitly state how many hundreds of thousands of ducats Shylock lost, assuming the lowest value of two hundred thousand, the loss of Shylock’s single business transaction would amount to 698,800 grams of gold, or 0.6988 metric tons. From 1551 to 1560, a total of only 43 metric tons of gold were shipped from America to Seville. At that time, Spain was in its peak period of gold mining and occupation of America, and Seville was the main destination for American gold inflows as the economic center of Spain. The loss of Shylock’s single business transaction amounted to approximately 1.63% of the total gold shipped to Seville during the ten-year period. Undoubtedly, Shakespeare has exaggerated the wealth of this Jewish merchant.

Besides, several other plays also exaggerated the wealth of Jewish people. In *The Three Ladies of London*, Gerontus easily lends out two thousand ducats, in *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*, Zariph lends one hundred thousand ducats to a Christian, in *A Christian Turned Turk*, Benwash gives three hundred ducats to a servant in one go, and in *Englishmen for My Money*, Pizarro, a Portuguese resident, obtains the Queen’s charter to sell popular wines and luxury goods at the time (Mason, 1920).

Why did playwrights of this period unanimously exaggerate the wealth of Jewish people? This may be related to the historical background of the Jewish people during this period. Starting from 1570, Jews were gradually readmitted into Western Europe because of their importance in the lending industry and overseas trade. In the last thirty years of the 16th century, Europe entered a transition period from feudalism to capitalism. With the rise of banking, both the landed gentry and the merchants were worried about their personal credit and the risk of being overwhelmed by debts, which came from the widely popular demand for lending at that time (Cohen, 1982). During this period, the dominant position of agricultural economy gave way to commodity economy, and the rapidly developing commercial capitalism replaced the occasional on-demand lending behavior in the Middle Ages with the lending industry driven by interest (Bronstein, 1969). Along with the early globalization came the increasingly expanding total trade and circulation demand. Both countries and merchants needed sufficient capital as the primary guarantee to deal with this change, which made private or bank lending inevitable. The wealthy Fugger family in the

²See <http://libertycoinservice.com/austria-1-ducat-information/>.

16th-century German region and major banking families in Genoa became the main sources of borrowing for the Spanish royal family. In Italy, the merchant-usurers played a significant role in promoting and consolidating the rising trend of capitalism by pushing for the emergence of new banks (Lim, 2010). Contrastingly, in England, the public during the Elizabethan era was as dependent on usury as the Venetians, and the operation of various industries depended on usury, among which the nobles became the biggest patrons of usury (Stone, 1967).

Due to religious and historical reasons in Europe, usury has always been associated with Jews. Since usury contradicts the ethical standards of Christian economics, many Christians still considered it a sin even in the 16th century, and Martin Luther was a famous representative of this view at that time (Lim, 2010). However, for the Jewish community, since the large-scale expulsion and persecution of Jews in medieval Europe, they have no longer been able to involve themselves in any country's property rights, and therefore finance and usury have become the livelihood means they were forced to choose. Therefore, when the continuous capital supply brought by early globalization became the primary guarantee of commercial activities, Jewish usurers became the funding suppliers for most European merchants.

This is fully confirmed in *The Merchant of Venice* through the lending relationship between Antonio and Shylock. When Bassanio sought Antonio's help to raise funds to marry Portia, Antonio replied:

Antonio: Thou know'st that all my fortunes are at sea;
Neither have I money nor commodity
to raise a present sum; therefore go forth,
Try what my credit can in Venice do,
That shall be racked even to the uttermost
To furnish thee to Belmont to fair Portia.
(*Merchant* 1.1.175-177)

As later revealed, what Antonio meant by "trying credit" was to use his personal property to gain the trust of Jewish usurers in exchange for loans. Later, when Shylock assessed Antonio's wealth before lending, he described,

Shylock: Yet his means are in supposition:
He hath an argosy bound to Tripolis,
another to the Indies; I understand moreover upon the Rialto,
he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for England,
and other ventures he hath squandered abroad.
(*Merchant* 1.3.15-18)

Graziano called Antonia the "royal merchant" (*Merchant* 3.2.238), therefore, Antonio's wealth was far beyond the reach of ordinary people. Even wealthy people like Antonio would seek help from Jewish usurers, so this indicates that borrowing from Jews was very common at that time.

