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The Lives of Roderigo Lopez, Solomon Lazarus Levi and Sidney Lee¹

At first glance, this is a tale of two lives: one early modern and one modern. At another level, it is a tale of three lives, one early modern and two modern. I am exploring this tale not merely because all three are fascinating lives in their own right, but also as a case study that throws light on one of the supreme achievements of modern biographical practice, *The Dictionary of National Biography*.

On 1 November 1879, Henry Irving's production of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* opened at the Lyceum Theatre in London. Its talking point was Irving's Shylock, played—despite the actor's conviction that he was playing “a bloody-minded monster”—as innately noble, “the type of a persecuted race; almost the only gentleman in the play, and most ill-used.”² In the midst of its two hundred and fifty consecutive performances, a precocious twenty-year-old student from Balliol College, Oxford, seized the moment to publish an essay on the play, paying particular attention to the character brought into the limelight by Irving. “The Original of Shylock” by S. L. Lee was published by the high-profile *Gentleman's Magazine* in February 1880.³ In it, Lee sets

out to recapture a topical allusion in William Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, suggesting that the character of Shylock is in some way indebted to the contemporary real-life figure of Dr Roderigo Lopez, the Portuguese-born Jewish physician to Queen Elizabeth. On 28 February 1594, Lopez was tried by a special commission at London's Guildhall on charges of conspiring to poison his royal patron on behalf of the king of Spain. Found guilty, he was hanged, drawn and quartered alongside two fellow conspirators, also Portuguese, the following June. It was alleged that Lopez had promised to poison the queen in return for a payment of fifty thousand crowns from the king of Spain; despite confessing at one point, he died protesting his innocence, claiming that his dealings with Spain had been known to English government officials.

Lee provided a somewhat vague account of Lopez's life prior to his arrest, interrogation, trial and execution, which were already well documented. Lopez, he claimed, was "descended from a Spanish Jewish family that had had close connections with Portugal" (188); it was "not unlikely that Roderigo was born in England," sometime between 1520 and 1530 (189); he "probably obtained his medical education ... at some southern [European] university" (189) and returned to England "comparatively early in life" and married "a Jewess named Sarah, who apparently had wealthy relations in Antwerp." Joining the College of Physicians, he became attached to the household of Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, with whom "he lived on terms of great intimacy" (189), and later became physician to Secretary of State Sir Francis Walsingham, Lord Treasurer Burghley, and to Queen Elizabeth herself (190). His skill in languages made him indispensable to a foreigner named "Antonio Perez... known popularly as King Antonio"

(191), but a falling-out with Antonio's ally Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, led eventually to Essex's hounding of Lopez, and his ultimate downfall.

Many of the alleged facts in this account were later shown to be garbled—Lopez was in fact of Portuguese stock, born and educated in Portugal before emigrating to England in 1559; his wife Sarah was born in England; and Antonio Pérez, the exiled Spanish secretary was emphatically *not* the same person as Dom Antonio, the exiled pretender to the Portuguese throne. Nevertheless, for Dr Roderigo Lopez, Lee's article constituted something of a Renaissance. After its initial impact—Lee's article was cited within months by the German scholar H. Graetz⁴—“The Original of Shylock” provoked later scholars led by Arthur Dimock and Martin Hume to re-examine the case and write lengthy articles, mostly exonerating Lopez of the charges against him; in recent years, David Katz devoted an entire chapter of his magisterial *The Jews in the History of England* to the Lopez conspiracy, against the tide of those taking the accusations against him more seriously.⁵

For S. L. Lee too, the article was the beginning of what was to develop into a spectacular career. Two years after that first article and sponsored by the influential antiquarian scholar-editor F. J. Furnivall, Sidney Lee became sub-editor to Leslie Stephen when George Smith founded his hugely ambitious *Dictionary of National Biography*. In March 1883, he rose to become assistant editor, and after Stephen suffered a breakdown in the autumn of 1889, Lee was called on to become first joint editor (in early 1890) and then sole editor of the *Dictionary*, a post he held from 1891 to 1901, and then from 1910 to 1912, throughout retaining the general oversight of the project. From his success in publishing, Lee moved sideways into the new Cinderella discipline of English, becoming

the first professor of English at the University of London's East London College (now Queen Mary). By the time he died on 3 March 1926, Sidney Lee was firmly ensconced in the British Establishment and recognised in North America—chairman of the executive of Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust from 1903, registrar of the Royal Literary Fund from 1907, member of the royal commission on the public records (1910), Fellow of the British Academy, trustee of the National Portrait Gallery (1924), member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, of the Massachusetts Historical Society, awarded honorary doctorates at the universities of Manchester (1900), Oxford (1907) and Glasgow (1907), knighted in 1911, and elected to the Atheneum Club in 1901 under Rule II (for "distinguished eminence in science, literature, or the arts, or for public services").⁶

