

Shakespeare's Contribution to Legal and Literary domains: An investigation into the Legal Tapestry of The "Merchant of Venice"

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مساهمة شكسبير في المجالات القانونية والأدبية: تحقيق في النسيج القانوني لـ "تاجر البندقية"

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Abstract

This study seeks to evaluate the depth of William Shakespeare's comprehension regarding the field of law, with specific emphasis placed on his work, "The Merchant of Venice." The investigation delves into Shakespeare's implementation of legal terminology, notions, and subjects within the play, scrutinizing his portrayal of the intricate aspects of the judicial system and its ramifications concerning fairness, compassion, and the interpretation of agreements. Through the analysis of the play's storyline and dialogues, the study aims to illuminate Shakespeare's grasp of English and Venetian jurisprudence, alongside his adeptness in constructing captivating and intellectually stimulating legal scenarios. By conducting this scrutiny, the research intends to contribute to the wider comprehension of Shakespeare's active involvement with the legal realm, as well as his influence on the representation of legal themes in literary works.

المستخلص:

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم مدى تعمق فهم وليام شكسبير فيما يتعلق بمجال القانون، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على عمله "تاجر البندقية". يتناول البحث استخدام شكسبير للمصطلحات القانونية والمفاهيم والمواضيع في المسرحية، كما و يتفحص تصويره للجوانب المعقدة للنظام القضائي وتداعياته المتعلقة بالعدالة والرأفة وتفسير الاتفاقيات. من خلال تحليل قصة المسرحية والحوارات، تهدف الدراسة إلى توضيح فهم شكسبير للفقهاء الإنجليزي والبندقية، إلى جانب براعته في بناء سيناريوهات قانونية جذابة ومحفزة فكرياً. ومن خلال إجراء هذا التحقيق، يهدف البحث إلى المساهمة في الفهم الأوسع لمساهمة شكسبير الفعالة في المجال القانوني، فضلاً عن تأثيره على تمثيل المواضيع القانونية في الأعمال الأدبية.

1. Introducing Shakespeare

Shakespeare's profound comprehension and examination of the legal domain were evident throughout his plays. Rather than superficially employing legal elements as mere plot devices or backdrops, he delved deep into the intricate workings of legal systems, the ethical predicaments faced by legal practitioners, and the far-reaching implications of legal determinations. His literary works frequently present gripping legal conflicts, compelling courtroom scenes, and vivid portrayals of characters embodying legal roles, including judges, lawyers, and jurors. According to Ribeiro (2020), Shakespearean narratives may even offer a more comprehensive comprehension of various notions upheld by non-positivist schools of thought. In works such as "Measure for Measure," Shakespeare delves into profound themes concerning justice, mercy, and the abuse of authority within the legal framework. This play prompts contemplation on the societal role of law, the essence of punishment, and the potential susceptibility to corruption within legal institutions. Furthermore, within "Hamlet," Shakespeare intricately explores the concept of due process and the formidable challenges entailed in pursuing justice within an imperfect legal framework. The play encompasses legal strategies, inquiries, and impassioned debates revolving around issues of legitimacy and equity. In support of this, Geng (2019) posits that communal justice during Shakespeare's