In addition to their dependence on funds, European merchants also needed to cooperate with Jews in trade because in the second half of the 16th century, Jews played a crucial role in all major trading circles. In the western Mediterranean, in the mid-16th century, Jews almost controlled the Ottoman Empire's foreign trade (Goodblatt, 1957). In the central Mediterranean, by the 1570s, Jews had replaced Venetians and took control of the inland transportation of the Balkans, (Israel, 1985) the Danube River, and its canal tributaries, which were the inland transportation arteries linking Central Europe, Southeast Europe, and the Mediterranean trading circles. In the eastern Mediterranean, following Spain, by the mid-16th century, New Christians (Jews turned into Christians) controlled Portugal's domestic and foreign trade (Samuel, 1953-55) and thus the export trade of the entire Iberian Peninsula was affected by them. On the North African coast of the southern Mediterranean, the several major trading ports at that time, Fez, Algeria, and Tunisia, were all Jewish settlements. Jews also controlled the spice trade in Antwerp, which served as a transit station for Portugal and northern European countries to trade spices. In the 16th century, the Portuguese New Christian consortium in Antwerp reached the Contract of India and the Contract of Lisbon to sell off spice crops (Samuel, 1953-55). By the late 16th century and early 17th century, most of the trade between Northern Europe and the colonies was also under their control. "The imports most needed in the colonies were northern manufactures, and since Northern Europe was the best market for the dyestuffs, bullion and sugar of Brazil, the Portuguese Jews of Hamburg, Amsterdam, and (as we shall see) London, would have been able to undercut all their competitors and make handsome profits." (Samuel, 1953-55).

The words of the protagonist Barabbas in *The Maltese Jew* indirectly confirmed the widespread influence of Jewish merchants in the European trading circle at that time.

Barabas: East and by-South: why then I hope my ships
 I sent for Egypt and the bordering Iles
 Are gotten up by Nilus winding bankes:
 Mine Argosie from Alexandria,
 Loaden with Spice and Silkes, now under saile,
 Are smoothly gliding downe by Candie shoare
 To Malta, through our Mediterranean sea.
 (*Jew*: 41-47)

In the mid-16th century, as early globalization progressed, the original intention of the Renaissance to revive Greek and Roman art and virtues gradually gave way to the pursuit of materialism. By the end of the 16th century, it became even rare for nobles to engage in overseas trade, and many nobles sold the positions they held in government, such as judges, lawyers, specific positions, and a large number of low-level positions, to exchange funds for luxury consumption (Ferguson, 1962). At that time, luxury goods favored by the nobles included spices and silk. Due to the popularity of spices and silk, their demand skyrocketed.

eted. At that time, spices and silk were mainly transported to Europe through two routes: one controlled by Arabs and Venetians, where silk and spices reached the Arab region through the overland Silk Road, and were then shipped by Arab ships to Venice, and then transported by Venetians to Western and Northern Europe via Alexandria. The other route arrived in the Persian Gulf through the East, crossed the Mesopotamian plain by land, and reached various ports in the eastern Mediterranean. However, this route was interrupted after the decline of the Mongolian Empire. The silk and spice fleet of Barabas traveled from Egypt and neighboring islands up the winding Nile River to Alexandria, then passed through Crete and crossed the Mediterranean to Malta, following the first route. Judging from the division of the Mediterranean trade circle at that time, Barabas needed to deal with at least three forces, Arabs, Turks (during the Great Siege of Malta, Egypt was under Ottoman Turkish rule), and Venetian Republic (Crete was under Venetian Republic rule from 1204 to 1699) to complete this maritime trade. His ability to trade across multiple regions at the same time was stronger than many countries at that time. After all, before the British eased their hostile relations with the Ottoman Turks in the 1570s and resumed trade, their merchants had been subject to the Venetians and the Portuguese in their access to Oriental goods (especially spices and silk).