It is an enviable career, but not one that the undergraduate writer of "The Original of Shylock" might have anticipated for himself. For when Sidney Lee matriculated at Balliol, he was not Sidney Lee but Solomon Lazarus Levi, son of a London Jewish merchant. It was at the suggestion of Balliol's master, Benjamin Jowett, that he truncated "Solomon Lazarus Levi" to "S. L. Lee." In time, the Lazarus-L would be dropped altogether; and the Solomon-S re-expanded as "Sidney:" hence Sidney Lee.⁷ It would be easy to see Lee's strategic print disguise as an assimilationist move that effectively denied his cultural and ethnic identity. In this vein, in his recent book *The Jews of Britain 1656-2000*, Todd Endelman provides a list of "Jews who were well known figures in the literary world," a list that includes Leonard Woolf, Humbert Wolfe, Israel Zangwill, Gilbert Frankau, G. B. Stern, Muriel Spark, Anita Brookner, Alfred Sutro, Peter Shaffer, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard and Queenie Leavis. These, however, Endelman argues,

“were not ‘Jewish’ writers or intellectuals in the sense of exploring Jewish concerns and themes in their work and identifying themselves with Anglo-Jewry.”⁸ Endelman’s list is headed by Sidney Lee, and it is undeniable that, for the last forty years of his life, Lee showed no explicit interest in Jewish concerns and themes nor in identifying himself with Anglo-Jewry. However, what I want to argue toward is that Endelman’s verdict is too sweeping, and misses the point of what Lee was aiming to do in his literary and scholarly career. For the supposed cover-up of Solomon Lazarus Levi and the subsequent slow “revelation” of Sidney Lee operates in neat counterpoint to the critical impetus of that original article, “The Original of Shylock.”

In building his case that Lopez was “the original of Shylock,” Lee argues that Shylock is “the living semblance of a *Jewish* trader,” bearing characteristics “distinctive of his race,” namely “[s]trong domestic affections,” “deep-set sympathies with the fortunes of his ‘tribe,’ and firm faith in the sacredness of its separation from the Gentiles:” this set of features, “combined with a pious horror of eating or drinking with Christians and a fondness for Scriptural illustration, leaves little doubt in the minds of those acquainted with the peculiarities of Jewish character that they have been drawn directly from a contemporary model” (185-6). Lee points out that in the years before *The Merchant of Venice*, there was an unprecedented interest in Jews displayed by London playwrights:

It is certainly significant that, rarely as the Jew has made his appearance on the English stage, he was the hero of no less than three plays, all written and produced within the same fifteen years of the sixteenth century,⁹ and that during those very years a Jewish doctor—Roderigo Lopez by name...—held a very prominent position in London and at court, and shared with the actors an intimacy with those noblemen who proved themselves the warmest patrons of the drama (188).

He continues: “It is, perhaps, a more remarkable coincidence that in the same year, and just before the earliest form of the *Merchant of Venice* was first produced” (188), Lopez came to prominence, to such an extent that “No one living in London at the time could have been ignorant of Lopez’s history and fate” (195).¹⁰

This means, Lee continues, that “Shakespeare was himself acquainted with Jews, and obtained an intimate knowledge of them from personal observation;” and if—as critical consensus would have it—Shakespeare did not travel abroad, then he must have personally observed Jews in England. Much more important than the (highly debatable) analogy between Lopez and Shylock, then, is Lee’s assertion that there were Jews in England—an assertion which insisted that the contemporary historiography that blithely claimed that England was free of Jews between the expulsion in 1290 and the “readmission” of 1655 was wrong-headed. Backing his argument with archival references from the State Papers, then newly available in accessible calendar form, Lee concludes: “we can safely assert that Jews were residing in England throughout Shakespeare’s lifetime, and that opportunities of more or less intimate intercourse with them were for many years open to him” (186). Lee continued his project to establish the existence of a Jewish community in early modern England in another important article, “Elizabethan England and the Jews,” published in the *Transactions of the New Shakspeare Society* in 1892.¹¹ Since Lee, the Jewish Historical Society of England, and in particular the work of Lucien Wolf, Cecil Roth, C. J. Sisson, Edgar Emmanuel and others has endorsed his claims and revealed much about an early modern Jewish presence in England.¹² But I would argue that Lee also used the *Dictionary of National Biography* to advance something of the same agenda.