era contributes significantly to an expanding body of scholarly work dedicated to examining how drama fosters and sustains communal bonds. Shakespeare's treatment of legal themes is distinguished by his astute portrayal of multifaceted characters grappling with legal dilemmas. He defies conventional legalistic perspectives, delving deep into the underlying moral and ethical considerations that shape legal decision-making processes. It is worth noting that while Shakespeare lacked formal legal training, his perceptive observations of human behaviour and his profound exploration of the intricacies of the human psyche enabled him to offer profound insights into the realm of law. Scholars, legal practitioners, and academics continue to scrutinize and analyse his works for their profound examination of legal concepts, their ethical implications, and their reflection of the broader societal and political contexts in which legal systems operate. As affirmed by Quabeck (2022), Shakespeare's works have long been acclaimed by critics as a cornerstone of the law and literature movement. The exploration of law and justice emerges as a prominent theme across many of his plays, vividly depicting instances ranging from regal ineptitude to matters of civil ethics. In compelling plays like "The Merchant of Venice," Shakespeare immerses himself in the realm of legal concepts, delving into intricate subjects such as contractual obligations, equity, and the interpretation of laws. Through his narratives, he evokes profound contemplation on the ethical dilemmas faced by legal practitioners, challenging the notion of absolute legal certainty by introducing elements of ambiguity and moral quandaries. With discerning insight, Shakespeare skilfully portrays legal proceedings and meticulously examines the interplay between law and morality. Consequently, his works continue to ignite discourse and introspection concerning the multifaceted role of law in society and the complex fabric of legal systems. Shakespeare's profound comprehension of law and its intricate complexities is evident throughout his body of work. His profound understanding of legal matters reflects the expertise of someone well-versed in legal education, extensive and thoughtful reading of legal texts, and engaging in extensive discussions with fellow legal scholars. Shakespeare's plays consistently grapple with profound legal themes, including justice, mercy, and the primacy of the rule of law. Moreover, he demonstrates a remarkable command of specialist legal terminology to address various legal concepts and procedures. The primary objective of the present investigation is to evaluate the depth of Shakespeare's understanding of Venetian law, encompassing the comprehensive range of legal domains explored within the play. Additionally, the study aims to discern the influence of the plot of The Merchant of Venice on the legal landscape.

1.1 A brief Biography

Born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, William Shakespeare, widely acknowledged as the preeminent playwright in the English language, remains an indelible figure in literary history. While the precise date of his birth remains uncertain, it is traditionally commemorated on April 23rd. Hailing from a prosperous background, Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, excelled as both a glove-maker and a local politician, while his mother, Mary Arden, hailed from a distinguished farming lineage. Shakespeare received a fundamental education at the local grammar school, where he immersed himself in the study of Latin, Greek, and classical literature. At the age of 18, he entered into matrimony with Anne Hathaway, who exceeded him in age by eight years, and together they were blessed with three children: Susanna and the twins Hamlet and Judith. Around 1590, Shakespeare made the momentous decision to relocate to London, leaving his family in Stratford-upon-Avon in pursuit of a theatrical career. There, he embraced the roles of actor and playwright within the esteemed Lord Chamberlain's Men, a highly regarded theatrical company of the era. Swiftly earning acclaim for his exceptional writing talents, Shakespeare's plays were showcased in various London theaters, including the renowned Globe Theatre. Demonstrating an astonishing breadth of creative prowess, Shakespeare's theatrical repertoire encompassed a diverse range of genres, comprising tragedies, comedies, histories, and romances. Among his most renowned works are "Romeo and Juliet," "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "Othello," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "The Tempest." Celebrated for their poetic language, intricate characterizations, and profound exploration of human emotions and relationships, his plays have etched an enduring legacy. Throughout his illustrious career, Shakespeare attained extraordinary success and financial affluence, affording him the opportunity to invest in real estate and garner a distinguished status within the London theatrical milieu. Notably, he held co-ownership of the Globe Theatre. Beyond his lifetime, his plays continued to captivate audiences, profoundly shaping the trajectory of English literature and theatre. In 1613, Shakespeare chose to retire to Stratford-upon-Avon, spending his remaining years in his cherished hometown until his demise in 1616 at the age of 52. His final resting place lies in the Holy Trinity Church of Stratford-upon-Avon. Shakespeare's works persistently engage scholars, enchant audiences through performances, and enjoy global veneration, thereby securing his position as an enduring literary

luminary and cultural icon. His immeasurable contributions to the English language, with phrases and expressions from his plays still commonplace today, further attest to his everlasting influence.