What gave Barabas this ability was his scattered kinsmen in various European trade circles. According to Jewish tradition, before the Messiah comes to establish a millennium kingdom on earth, they must be scattered to every corner of the world. Therefore, even before the great geographical discoveries, they had spread out to every trade zone in the world, and Hebrew became their language guarantee for communication and contact. The common belief in the Talmud not only provided them with all the rules for doing business but also served as the basis for Jewish courts to make judgments and mediate disputes. Based on these favorable conditions, when transnational trade emerged in the 16th century, the Jews took advantage of the situation and became an unstoppable force in the European trade market.

Taking into account the importance of Jews in the lending and ocean trade industries, in the second half of the 16th century, the hostile sentiment towards them began to ease on the European continent, and Western European countries began to readmit Jews one after another. In 1577, Rudolf II issued a charter for the Jews, granting them new privileges and promising never to expel Jews from Prague and its territory again (Israel, 1985). At the same time, in the 1570s, the number of Jews in Frankfurt, Germany, also showed a significant increase. Even the Netherlands, which had always refused to accept Christian converts, began to change its policy in 1565 and established a Jewish community with more than four hundred registered households in Amsterdam in the early 17th century. These Sephardim soon controlled most of the Netherlands' foreign trade and 25% of the shares of the Dutch East India Company.

At that time, influenced by this "pro-Jewish" trend, England, which faced the Western European countries across the sea, also showed unprecedented "friend-

liness” towards Jews. During the reign of Henry VIII, several Hebrew scholars had already emerged in England. In the 1570s, during the reign of Elizabeth, the British people’s interest in the ancient history of the Jewish people continued to rise (Langham, 2005). By the time of James I, in the mercantilist environment, considering the indispensable role that Jews played in the major trade circles at the time, some people in the country believed that the readmission of Jews to Britain would undoubtedly have a positive impact on its economic development. In 1607, Sir Thomas Shirley proposed to James I to allow Jews to enter Ireland and Britain, and explained the benefits of this policy from economic and financial perspectives, such as stimulating trade and enriching the treasury (Langham, 2005).

From an economic perspective, in the environment of mercantilism, would these “pro-Jewish” sentiments lead to the government’s reacceptance of Jews settling in England? If Jews were allowed to return to England, would England, like Turkey, see the emergence of a powerful Jewish community competing with local businessmen in finance and commerce? While those local businessmen had no reliable trade network and relied on government protection, could they withstand the impact brought by Jews who have already established themselves in various trade circles in Europe? These contradictions and crises are likely to cause the just stabilized English society to become restless again.

In the 16th century, in order to open up overseas markets and share the fruits of geographical discoveries, the English government (especially the Elizabethan government) granted charters and monopolies to groups of merchants engaged in overseas trade. In addition to the existing adventurer companies, the Russia Company, Levant Company, East India Company, etc. were successively established. These companies monopolized the local foreign trade business under the protection of the government, earning a lot of profit. During this period, English local businessmen (especially those in London) also accumulated a lot of wealth. It can be said that the rise of English local businessmen during this period was entirely dependent on the monopoly rights granted by the Queen’s charters. If Jews are allowed to re-enter England, with their abundant funds and unshakable position in overseas trade, they are likely to cause a considerable impact on the monopoly status of English local businessmen. In 1655, when the Cromwell government reintroduced the acceptance of Jews after nearly four centuries, English local businessmen, represented by those in London, protested for the first time. While they were worried about the emergence of a powerful Jewish community competing in business and finance, they also pointed out that the readmission of Jews was actually at the expense of sacrificing the interests of the British people, and filling the pockets of others (Katz, 1994).

During this period, the plays that portrayed the Jewish image also responded to the above anxieties to some extent. On the one hand, the playwrights exaggerated the wealth of Jewish merchants, reinforcing their image as wealthy and powerful competitors, making the people aware that Jewish merchants were a potential formidable opponent. On the other hand, they also constructed in the

play the image of Jews as a potential economic enemy, and the image of the locals as victims.

In Act I of *The Jew of Malta*, when Barabas's ship carrying goods arrived at the port of Malta, a Jewish merchant came to deliver a message to him. Their conversation is as follows:

Barabas: The ships are safe thou saist, and richly fraught.