Although he was not its founder, Lee's influence on the *DNB* should not be underestimated. Like most general editors, he was prone to the temptation of reserving the best commissions for himself, and it was Lee who plucked the two plum entries of this turn-of-the-century *National Biography*. The first, of course, was William Shakespeare: Lee's entry appeared in July 1897 and was followed in November 1898 by a full-length biography of the Bard.¹³ The second key entry was the recently deceased Queen Victoria—originally it had been intended that the First Supplement of the *Dictionary* would reach to the end of the nineteenth century (then considered to be 31 December 1900), but when Victoria died twenty-two days later, it was decided to expand the nineteenth century to include all of her reign. Lee's article appeared in October 1901, again with a full-length biography following in November 1902.¹⁴

In choosing Shakespeare and Victoria, Lee might seem to be perpetuating the most egregious examples of biography's adulation of history's "great men" (and women)—indeed, Lee published in 1904 an account of *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century*, namely More, Sidney, Raleigh, Spenser, Bacon and of course Shakespeare.¹⁵ Yet he also wrote, throughout his career, of two ideas that radically influenced his vision of the *Dictionary*: what he called "the commemorative instinct" and, relatedly, the very notion of "national biography." On 31 January 1896 Lee gave a lecture at the Royal Institution entitled simply "National Biography." In it he claimed that biography was the fulfilment of an "instinctive desire" and that national biography should reflect "pride in the achievement of one's ancestors" by fulfilling an "instinctive desire to do honour to the memories of those who, by character and exploits, have distinguished themselves from the mass of their countrymen."¹⁶ However, as the lecture progressed, Lee conceded

that *national* biography, that is “biographical effort that shall seek to satisfy a nation’s commemorative instinct” needed to be “specially organised for the service.” Biography, he continues:

as it is ordinarily practised, is controlled by no national considerations. It works fitfully. Change, caprice, domestic partiality, confer on one distinguished man and on thousands of lesser men biographic honours, but many others equally or more notable are left outside the biographic pale. If biography is to respond to a whole nation’s commemorative aspirations, its bounds must be enlarged and defined, so as to admit, with unerring precision, everyone who has excited the nation’s commemorative instincts... (15)

Later in the lecture he expatiates on the theme: “national biography will not fulfil its purpose unless it adopt a principle of inclusion that is generous as well as carefully guarded. National biography must be prepared to satisfy the commemorative instinct of all sections of a nation.” (25). Significantly, the “sections” he goes on to give as examples are all dissenting groups, both religious and political. He writes:

Every great religious or political crisis generates, in large numbers of persons, distinctive achievements of the smaller magnitudes which specially excite the commemorative instinct of certain sections of the population. Most of those who went to the scaffold for refusing to acknowledge the supremacy of Henry VIII, those who went to the stake for refusing to acknowledge the authority of the Pope, the Roman Catholic priests who suffered death in Elizabeth’s reign, many of the members of the Long Parliament, the military officers in the civil wars, the Dissenting ministers who were ejected in 1662 for refusing the oaths to Charles II, the early Quakers, the leading Nonjurors, all merit a well-investigated, brief biographical commemoration (25).

National biography, he continues, has to work “on lines of catholicity... a liberal scheme of national biography can on occasion render the nation some medicinal service by correcting the workings of the commemorative instinct, which will now and then get out of order.... National biography—largely designed—is almost the only machinery available to redress the balance” (26).

Twenty-two years later, when the *Dictionary of National Biography* had gone through its first edition, Lee returned to this theme in his 1918 English Association lecture “The Perspective of Biography.” “[I]n the workaday world ... biography does not confine its attention the master spirits,” he claims, quoting with approval Sir Henry Newbolt, who “once wrote of biographers when he was poring over the pages of the *Dictionary of National Biography*:”

Not of the great only [they] deign to tell
 The stars by which we steer,
 But lights out of the night that flashed and fell
 To night again are here.