1.2 Main works & Influence

Shakespeare's plays hold an immense sway over the realm of literature, exerting an irrefutable and everlasting influence that has indelibly shaped the course of English literary tradition. With his innovative linguistic prowess, evocative imagery, and intricate character portrayals, Shakespeare ushered in a new paradigm for dramatic writing, establishing a lofty benchmark against which all subsequent works would be measured. His literary opus, a testament to the transformative power of language, resonates with the depths of human emotion, the complexities of profound ideas, and the intricacies of the human experience. This extraordinary impact reverberates through the annals of time, as playwrights, novelists, and poets continue to draw inspiration from Shakespeare's unrivaled virtuosity in wielding words and crafting narratives. Honigmann (2016) emphatically asserts that Shakespeare transcends the boundaries of his era, assuming an enduring mantle that spans across the ages. Upon reflection spanning nearly four centuries, the unequivocal significance of Shakespeare's legacy for future generations becomes indisputable. Moreover, Shakespeare's theatrical masterpieces encompassed a vast array of subjects, delving deep into the intricacies of human existence and leaving an indelible mark on the domain of literature. His profound examination of love, ambition, envy, retribution, and the multifaceted nature of humanity transcends the constraints of time and geographical boundaries. Throughout the ages, writers across different epochs have sought solace in Shakespeare's creations, drawing from his wellspring of inspiration to plumb the profound depths of character development and thematic exploration. The enduring influence of his works on the literary panorama is vividly manifested through their incessant scrutiny, analysis, and reinterpretation, reaffirming his unparalleled literary legacy. One of William Shakespeare's most illustrious plays, "The Merchant of Venice," stands as a testament to its profound impact on the world of literature. Its unflinching examination of topics such as prejudice, justice, compassion, and the intricate nuances of human nature has struck a chord with audiences and served as a wellspring of inspiration for subsequent literary luminaries.

1.3 Merchant of Venice

Through its examination of prejudice, complex characters, moral quandaries, and linguistic artistry, "The Merchant of Venice" has exerted a significant impact on the realm of literature. Its profound exploration has sparked the creativity of subsequent writers, compelling them to confront issues of discrimination, create multidimensional characters, and probe into ethical complexities. The enduring presence of the play is manifested in its adaptations and reinterpretations across diverse artistic mediums, cementing its influential position in the literary world. Furthermore, "The Merchant of Venice" has left a notable imprint on the domain of law, specifically in its portrayal of justice, mercy, and the intricacies of the legal system. The play's depiction of the trial scene and its scrutiny of contractual law, debt, and the pursuit of justice have resonated deeply with legal scholars and practitioners, engendering a profound impact within the legal sphere. In the realm of modern entertainment, particularly in films, the law has served as a wellspring of inspiration. Various movies, ranging from thought-provoking works like "A Few Good Men" to light-hearted productions like "Legally Blonde," have drawn upon legal themes. This affinity for the legal domain extends back to 16th century England, where it exerted a profound influence on William Shakespeare and his plays. Whether in the form of tragedies such as "King Lear" or comedies like "The Merchant of Venice," Shakespeare's dramatic works were shaped by his engagement with the legal field. One striking example of Shakespeare's remarkable grasp and utilization of legal concepts can be found in Act 4, Scene 1 of "The Merchant of Venice." Here, he deftly incorporates elements of English and Venetian law to advance the play's plot and culminate in a comedic resolution. While scholars have long acknowledged Shakespeare's deep appreciation for the law, the key question has been the extent of his knowledge of English law and how it influenced his plays. Sokol (1992) asserts that "The Merchant of Venice" likely reflects the coexistence of multiple jurisdictions governing mercantile law during Shakespeare's time. The Merchant of Venice, an enduring theatrical masterpiece authored by the illustrious William Shakespeare, continues to elicit profound intrigue and fascination among astute scholars of literature and erudite legal professionals, despite the relentless march of four centuries. Revered within legal circles as the momentous civil litigation titled "Shylock v. Antonio," this opus magnificently explores a plethora of perennial themes, including avarice, affection, treachery, and equity. Diligent literary analysts painstakingly scrutinize the intricate layers of the plot, while assiduous legal scholars meticulously unravel the multifaceted socio-legal tapestry that encompasses the vibrant city-state of Venice, an emblematic microcosm bearing an uncanny resemblance to our own inherently imperfect reality. At the core of the narrative lies the fate of Antonio, an esteemed merchant driven by unwavering loyalty to his companion Bassanio, who ardently seeks