I Merchant: They are.

Barabas: Why then goe bid them come ashore,
 And bring with them their bills of entry:
 I hope our credit in the Custome-house'
 Will serve as well as I were present there.
 Goe send'um threescore Camels, thirty Mules,
 And twenty Waggons to bring up the ware.
 But art thou master in a ship of mine,
 And is thy credit not enough for that?

I Merchant: The very Custome barely comes to more
 Then many Merchants of the Towne are worth,
 And therefore farre exceeds my credit, sir.
 (*Jew*. I. i. 53-64)

Barabas's cargo for a single trade was so extensive that it required "threescore camels, thirty Mules, and twenty Waggons" to haul back, and the customs duties alone exceeded the "t many merchants of the city are woth". From a historical perspective, this would have been impossible in Malta at that time.

In 1530, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and also King of Spain as Charles I, donated Malta to the Order of St. John as their territory, thus beginning the Order's Spanish period. Starting in 1492, Spain began to use violent means to expel Jews from its territory, and Malta, under the influence of the Spanish government, followed suit in expelling Jews from the island. At that time, only a small number of Jews, who had forfeited 45% of their property to purchase "baptismal privileges", were granted residency (Hopkins, 1997). Cecil Roth, a well-known British Jewish historian, also mentioned in his article "The Jews of Malta" that in the 16th century Malta, only during the brief period of Pope Sixtus V's reign from 1585 to 1590 were knights on the island forbidden from interfering with Jewish merchants' trade (Roth, 1928-1931). Given this, it would have been almost impossible for Jewish merchants on Malta to engage in free and fair trade, let alone become wealthy and powerful tycoons during Barabas's lifetime.

However, Barabas achieved it. Marlowe may have deviated from historical facts to highlight the great impact that Jewish merchants had on the local economy, as he boasted through Barabas in later dialogue, "halfe of my substance is a Cities wealth" (*Jew* I. ii 86). Thus, the image of a Jewish merchant monopolizing most of the city's trading resources is vividly portrayed, and Malta's local merchants are portrayed as the victims of their business advantages.

In *Englishmen for My Money*, the image of the victims of the Englishman is

even more pronounced. Pisaro, who lived in London and accumulated a certain amount of assets through overseas trade, began to engage in high-interest lending on the side, and the native English people became the sacrifices of his business.

Pisaro: And by the sweete loude trade of Vsurie,
 Letting for Interest, and on Morgages,
 Doe I waxe rich, though many Gentlemen
 By my extortion comes to miserie:
 Amongst the rest, three English Gentlemen,
 Have pawned to mee their Liuing and their Lands:
 Each seuerall hoping, though their hopes are vaine,
 By marriage of my Daughters, to possesse
 Their Patrimonies and their Landes againe.
 (*Englsihmen*: I. i. 17-25)

Here, foreign Jewish merchants made a fortune while the native British became the objects of their plunder and oppression.

Shakespeare also attributed the feud between Shylock and Antonio to their business competition, highlighting the intense relationship between Jewish and local merchants. Earlier, when explaining why he hated Antonio, Shylock said that he had cost him “half a million”. The original text was “hindered me half a million”, and the Cambridge edition of *The Merchant of Venice* provides a note for the word “hindered” as “prevented me from making (money)” (Shakespeare, 2003) since Antonio is a Christian, it is impossible for him to have taken a high-interest loan business from Shylock. Considering Antonio’s line of work, he probably took away a trade worth hundreds of thousands from Shylock. Later, when he heard that Antonio’s fleet had been lost, Shylock was even happier, saying “for were he out of Venice I can make what merchandise I will” (*Merchant* 3.1.100). This implies the competitive relationship between Shylock and Antonio in business, and explains why the greedy Shylock did not demand monetary compensation when Antonio breached their agreement, but rather one pound of flesh. Additionally, when Bassanio proposed to pay him three times the amount in money, Shylock refused, not only because he hated Antonio’s insult to his ethnicity and faith, but also because he wanted to get rid of his business rival and pave the way for future trade.