Lee continues:

[H]uman action which can be credited with the biographic quality of distinction varies infinitely in scale. It is not indeed only the master-spirits, —the Shakespeares and the Miltons, the Drakes and the Nelsons, —who in the interests of the present or the future justly invite biographic commemoration. Biography touches earth far below the stars. Although it leave[s] out of account the vast majority of men and women, it can only justly satisfy the commemorative instinct by bringing a goodly sized minority within the biographic fold.¹⁷

Among the “goodly sized minority” that Lee brought into the *DNB* was Dr Roderigo Lopez, in a volume published in 1893. Building directly on the work he had commenced in “The Original of Shylock,” the entry on Lopez seizes the opportunity to throw in some not strictly relevant information about other Jews in sixteenth-century London. By placing Lopez and, by extension, other Jews of the early modern period into a ‘national biography,’ Lee is rehearsing textually—and for the record—the tendency he had himself detected. He concluded his essay “Elizabethan England and the Jews,” with a brief statement of what he hoped his work had established:

Elizabethan Jews would seem in many instances to have been absorbed into the general population, and the ethnologist may perhaps infer from the circumstance

that the admixture of Jewish and English blood is larger and of older standing than is commonly assumed.¹⁸

This “admixture of Jewish and English blood” is, however, very specific in its age and standing—dating, according to Lee, not from the pre-expulsion era but from the English Renaissance. And this argument is central to his philosophy. Lee was elsewhere to argue that the English Renaissance, which he dated to after the Reformation, was essentially a productive interaction between “Hellenism” and “Hebraism:”

On secular literature the religious reformation, working within its normal limits, produced a far-reaching effect. The qualified desire for increase of knowledge, which characterised the new religious creeds, widely extended the first-hand study of the Holy Scriptures, which enshrined the title-deeds of Christianity. Translations of the Bible into living tongues were encouraged by all Protestant reformers, and thereby Hebraic sublimity and intensity gained admission to much Renaissance literature. It was owing to such turn of events that there met, notably in the great literature of sixteenth-century England, the solemnity of Hebraism, with the Hellenist love of beauty and form.¹⁹

To any early twentieth-century reader, Lee’s tacit reference here would be obvious. In his discussion of Hebraism and Hellenism, he was recasting the debate contained in Matthew Arnold’s 1869 work *Culture and Anarchy* (itself drawing on the work of Heinrich Heine).²⁰ Arnold diagnosed within the English nation two forces: first, “this energy driving at practice, this paramount sense of the obligation of duty, self-control, and work” (142); and second, “the ardent sense for all the new and changing combinations of them which man’s development brings with it, the indomitable impulse to know and adjust them perfectly” (143). Naming these forces “from the two races of men who have supplied the most signal and splendid manifestations of them,” Arnold dubs them, respectively “Hebraism and Hellenism” (143). Each of these two forces, Arnold goes on, “has its appointed hours of culmination and seasons of rule.” Hebraism’s triumph came

with “the great movement of Christianity,” but “the great movement which goes by the name of the Renaissance” —and Arnold’s spelling was deliberately meant to denote “an English form” of the Renaissance— “was an uprising and re-instatement of man’s intellectual impulses and of Hellenism” (159). Hebraism’s contribution to the English Renaissance was the Reformation, “often called a Hebraising revival, a return to the ardour and sincereness of primitive Christianity” (159-60), but definitely the “subordinate and secondary side” of the Renaissance.

In his analysis of Arnold’s concept of “Hebraism,” Bryan Cheyette points out that there is “an inherent instability at the heart of his construction of Hebraism.” Arnold’s “purveyors of culture” were “constructed as ‘aliens’.... The Jew as ‘alien’—a semitic race ‘other’ to the Indo-European English—was to signify both the ideas of cultural perfection as well as an unchanging racial difference.”²¹ In this context, then, Lee’s assertion that “there met, notably in the great literature of sixteenth-century England, the solemnity of Hebraism, with the Hellenist love of beauty and form”²² is by contrast an insistence on the *integral* part played by Hebraism in the cultural highground of the English Renaissance, slightly but importantly skewing Arnold’s account of the relative roles played by his two forces. But Lee goes beyond the abstract philosophy of Arnold’s Hebraism to reinstate the representatives of Hebraism, the Jews of Elizabethan England, back into his “national biography,” his biography of the nation.

Finally, I want to suggest that there may have been important external factors influencing Lee’s agenda from his first article onwards. “The Original of Shylock,” it will be recalled, was published in February 1880, inspired by Henry Irving’s playing of Shakespeare’s anti-hero in November 1879, and therefore presumably penned in the

closing weeks of that month. But Lee was not alone in turning his attention to Lopez in 1879. As Max J. Kohler noted in 1909, a New York Jewish jurist, Judge Philip J. Joachimsen, had published a “Historical Vindication of a Martyrized Jew against John Lothrop Motley” in *The Reformer and Jewish Times* in January 1879, although admittedly “with but little of Mr. Lee’s historical material at his command.”²³ Why should it be that Joachimsen and Lee turned to Dr Lopez in late 1879?