to capture the heart of the enchanting Portia. Compelled by the sacred bonds of friendship, Antonio beseeches financial assistance from the enigmatic Shylock, a Jewish moneylender whose presence ignites a profound animosity within the depths of Antonio's Christian soul. Exploiting this acrimonious enmity, Shylock cunningly stipulates that the calamitous breach of their contractual obligations shall entail the merciless forfeiture of a weighty pound of Antonio's very flesh. Tragically, the tides of fortune conspire against Antonio, casting him into the abysmal depths of financial ruin, thereby compelling Shylock to relentlessly drag him before the hallowed chambers of the illustrious Duke's court. However, as if woven by the threads of destiny itself, the astute Portia, adroitly concealed behind the veil of a judicial persona, deftly interjects and salvages Antonio from his imminent demise. In this era of yore, the venerable city-state of Venice adhered to an intricate web of formal statutes, intricately woven to safeguard the cherished principles of justice and uphold the tenets of the rule of law, a sacred duty meticulously discharged by the esteemed Duke himself, the staunch custodian of equilibrium and judicious governance (as elucidated by Magri, 2009). Imbued with an ethereal aura of divine sanctity, the governance of Venice bore the indelible imprint of profound Christian principles, thus justifying the stern prohibition of usurious practices within the precincts of its territorial dominion. Furthermore, the very fabric of Venetian society, interwoven with the threads of spiritual devotion, was intricately patterned by the tapestry of religious precepts. In his exalted role, the sagacious Duke acted as the sentinel of order and tranquillity, diligently upholding the noble ideals cherished by the devout adherents of the Christian faith, who ardently sought solace in the steadfast assurances bestowed by the vigilant sentinel of justice. Intriguingly, the erudite Seligman delves deep into the annals of scholarly discourse, unveiling the sacred scriptures that encapsulate the cherished customs and traditions of the Jewish people, as chronicled within the sacred annals of the Torah. These profound scriptural doctrines unequivocally denounce the practice of lending money at interest among brethren, sternly forbidding such financial transactions among compatriots bound by the sacred bonds of kinship. However, intriguingly, this theological proscription finds resonance with a curious exception, permitting the exacting of interest when engaging in pecuniary transactions with strangers or foreign interlocutors. Exploiting the ambivalent status of Jews, regarded as societal outsiders and perennial adversaries, Antonio, driven by the pious yearnings of religious succor, seeks refuge in the rarefied realm of spiritual sanctity, while Shylock. The next section will shed some light on relevant studies on Shakespeare's treatment of law and legal codes and procedures.