During the Tudor era, drama, as the most popular literary form, had countless connections with politics. Public performances became an intermediary between drama and society (Dutton & Howard, 2003). Commercial public theaters, in addition to profit, also considered the special audiences and positions of sponsors (Walker, 1991). Many plays might even be specifically arranged for royalty and the nobility. Therefore, most authors held a certain political purpose in mind at the beginning of their creation and focused on a specific scenario. Connecting with the current situation in which various countries in Europe welcomed Jews to return to their homeland, and the trend of “pro-Jewishness”

within England, it is not difficult to find that whether it is the exaggerated portrayal of Jewish merchants sitting on a fortune or the emphasis on their economic conflicts with local merchants, playwrights probably aimed to convey a clear and dangerous message to audiences, especially to the officials and nobles: Jews, due to their business talents, will always pose a threat to the local economy and merchants of their host countries at any time.

3. The Portrayal of Jews as Dangerous “Foreigners” and National Security Anxiety

Apart from economic threats, these plays also imply the potential risks to social stability and national security if Jews were to return to England. During this period, England experienced Protestant reform, currency depreciation, frequent changes of monarchy, and internal struggles among old forces, while facing the watchful eyes of Catholic countries, primarily Spain and France. Were these Jews who originally rooted in the Iberian Peninsula coming to England for trade or to engage in espionage for Spain? Throughout history, Jews in England have suffered significant persecution. Would they be able to integrate into English society without harboring any grudges? What impact would their arrival have on national security?

England in the 16th century found itself caught between the two major powers of France and Spain, struggling to survive and develop. Baron Paget, the State Secretary during the reign of Mary I, described this situation as “a bone between two dogs” (Wernhan, 1980). This anxiety of surviving in the midst of such a predicament persisted throughout Elizabeth I’s reign. When she came to power, the Queen was facing economic difficulties, the kingdom had exhausted its resources, the nobility was impoverished and declining, and the army lacked competent soldiers. The people were in chaos, law and order were lax, and the prices of goods were high, resulting in stagnant sales of food, clothing, and alcohol. There were internal struggles and external wars with France and Spain, with the French king standing on one foot in Calais and the other in Scotland, spanning over the kingdom. On April 2, 1559, the three countries of England, France, and Spain signed the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis, ending the half-century-long Italian War between France and Spain. However, soon after the territorial dispute ceased, France and Spain began their own religious wars, with a tendency to suppress the religious heretics together. Thus began one of the most brutal and religiously fanatic periods in European history. From 1562 to 1598, the Catholic forces in France fought the Huguenot faction for nearly 40 years in a struggle for national power. When Philip II came to power, he established a religious tribunal in the Netherlands and brutally suppressed Protestants. These series of religious persecutions actually posed a threat to England as a Protestant nation.

Geographically speaking, England was also a coveted land for France and Spain. The Italian Wars that lasted for more than half a century almost depleted the treasuries of both countries, and the restoration of the economy became their

top priority. At this time, England, which held steady control over the gateway to the Nordic market for France and Spain on the side of the English Channel, naturally became the object of the two countries' contention. Meanwhile, the Netherlands on the other side of the English Channel became crucial to the survival of England. As mentioned earlier, for England, losing Calais meant that the French king had stepped on Calais and Scotland, crossed above the kingdom of England, and this "crotch-under survival" situation made England extremely anxious. If the Low Countries, centered on the Netherlands, were excluded from their sovereignty, England would be in dire straits. From a geographical standpoint, the Netherlands and England face each other across the sea, and the nearest distance is only over 100 nautical miles away from London. The issue of sovereignty over the Netherlands directly affects England's control over its own waters. From an economic perspective, the Netherlands is the main export destination for British woolen textiles, and the export tariffs on woolen textiles are an important source of government revenue. Therefore, the smoothness of trade in this region directly affects the stability of England and government revenue. Therefore, in 1586-1587, members of the British Parliament unanimously believed that if the Low Countries "were subdued by the King of Spain, the Low Countries shall crown him Aeolus and Neptune of the winds and narrow seas (the English and French Channel)" (Neale, 1957).