To answer this, we have to turn to another strand in Lee’s argument: that Lopez was despised because of his Jewishness. In Lee’s account, the prosecutor, Attorney-General Sir Edward Coke “laid especiall stress on the fact that Lopez was a Jew. This ‘perjured and murdering traitor and Jewish doctor,’ he said, ‘is worse than Judas himself.’ His judges spoke of him as ‘that vile Jew.’” Lee also rehearses a near-contemporary account by antiquarian and historian William Camden of how Lopez cried out on the scaffold that “he loved the Queen and Antonio as well as he loved Jesus Christ. The irony called forth loud peals of laughter, and as the bolt fell the people shouted, ‘He is a Jew!’” (195). With his footnotes larding his claims with scholarly authority from other seventeenth-century texts by churchmen Godfrey Goodman and George Carleton, Lee insists that Lopez’s degradation proceeds from his instant, unavoidable recognition *as a Jew*. But on further investigation, Lee’s assertions prove misleading. Bishop Goodman’s account of the execution speaks of Lopez trying to be heard by the crowd challenging his sentence to the bitter end, but never mentions his Judaism.²⁴ George Carleton excludes details of the execution from his account, but does include another redaction of the story, in which Lopez, being “examined in the Tower” swore “imprecations vpon him if ever he intended any evill against Queene *Elizabeth*. For *I loue Queene Elizabeth*, said he, *better*

then I loue Iesus Christ;” as Carleton notes, this seemed to some possibly true, “for he was a *Jew*.”²⁵ William Camden does in fact write of the crowd’s laughter and Lopez’s Judaism: “They were all of them condemned, and after three moneths put to death at *Tiburne*; *Lopez* affirming that he had loued the Queene as hee loued *Iesus Christ*, which from a man of the *Jewish* profession was heard not without laughter.”²⁶ But even here the dramatic cry of ‘He is a Jew!’ is missing. The cry is not the crowd’s, nor Camden’s, nor Goodman’s, nor Carleton’s: it is Sidney Lee’s.²⁷

Lee’s insistence on Lopez’s Jewishness as a determining factor in the hostility towards him has influenced critics to the present. Most recently, Jonathan Gil Harris has shown how representations of Lopez feed off existing anti-Jewish stereotypes, still being mobilised in late sixteenth-century fiction: as a poisoner, Lopez follows the supposed Jewish well-poisoners of medieval tales.²⁸ Recently Christopher Marlowe had presented on stage in *The Rich Jew of Malta* the Jewish villain Barabas who tells his slave Ithamore that “Being young I studied Physicke,” boasts “Sometimes I goe about and poyson wells,” and then does indeed poison a nunnery.²⁹ *The Rich Jew of Malta* was revived and played in London several times during 1594, leading Margaret Hotine to argue that “[d]etails of the Lopez case and theatre performances given in Henslowe’s Diary suggests that the *Jew of Malta* revival could have been used to help create anti-Semitic prejudice.”³⁰

While I am convinced by Harris’s reading of these representations, and tempted by Hotine’s account of the social power of Marlowe’s play, I want here to depart from their reading, at least as a working strategy. The poisoning Jew can be more productively read as a strand of what Miri Rubin, in her recent work on the host desecration

accusation, calls the “narrative assault” on Jews.³¹ These narratives are so well embedded, so potent, that it is too easy to employ them to read off any historical or fictional Jew, a critical strategy that, while highlighting the historical persistence of a fixed anti-Judaism, syllogistically delimits the scope of the enquiry. Lopez was a Jew, Jews were considered poisoners, therefore Lopez was accused of poisoning, QED: that is the narrative logic. But this logic is importantly not dominant in contemporary writings dealing with Roderigo Lopez: in these Lopez most frequently appears typed *not* as a Jew, but as either a cozening physician or as one in a litany of heretic Roman Catholic traitors in the pay of Spain threatening the life of the Protestant Virgin Queen. This is certainly the case in Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus* (1604); Thomas Nashe’s *Have with you to Saffron walden* (1596) and *Nashes Lenten Stuffe* (1599); a lost entertainment entitled *England’s Joy*; Thomas Robinson’s *The Anatomy of the English Nvnnerie at Lisbon in Portvgall* (1622); John Gee’s *The Foot out of the Snare* (1624) and Thomas Middleton’s *A Game at Chess* (1624).³² Similarly, even the “official” printed version of the case, orchestrated by the Lord Treasurer, William Cecil, Lord Burghley, *A Trve Report of Svndry Horrible Conspiracies of late time detected to haue (by Barbarous murders) taken away the life of the Queenes most excellent Maiestie*, at no point identifies Lopez either explicitly or implicitly as a Jew—but as a heretic Roman Catholic.³³ This identification gave no little annoyance to real Catholics such as Father Henry Garnett, who wrote to Robert Persons on 6 September 1594 to complain that Lopez’s fall had been “greatly derived to the discredit of Catholics, although most unjustly.”³⁴ Hearing that Lopez had been incited to poison the Queen “by the instigation of the Jesuites,” Garnett exclaimed indignantly: “Lopez was a Jew... and knew no Jesuit in the world, nor was acquainted