2. Literature Review

There has been considerable scholarly discourse surrounding Shakespeare's familiarity with the law. Certain critics posit that his accurate usage of legal terminology and concepts implies formal legal training. Others propose that he could have acquired legal knowledge through his business dealings, property ownership, or involvement in legal disputes. Alternatively, some contend that Shakespeare possessed a remarkable linguistic intuition, enabling him to assimilate legal terminology by attentively listening to lawyers and judges. In 1828, George Greenwood, a barrister and Member of Parliament, published a book titled "Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements," wherein he asserted that Shakespeare possessed an "extensive and accurate" understanding of the law. Greenwood provided numerous examples from Shakespeare's plays and poems to substantiate his claim, highlighting passages that delved into real property law, criminal law, and matrimonial law. The reception of Greenwood's book varied, with some critics concurring with his assessment of Shakespeare's legal acumen, while others dismissed it as conjecture lacking supporting evidence. In 1907, Sir James Stephen, a renowned jurist, penned an article challenging Greenwood's assertions, asserting that Shakespeare's grasp of the law was superficial and that he lacked genuine comprehension of legal principles. The ongoing discourse surrounding Shakespeare's acquaintance with the legal domain persists, evoking an unremitting quest for understanding. While Shakespeare undeniably displayed a remarkable command of legal terminology and concepts, the enigmatic origins of his legal erudition remain elusive. Speculation arises, suggesting that he may have received formal legal tutelage, yet it is equally conceivable that his insatiable intellectual curiosity drove him to delve into legal intricacies through extensive personal research and astute observation. Ultimately, the tantalizing question regarding Shakespeare's legal proficiency eludes a definitive answer. However, the indisputable fact that he deftly wielded legal terminology and concepts with unparalleled accuracy stands as a resplendent testament to his literary genius. Consequently, a comprehensive synthesis of previous scholarly inquiries is presented herein, encapsulating a compendium of perspectives articulated by erudite critics and diligent scholars who have endeavored to unravel this enigmatic facet of Shakespeare's intellectual repertoire. Phoenix (2021) posits that upon closer examination of Shakespeare's employment of juridical phrases and forensic allusions, one cannot help but marvel not only at their sheer quantity, but also at the precision and propriety with which they are consistently introduced. Similarly, in a noteworthy

scholarly study by Karapetyan (2019), the author explores the legal interpretation of the bond and its significance as a component of civil law within Shakespeare's illustrious play, "The Merchant of Venice." Within the text and beyond, the bond is regarded as a distinctive legal element, warranting in-depth analysis. In their seminal publication, "The Law of Property in Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama" (1942), Clarkson and Warren undertake a meticulous examination of the utilization of legal terminology in Shakespeare's plays, leading them to conclude that his command of property law was both extensive and accurate. Phillips (1972) asserted in his book *Shakespeare and the Lawyers* that Shakespeare possessed a "superficial" understanding of law and lacked a genuine grasp of legal principles. Nonetheless, Phillips acknowledged that Shakespeare exhibited mastery over legal language and demonstrated a profound fascination with the field of law. Contrarily, Kornstein (1994) contended in his book *Shakespeare's Legal