Already plagued by internal and external troubles, if England were to readmit Jews at this moment, would it be inviting the wolf into the house? Would these Jews secretly engage in espionage within the country and collude with Spain and the Roman Catholic Church? After all, in the early 16th century, the painful lesson of Rhodes, the gateway to the Christian world, falling to the Turks due to Jewish doctor spies, was still vivid, and it was understandable that the English were concerned about this. Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* undoubtedly reflects the author's anxiety about this.

Marlowe wrote this play in 1589 which was during the period of crisis for the survival of the Netherlands. Since the outbreak of the revolution against Spanish rule in the Netherlands in 1566, Queen Elizabeth had repeatedly used her own marriage as a bargaining chip to maintain the balance of power between Spain and France in the hope of ensuring the security of England. However, in 1584, William of Orange, the leader of the Netherlands, was assassinated, and the following year, in June, King Henry III of France finally yielded to the French Catholic League, which had already accepted the protection of Philip II of Spain. As a result, both the Netherlands and France faced the threat of being annexed by Spain, which could also form an encirclement against England. This series of crises eventually led to the formal declaration of war between England and Spain in December of the same year. Although England defeated the Spanish Armada three years later and the threat from Spain temporarily eased, the Netherlands still did not gain independence, and the crisis in England was not resolved. Marlowe chose to write a play set against the backdrop of the siege of Malta in 1565 at this turning point in history, with the intention of alluding to the crisis

in the Netherlands more than twenty years prior.

First of all, Marlowe was very knowledgeable about the geography, politics, and economy of Malta, even though it was located far away in the Mediterranean. Roma Gill once noted that “Marlowe seems to have known a lot about the island of Malta, its geography and its recent history.” Therefore, Marlowe, who was also well-versed in current English politics, should have easily recognized the similarities between the crisis in the Netherlands and that of Malta at the time.

Firstly, in terms of the economy, Malta was known as the pearl of the Mediterranean, while the Netherlands was the trade hub of Europe at that time. Secondly, from a geopolitical perspective, the importance of Malta to Spain and Turkey was similar to that of the Netherlands to England and Spain. The gains and losses of Malta directly affect the political, economic, and security situations of Spain or the Ottoman Empire. Before the Great Siege of Malta, the Ottoman Empire’s territory stretched from Central Asia in the east to the mouth of the Strait of Gibraltar in the west, almost covering the entire Mediterranean coast of North Africa, and bordered Russia to the north, occupying the entire Balkan Peninsula. Apart from the small sea area from Italy to Spain in the west, the Mediterranean has almost become the inland lake of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Malta, located in the heartland of the Mediterranean, is crucial for both sides. In the 16th century, sailing still hugged the coast, from cape to island, and from island to cape. In this case, Malta became an important port for merchants to stop when crossing the east and west of the Mediterranean. For the Ottoman Empire, taking Malta can further expand its influence in the western Mediterranean and pose a threat to the then Mediterranean trading powers, the Duchy of Milan, the Spanish Kingdom of Sicily, and Spain. Losing Malta would make it difficult for Spain to contact the East, which provided scarce goods. Emily C. Bartels has pointed out that the conflict between Spain and the Ottoman Empire over Malta was actually a dispute over Mediterranean trade and territory (Bartels, 1993).

Similarly, due to its advantageous geographical location, the sovereignty of the Netherlands directly determines whether England will be attacked from the front and back, and whether Spain and Northern Europe can continue to trade smoothly. England is located on the northwest coast of the English Channel, but prevailing southwest winds prevail in the channel. At that time, due to the limitations of navigation technology, sailing against the wind was very difficult. France, which recaptured Calais, was on the windward coast, often blocking ships in southern English ports. If Spain completely controlled the Low Countries centered on the Netherlands, France and Spain would likely form a tight blockade chain southeast of the English Channel, almost cutting off England’s connection with the European mainland.

One scholar discussing the foreign portrayals in Shakespeare’s plays pointed out that “wherever they are set, all of Shakespeare’s plays are ‘about’ England” (Ferber, 1990). Because the audience at the time shared a common cultural

background with Shakespeare, they could easily make connections between foreign portrayals and their own country or culture. This law also applies to other authors and their works during the Renaissance period. As a spy for Queen Elizabeth's government, Marlowe may have realized the strategic similarities between the Siege of Malta and the current situation in the Netherlands, and thus used the play to draw comparisons between the two. By using the Siege of Malta as a metaphor, Marlowe made the audience perceive the current political situation of their own country through the lens of another country's history.