with any Catholics in England that I know of.”³⁵ Lopez does admittedly appear as a Jew in a few seventeenth-century writings: in a bizarre German touring version of an amalgamated *Jew of Malta* and *Merchant of Venice*, entitled *Das Wohlegesprochene Uhrtheil, oder Der Jud von Venedig*, the Jew is called (in passing) “Lupus,”³⁶ John Taylor the Water-Poet’s “The Churches Deliuerances” identifies him as “by descent a Jew;”³⁷ and Jonathan Gil Harris has argued convincingly that the treatment of the doctor ‘Ropus’ in Thomas Dekker’s *The Whore of Babylon* draws on the tradition of the *foetor Judaicus*.³⁸ But these date from significantly after Lopez’s death.

So why might Lee insist on this identification in 1879? Jewish academic historians have since pinpointed 1879 as the year that “saw the inception of so-called modern anti-Semitism on the Continent and the coining of the term itself by Wilhelm Marr,” in his popular and influential pamphlet *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum (The Victory of Judaism over Germanism)*, published in Berne in February.³⁹ Moreover it was “also a crucial period in the development of anti-Semitism in Great Britain,”⁴⁰ prompted by the refugee crisis and the rise of what was then called “anti-alienism.” It was in November 1879 that the *Jewish Chronicle* printed three leading articles on German anti-Semitism arguing that its supposed “scientific” basis was fallacious.⁴¹ “The Original of Shylock” does not of course refer to any of these developments, but within a few years, Lee’s agenda had become more explicit. Discussing *The Merchant of Venice* in his 1898 biography of Shakespeare, he once again avers that “Doubtless the popular interest aroused by the trial in February 1594 and the execution in June of the Queen’s Jewish physician, Roderigo Lopez, incited Shakespeare to a new and subtler study of Jewish character.” The doctor’s trial and execution, he can

now argue, “evoked a marked display of anti-Semitism on the part of the London populace.”⁴² Might it not be that Lee’s identification of Lopez not only as a Jew but importantly as a victim of anti-Semitism draws on very current and pressing concerns within the Anglo-Jewish political and intellectual culture of late 1879?

Within Shakespeare studies, the “was Shylock based on Lopez?” conundrum has become somewhat sidelined, with editors feeling it is *de rigueur* to trundle it out in a footnote, more out of respect for tradition than for its scholarly relevance. But in “The Original of Shylock,” I would argue, and especially in Lee’s account of the death of Dr Lopez, we can see the emergence of a tenacious strand of Anglo-Jewish history, and of a Jewish-English literary criticism that reached its apogee in James Shapiro’s masterly *Shakespeare and the Jews*.⁴³ Lee succeeded in introducing Jews to Britain’s “national biography” but at the cost of inventing an Anglo-Jewish history that was defined, and perhaps misrepresented, by the anti-Semitism of 1879. We now need to re-examine the early modern case: the multivalent national, religious and ethnic identities of men such as Dr Lopez require a more nuanced, and determinedly global reconsideration of Jewishness and Englishness in Elizabethan England.

Notes

¹ This piece forms part of a work in progress about the Portuguese Jewish community of late Elizabethan London, tentatively entitled *The Death of Dr Lopez*. Earlier versions of this material were presented at the *Early Modern Lives* conference (Middlesex University, June 2002) and at the AHRB Centre for Editing Lives and Letters Graduate Seminar (Queen Mary, University of London, November 2002): I am grateful

to Sarah Hutton and Patricia Brewerton for inviting me to speak, and to participants for the helpful comments and suggestions generated.

² Henry Irving quoted in W. Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage* (1912), 175, cit. John Russell Brown, “Introduction” to his edn., *The Merchant of Venice* (London: Methuen, 1955), xi-lviii at xxxiv-xxxv; Joseph Hatton, *Henry Irving’s Impressions of America*, 2 vols. (London, 1884), 1.265, cit. Jay L. Halio, “General Introduction” to his edn., *The Merchant of Venice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1-83 at 68.