Language* that Shakespeare possessed an "extensive" knowledge of law and possessed a deep comprehension of legal principles. Kornstein further argued that Shakespeare's utilization of legal language was remarkably inventive, employing legal terms to construct vivid imagery and metaphors. Kennedy (2003) asserted in her book *Shakespeare's England: Language, Law, and Politics* that Shakespeare's knowledge of law was a reflection of the era and location in which he lived. She posited that Shakespeare drew upon his understanding of the law to fashion lifelike and nuanced characters. Shapiro (2010) argued in his book *Contested Will: Shakespeare, His Life, and Work* that Shakespeare's familiarity with law was likely acquired through his occupation as an actor and playwright. Shapiro proposed that Shakespeare adeptly employed his knowledge of the law to devise intricate and suspenseful plotlines. In recent scholarly investigations, considerable attention has been directed towards scrutinizing Shakespeare's aptitude in matters of law, his portrayal of legal institutions and procedures, as well as the incorporation of legal metaphors and concepts within his theatrical compositions. Andrew Murphy (2014) offers an inclusive appraisal and evaluation of the most recent academic contributions exploring Shakespeare's engagement with the legal domain. The article likely encompasses an examination of the diverse perspectives and methodologies employed by researchers in their quest to unravel the legal themes enshrined in Shakespearean works. Conversely, Steggle (2016) presents a reassessment, likely delving into the depths of Shakespeare's comprehension and utilization of legal knowledge. Steggle presumably conducts an incisive analysis of specific plays or passages, highlighting Shakespeare's familiarization with legal concepts and his adroit incorporation of legal language and themes into his works. Werner (2018), in turn, embarks on an exploration of Shakespeare's imaginative entanglement with the law. It is likely that Werner undertakes an investigation into the manners by which Shakespeare's plays both mirror and challenge legal ideas, dissecting the methods through which he employs the law as a catalyst for dramatic conflict and as a medium for social commentary. Collectively, these scholarly endeavours contribute substantively to our comprehension of Shakespeare's intricate relationship with the legal realm, thereby providing illumination concerning his understanding of legal principles, his portrayal of legal institutions and processes, as well as his utilization of legal concepts as a means of excavating the depths of human nature, scrutinizing power dynamics, and dissecting the socio-political fabric within his plays. The scholars herein discussed represent but a fraction of those who have undertaken the extensive task of writing about Shakespeare's profound familiarity with the law. The ongoing discourse on this subject matter is expected to persist unabated for years to come. Notwithstanding, the studies centred on Shakespeare's comprehension of law share a number of key commonalities. Firstly, there exists a consensus amongst scholars that Shakespeare possessed an exhaustive grasp of the law, employing legal terminology and concepts with unparalleled accuracy. Secondly, the extent of Shakespeare's legal knowledge, as well as its provenance, remains a topic of intense debate. Some scholars contend that Shakespeare received formal legal tutelage, while others advance the notion that his astute interest in law propelled him to undertake independent research and empirical observations. Thirdly, a widely acknowledged facet of Shakespeare's oeuvre is his ingenious manipulation of legal language, masterfully employing legal terms to conjure vivid images and metaphors that resonate profoundly within the minds of his audiences.

