Considering the notion of poetry in Early Modern drama as a veil for political commentary during a perilously censurrous time, this essay closely examines Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* in its previously ignored historical context while providing a brief survey of the play’s critical heritage to show how the play’s anti-Judaism effects reader response. Within an emerging new vein of Dissident Theory that explores formerly overlooked historical facts in England’s troubled Reformation history, this essay provides an alternate interpretative.
how Shylock haunts our interpretations of the play, which is not, as this essay's title suggests, so much about the Jewish one as found in the Catholic-Protestant crisis, as crisis it undoubtedly was. This reading offers a measured departure from most existing scholarship by exploring the play poststructurally as the site of a metaphoric, performative conversion where Shakespeare employs the trope of anti-Semitism ironically to convey a coded message about the moral incoherence in popular Christianity—specifically concerning Christian identity as seen in forced conversions and the complete violation of the basic tenets of mercy and justice Christianity as Shakespeare saw it practiced.

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