³ S. L. Lee, “The Original of Shylock,” *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 246 (1880), 185-200.

⁴ H. Graetz, *Shylock in der Sage, im Drama und in der Geschichte* (Krotoschin: B.L. Monasch & Co., 1880), 23, 26, 29 and 30.

⁵ Arthur Dimock, “The Conspiracy of Dr. Lopez,” *English Historical Review* 9 (1894), 440-72; Martin A. S. Hume, *Treason and Plot: Struggles for Catholic Supremacy in the Last Years of Elizabeth* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1901), ch. 5; M. Hume, “The so-called conspiracy of Dr Ruy Lopez,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* [hereafter *TJHSE*] 6 (1908), 32-55; Max J. Kohler, “Dr. Rodrigo Lopez, Queen Elizabeth’s Jewish Physician, and his Relations to America,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 17 (1909), 9-25; John Gwyer, “The Case of Dr Lopez,” *TJHSE* 16 (1952), 163-84; P. J. Fenn, “Queen Elizabeth’s Poisoner,” *St Bartholomew’s Hospital Journal* (February 1957), 49-55; A. Griffith, “Dr Roderigo Lopez,” *St Bartholomew’s Hospital Journal* (November 1964), 440-52; Frederic D. Zeman, “The Amazing Career of Doctor Rodrigo Lopez (? –1594),” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 39 (1965), 295-308; David S. Katz, “The Jewish Conspirators of Elizabethan England” in *The Jews in the History of England 1485-1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 49-106.

⁶ [F. R. Cowell], *The Athenaeum: Club and Social Life in London 1824-1974* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 165.

⁷ C. H. Firth, “Sir Sidney Lee 1859-1926” [from *The Proceedings of the British Academy*, 15]; E. I. Carlyle, “Lee, Sir Sidney (1859-1926),” *The Dictionary of National Biography, 1922-1930*, ed. J. R. H. Weaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 497-502 at 497: although both Firth and Carlyle give Lee’s original name as “Solomon Lazarus” and his father’s as “Lazarus Lee,” thus still eliding “Levi.”

⁸ Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 263.

⁹ In addition to *The Merchant of Venice*, Lee refers to Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and the lost play *The Jew*, cited by Stephen Gosson.

¹⁰ Lee cites "four important points" giving "unexpected confirmation" of his theory (196). First, "the name of Antonio:" Shylock's opponent shares a name with Dom Antonio, the pretender to the Portuguese throne, whom Lopez befriended then betrayed; second, "the date and construction of the play," which he dates to "not much more than three months after Lopez's famous execution" (198) in June 1594; third, "a few points in Shylock's character," to wit, devotion to family and "the Jewish virtue of domesticity," citing Lopez's attending to his ill wife, and the warmth evinced in correspondence with relatives overseas; and fourth, "some incidental references to current events" —references to racking, hanging "for human slaughter," gallows, a halter, etc.

¹¹ Lee, "Elizabethan England and the Jews," *Transactions of the New Shakspeare Society 1887-92*, 143-66.

¹² See *TJHSE passim* and especially Lucien Wolf, "Jews in Elizabethan England," *TJHSE* 11 (1928), 1-91; *ibid.*, "Jews in Tudor England" in *Essays in Jewish History*, ed. Cecil Roth (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1934), 71-90; Cecil Roth, "5. The case of Thomas Fernandes before the Libson Inquisition, 1556. From the papers of the late Lucien Wolf" in *The Jewish Historical Society of England: Miscellanies part II* (Paulton, Somerset and London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1935), 32-56; C. J. Sisson, "A Colony of Jews in Shakespeare's London," *Essays and Studies* 23 (1938), 38-51; E. R. Samuel, "Portuguese Jews in Jacobean London," *TJHSE* 18 (1958), 171-230; Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 132-48; Edgar Samuel, "Passover in Shakespeare's London," *TJHSE* 26 (1979), 117-18.

¹³ Sidney Lee, *A Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1898); the book went through thirteen editions in Lee's lifetime.

¹⁴ Sidney Lee, *Queen Victoria, A Biography* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1902).

¹⁵ Sidney Lee, *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Archibald Constable, 1904).

¹⁶ Sidney Lee, *National Biography: A Lecture delivered at the Royal Institution on the evening of Friday, Jan. 31, 1896* (privately printed [from *Cornhill Magazine*], [1896?]), 13.

¹⁷ Sir Sidney Lee, *The Perspective of Biography* (London: The English Association [pamphlet no. 41], 1918), 7-8.