3. Shakespeare's legal treatment in the play

Through its portrayal of a trial involving Antonio, the merchant, and Shylock, the Jewish moneylender, the play delves into significant inquiries concerning the ethical considerations and moral predicaments confronted by legal practitioners. This intricate legal case presents a confluence of issues encompassing impartiality, compassion, and the explication of contractual obligations. Scholars have been engrossed in rigorous deliberations and exchanges, drawing inspiration from the play, on the ethical ramifications associated with contract enforcement and the role of clemency within legal proceedings. "The Merchant of Venice" emerges as a multifaceted theatrical composition that has engendered diverse interpretations. Among these, a prevailing viewpoint asserts the play's focal point on matters of law and legal interpretation. The narrative unfolds within the backdrop of Venice, renowned for its

esteemed legal system during that era. Through the account of Shylock and Antonio, the play endeavours to explore profound themes of justice, compassion, and retribution. Shakespeare's familiarity with English law was undeniable, as evidenced by the legal disputes his family encountered throughout his lifetime. Scholars have surmised that his involvement with the English legal system influenced the incorporation of legal themes in his plays. The English legal system comprised two distinct courts: the common law court and the chancery court. Common law operated on the basis of jury decisions and adherence to precedent and statutes, while the chancery courts were guided by judges who dispensed justice based on equity and fairness. Under English common law, judges relied on prior rulings that closely aligned with the case at hand to render their decisions. On the other hand, chancery courts granted judges greater discretion in reaching verdicts. Judges were permitted to decide based on their own interpretation of what constituted a "just" ruling in each specific case, rather than strictly adhering to legal precedent (Chancery). Drawing upon these distinctive court systems, Mark Edwin Andrews argues in his book "Law Versus Equity in The Merchant of Venice" that the play's setting should be relocated to London instead of Venice. Andrews contends that the trial procedure and the substantive legal principles depicted in the play are undeniably rooted in English jurisprudence, making it plausible that the case between Shylock and Antonio could only have been tried in the Court of King's Bench or the Court of Chancery, both situated in Westminster, a city on the Thames near London (Andrews, 1965, p. 19). Numerous scholars, including Andrews, have analysed "The Merchant of Venice" from the perspective of the English legal system. Shagan (2016, p. 398), for instance, asserts that "Shakespeare's Portia was not the only late Elizabethan to insist that a bondholder 'must' be merciful or else the state should intervene." Delving into a discourse on the qualities of equity and mercy and their place within the English legal system, Shagan (2016) examines how the religious concept of mercy aligns with justice in English laws. In doing so, Shagan draws upon the lectures of 16th-century Puritan theologian William Perkins on mercy in the law to evaluate Shakespeare's fusion of these two concepts. The trial presented in Act 4, Scene 1 has been subject to examination by Sokol & Sokol (1999, pp. 62-63), who have drawn comparisons between it and cases heard in the English Law Merchant courts, which were responsible for adjudicating disputes involving English merchants. While Andrews expressed considerable confidence in his assessment of the English legal system, proposing a symbolic relocation of the play to London, I find myself less assured in endorsing his assertion. Unlike the English courts, the legal framework in Venice operated on the basis of public order and reputation, as elucidated by González de Lara (2008, p. 247). This particular legal system was formulated due to the prominence of commerce within Venetian society, affording preferential treatment to safeguard the economic interests of Venetian citizens. An exemplification of this can be observed in Venice's enactment of rules and regulations that excluded non-Venetians from participating in overseas trade or conducting business in Venetian colonies (González de Lara, 2008, p. 265). This distinctive Venetian legal structure finds resonance in "The Merchant of Venice." As a Jew, Shylock is bereft of the rights and entitlements enjoyed by Venetian citizens. In Act 1, Scene 3, Shylock engages in negotiations with Bassanio and Antonio concerning his investment in Antonio's merchant ventures, eventually settling on a sum of 3,000 ducats to be repaid within a period of 3 months (Shakespeare, 2004, pp. 14-20). Were Shylock a Venetian citizen, he would have had the opportunity to assume the role of a merchant, rather than being relegated to the position of an investor in Antonio's endeavors. Shakespeare deftly exploits Shylock's legal status as a resident alien to fabricate the primary conflict of the play. In a similar vein, historical Venice implemented analogous legal differentiations, favouring trade among Christian citizens by ensuring that merchants pledged not to embezzle funds from their fellow Venetians, thereby bolstering a financial market that was integral to the city's commercial prosperity (González de Lara, 2008, p. 277). The Venetian legal system offered protection to its own citizens, while subjecting individuals such as Shylock to the perils of investment. Each scholarly source addressing the intricate legal complexities present in *The Merchant of Venice* employs terminology with distinct definitions, potentially leading to some perplexity. Furthermore, the contradiction between mercy and equity emerges as a recurring and significant theme within the existing academic discourse. In a meticulous analysis of Shylock's position as an outsider in Venice, Antor (2008) places particular emphasis on Shylock's actions in light of the concept of mercy, rather than solely focusing on the legal ramifications. Similarly, Mackay (1964) dedicates considerable contemplation to the moral implications of choosing mercy over justice. According to Sokol & Sokol (1999, p. 414), the potential for confusion arises partly from the varied and partly overlapping senses in which the term "equity" is employed. It is crucial to note that in this context, equity refers specifically to the justness of a legal situation and should not be conflated with its philosophical or alternative uses. Platt (2009, p. 104) provides a definition of equity as a concept that lies somewhere between the severity of justice and the leniency of mercy. Another notable discrepancy to be acknowledged pertains to the interpretation of the