In addition to using the Siege of Malta as a metaphor for the situation in the Netherlands, Marlowe also cleverly rewrote the history of the siege, casting the Jewish character Barabas as a pivotal figure in the famous Christian-Islamic conflict. This highlighted the perceived threat that Jews posed to national security. In 1565, the Knights of St. John led the people of Malta in a vow to resist the Turkish siege of Malta, which eventually proved successful. However, Marlowe rewrote the history, portraying Malta as having fallen to the Turks due to the betrayal of the Jewish merchant Barabas. In the play, Barabas, who had all of his wealth confiscated by the Maltese governor Fernandez, harbored a grudge and carried out a series of targeted revenge attacks. This hatred eventually escalated into animosity towards Malta and its residents.

Barabas: I'll be reveng'd on this accursed Towne;
 For by my meanes Calymath shall enter in.
 I'll helpe to slay their children and their wives,
 To fire the Churches, pull their houses downe,
 Take my goods too, and seize upon my lands:
 I hope to see the Governour a slave,
 And, rowing in a Gally, whipt to death.
 (*Jew V. i. 64-70*)

In Marlowe's work, Barabbas sacrificed the entire Malta just to regain his own goods and land. Although this seems shocking, upon further reflection, this setting of economic conflict ultimately leading to the jeopardy of social and even national security has a deeper meaning. Scholars have explored Barabas' root of hatred from an identity perspective, believing that identity consists of two important parts: social awareness directed towards the self and social identity directed towards the persona. The two important parts of Barabas' social awareness that formed his identity were his Jewish identity and his wealth. However, at the same time, these two factors made Maltese society assign him the identity of an outsider rich merchant and a scapegoat. His Jewish identity made him an outsider not recognized and protected by the law, while his wealth made him an object of hatred and desire for the Maltese people as another. When Malta faced threats, he became a scapegoat and sacrificed his wealth as an illegal resident to ensure the safety of other legal residents. All of Barabas' retaliatory actions were only to gain his legal identity (Bartels, 1993). Emily Bartels also pointed out that the Maltese legal system represented by Governor fined Barabas' identity based

on his wealth. If he refused to pay taxes, he had to “straight become a Christian” (*Jew*: I. ii 73-74). If he could not be a money provider, he was not worthy of being a Jew (Bartels, 1993). This viewpoint is a pure theoretical analysis from the perspective of social anthropology and law, which makes Marlowe’s character Barabas and his retaliatory behavior more novel, but the practical significance is somewhat insufficient. Marlowe’s setting of Barabas’ identity conflict, although derived from his creative imagination, has historical roots. In the British chronicles, the image of Jews related to political history always played the role of a scapegoat. When the treasury was in deficit or the political atmosphere was tense, they were taxed, fined, or attacked, and their finances were also looted. In 1194, in order to redeem King Richard I who was imprisoned in Germany, the Jews were forced to donate twice as much money as the wealthy citizens of London. During the reigns of John and Henry III, Jews were forced to pay various targeted special taxes to obtain the right to reside. During the reign of Edward I, Jews became impoverished and lost their importance to the treasury, and in 1290, they lost the right to stay in the country. Obviously, the Jewish ethnic identity and wealth helped the Jews in the alien world to complete their self-identity cognition, but on the other hand, it also excluded them from any Christian mainstream society. This identity contradiction made it difficult for them to identify with any non-Jewish society, and conflict became an inevitable result. Marlowe probably realized the irreconcilable contradiction between the Jewish people and Christian society. Moreover, having studied at the University of Cambridge, he should have been well aware of the history of that time. It was based on the experience of the Jewish community at that time that he created the character of Barabas, who had similar experiences.