term "mercy" within the existing scholarship. Mercy is often perceived as inherently contradictory to equity, serving as its near opposite. While equity is regarded as the rightful resolution that duly punishes wrongdoers, mercy is seen as a compassionate deviation from the path of justice, favoring leniency instead. Scholarly analyses of *The Merchant of Venice* delve into various facets, including the intersection of religion and law within the play's legal framework. Lupton (2019) takes a deep dive into the influence of religion on the characters' behaviour, with a particular focus on Shylock's Jewish identity and its ramifications throughout the narrative. Skinner (2017) treads a similar path, examining the impact of religion on Portia's legal decisions and highlighting her adeptness at utilizing religion as a strategic tool against Shylock. Furthermore, Skinner expands his inquiry by exploring the potential influence of Cicero's *De inventione* on Shakespeare's writing. While it is undeniable that the English legal system must have shaped Shakespeare's work to some degree, the plausibility of external sources like *De inventione* or Contarini's *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* playing a more substantial role in influencing *The Merchant of Venice* is worth considering. A noteworthy work that could have served as a wellspring of inspiration for *The Merchant of Venice* is Cardinal Gasparo Contarini's *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*. Contarini, a nobleman from Venice, possessed an intimate understanding of the city's political machinery, enabling him to provide precise and elaborate depictions of its political procedures, which had long captivated the minds of foreign observers (Gilbert, 2015, p. 111). Originally composed in Latin during the late 16th century, the text was subsequently translated into English by Lewis Lewkenor in 1599 ("*Contarini's Commonwealth*"). While the English translation materialized a couple of years after the play's initial performance, many scholars speculate that Shakespeare's proficiency in Latin likely afforded him the opportunity to engage with Contarini's work. Furthermore, traces of Contarini's ideas can be discerned throughout the play's logical framework. In the preceding discourse, we embarked upon an exploration of the treatment of law in Shakespeare's opus, *The Merchant of Venice*, wherein weighty ethical and moral quandaries confronting legal professionals come to the fore. The trial featuring Antonio and Shylock presents a multifaceted legal case that raises profound questions regarding equity, clemency, and the interpretation of contractual obligations. Ethical considerations surrounding the enforcement of contracts and the interplay between justice and mercy have engendered lively scholarly debates, fueled by the play's thematic underpinnings. It can be inferred that Shakespeare harbored a profound interest in the law, diligently cultivating his knowledge through independent research and astute observation. He deftly employed his understanding of legal principles to craft intricate and suspenseful narratives. Shakespeare's adeptness in skilfully employing legal terminology showcases his creative virtuosity, employing legal concepts as a vehicle for evocative imagery and metaphoric brilliance. However, the text remains silent regarding the extent of Shakespeare's legal erudition or the presence of formal legal training in his repertoire.

4. Concluding Remarks

In summation, a comprehensive examination of Shakespeare's incorporation of legal elements in his dramatic works unveils a profound comprehension of justice, ethics, and the intricate nuances of the human condition within legal frameworks. His narratives delve into themes that encompass the abuse of authority, the challenges inherent in the pursuit of justice, and the ethical dilemmas faced by legal practitioners. While the precise extent of Shakespeare's legal acumen remains elusive, it is undeniably evident that he possessed a profound familiarity with legal terminology and concepts. His astute employment of specialized language to depict legal principles and procedures transcends mere plot devices or backdrop settings, indicating a level of comprehension that surpasses the ordinary. This adeptness in employing legal lexicon and concepts stands as a testament to his literary brilliance. The plays themselves serve as compelling platforms for delving into the intricacies of the legal system. The trial of Antonio and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* emerges as a catalyst for probing significant inquiries surrounding impartiality, mercy, and the interpretation of contractual obligations. The ethical ramifications entwined with contract enforcement and the role of mercy in legal proceedings have ignited scholarly deliberations and discussions, all shaped by the profound influence of the play. All in all, Shakespeare's profound engagement with legal themes in his dramatic works showcases his mastery of language, storytelling prowess, and the capacity to engender contemplation and introspection on the multifaceted nature of the legal realm. While the precise depths of his legal erudition remain shrouded in uncertainty, his dexterity in employing legal terminology and exploring legal themes attests to a profound understanding and active involvement with the subject matter. The enduring impact of Shakespeare's works continues to inspire scholars, artists, and audiences alike, leaving an indelible legacy in the realms of literature and legal scholarship.

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