In addition, escalating the economic conflict between Barbary and Malta to the political level that affects national security also has a certain practical significance. There were rumors after the Great Siege of Malta that the event was actually an economic conspiracy between Jews and Turks aimed at jointly stopping the provocative plundering behavior of the Maltese knights, which turned Malta into a notorious slave market (Siemon, 1994). Cecel Roth also pointed out that during the Great Siege, the knights claimed that Jews were more dangerous than Turks and accused them of engaging in espionage and even worse activities (Roth, 1928-1931).

As a government spy engaged in national security work, Marlowe’s spy identity requires him to be loyal to the Queen and the country, and his identity as a writer requires him to serve his political identity and defend national security. It may be because he recognized the unstable factors that Jews could pose to national security that he chose to create a Jewish image like Barabas, who was like a Machiavellian figure, centered on his own interests, fickle, and unable to identify with any country or nationality, when the situation in the Netherlands was not yet clear and the crisis with other countries had not been resolved. On the one hand, by rewriting the Great Siege of Malta, he implied the audience to associate it with the crisis in the nearby Netherlands and warned the English Protestants

to be wary of possible provocations from the Spanish Catholics. On the other hand, by emphasizing the irreconcilable contradictions between Jews and Christians due to economic interests and giving Jews like Barabas the privilege of controlling Malta's destiny, he guided the audience to consider the possible threat to national security posed by the return of the Jews to England, against the backdrop of domestic and international tension.

Looking at other plays during this period that involve Jewish characters, like Marlowe, the authors almost invariably focus on the conflict between Jews and non-Jewish society, conveying the message, whether implicit or explicit, that the Jewish community may pose a threat to the country and its people. In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, Shylock seeks revenge and demands a pound of flesh from Antonio. In *The Three Ladies of London*, the Italian merchant Mercadorus is willing to convert to Islam to escape the debt collector, the Jewish usurer Gerontus, and gain protection from the Turkish court. Although literary creation is based on the author's imagination, when different writers in the same period construct the same characteristics for the same other group, this imagination carries specific social and political implications, especially given that 16th-century English writers viewed literature as an auxiliary means of political expression. The special nature of the writer's profession makes them exceptionally sensitive to objective reality and social dynamics, and therefore the dangerous outsider Jewish image is an intentional projection based on historical experience. The purpose of this writing is to encourage citizens and the government to break away from the trend of readmitting Jews to return to Europe and to make the government aware of the threat that the Jews could pose to national and social security.

4. Conclusion

Overall, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the rise of early global trade gave Jews in Europe a new identity as wealthy merchants. However, because they were perceived as different in terms of race, faith, and tradition, they also became the preferred target for Europeans' imaginings of the other, becoming symbols of cultural conflict and racial threats. During the Age of Discovery, as the wave of economic globalization began to emerge, national connections became increasingly close, trade volume and capital requirements gradually expanded, and population mobility also increased. As a result, the relationship between Jews and European countries underwent a subtle transformation, with commercial cooperation and mutual benefit becoming the main aspects of the relationship, while racial differences and conflicts became secondary. European countries began to open their doors to Jews. When some members of the British government showed some tendency to join this trend and began to speak up for Jews, playwrights of this period tried to use their dramatic works to express their concerns about the decision of readmitting Jews to the country from a political, economic, and national security perspective. They clearly recognized the scale of population mobility brought about by early globalization, which, while bringing in ex-

ternal funds and labor for the country, also posed a potential threat to the balance of the domestic economy. In this period, after experiencing a series of landmark political and historical events such as religious reform, the accession of Queen Elizabeth, the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the opening of routes to the New World, the reconquest of Ireland, England's national cohesion was significantly strengthened, and English national consciousness entered a period of rapid development. However, the external threat and internal turmoil continued to pose a threat to this newborn national community, and the Jews, whose identity was unclear, undoubtedly added to the variable factors in Britain's political, economic, and faith transformation period. Finally, it is worth noting that during the Shakespearean era, influenced by the backdrop of national economic expansion, plays became increasingly fascinated with portraying foreign characters. The Jewish image was just one component among these various portrayals. However, the study of Jewish images plays a crucial role in understanding the process of constructing English national identity. As Daniel Vitkus said: "the representation of cross-cultural encounters played an important role in the ideological development of English identity" (Vitkus, 2003).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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