¹⁸ Lee, “Elizabethan England and the Jews,” 161.

¹⁹ Lee, *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century*, 13-14.

²⁰ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1869). Further references in the text are to this edition.

²¹ Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of ‘the Jew’ in English Literature and Society: Racial representations, 1875-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 13-23 at 18, 22.

²² Lee, *Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century*, 13-14.

²³ Philip J. Joachimsen, “Historical Vindication of a Martyrized Jew against John Lothrop Motley” in *The Reformer and Jewish Times* 10 (24 January 1879) cited in Kohler, “Lopez ... and his Relations to America,” 10. See also Joachimsen’s article in *Jewish World*, January 1880.

²⁴ “Being brought to the place of execution, Lopez began to speak and to acquaint the people with the whole business. But there were some that stood afar off, some in one place, some in another, and they cried to him, ‘Speak out, speak out;’ others, that were in some nearness unto him, cried aloud, ‘Hold your peace, hold your peace:’ and thus was the whole time spent, and the poor man could not be heard a word, and so was turned off the ladder. This I heard from a very credible man that was then present; and the former narration I heard from a very honest man, who had it from him that did solicit Dr. Lopez’ business, and was the messenger between the Queen and him.” Godfrey Goodman, *The Court of King James the First*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), 1.155.

²⁵ Geo: Carleton, *A Thankfvll Remembrance of Gods Mercy. In an Historicall Collection of the great and mercifull Deliverances of the Church and State of England, since the Gospell began here to flourish, from the beginning of Queene Elizabeth... The second Edition, revised, and enlarged* (London: I. D. for Robert Mylbourne, 1625), Aa2^v.

²⁶ William Camden, *The Histoire of the most Renowned and Victorious Princesse Elizabeth, Late Queene of England... Composed by Way of Annals* (London: Benjamin Fisher, 1630), Hhh2^r (4.59). This is a translation of Camden’s 1615 Latin text: “Singuli condemnati, & post tres menses, supplicio ad Tiburnas furcas affecti, Lopezio profitente se adamare Reginam perinde ac Iesum Christum, quod à Iudaicæ professionis homine non sine risu exceptum.” William Camden, *Annales rerum Anglocarvm, et*

Hibernicarvm, regnante Elizabetha, ad annvm salvtis M. D. LXXXIX (London: typis Guilielmi Stansbij, Impensis Simonis Watersoni, 1615), L2^f.

²⁷ Recently Edgar Samuel has attempted to explain Camden's story, and salvage Lopez for Judaism, by suggesting that Lopez in fact said "I love the Queen as well as I love Our Lord," referring not to Jesus Christ but to the God of Israel. See Edgar Samuel, "Dr Rodrigo Lopes' last speech from the scaffold at Tyburn," *TJHSE* 30 (1987-1988), 51-3.

²⁸ Jonathan Gil Harris, "Public Enemas: The Disjunctions of the Excremental Jewish Pharmakon" in *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 79-106, citing Tho[mas] Nash[e], *Christs Teares over Iervsalem. Whereunto is annexed a comparatiue admonition to London* (London: Thomas Thorp, 1613), D^v; and *The Vnfortvnate Traveller. Or, The life of Iacke Wilton* (London: C. Burby, 1594), N^f.

²⁹ Christopher Marlo[we], *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Iew of Malta* (London: Nicholas Vavasour, 1633), E2^f cit. Harris, "Public Enemas," 98.

³⁰ Margaret Hotine, "The Politics of Anti-Semitism: *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice*," *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 38 [236] (1991) 35-8 at 35.

³¹ See Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

³² Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of D. Faustus* (London: T. Bushell, 1604), E2^f; Nashe, *Have with you to Saffron walden. Or, Gabriell Harueys Hunt is vp* (London: John Danter, 1596), C4^f; Nashe, *Nashes Lenten Stuffe* (London: for N.L. and C.B., 1599), I4^v; Thomas Robinson, *The Anatomy of the English Nvnnery at Lisbon in Portvgall* (London: Robert Mylbourne, and Philemon Stephens, 1622), C^{f-v}; John Gee, *The Foot out of the Snare: with a Detection of Svndry Late practices and Impostures of the Pirests and Iesuits in England* (London: H.L. Robert Milbourne, 1624), G2^v-G3^f; [Thomas Middleton], *A Game at Chesse* (Ghedruckt in Lydden: Ian Masse, 1624?), H^f.

³³ *A Trve Report of Svndry Horrible Conspiracies* (London: Charles Yetsweirt, 1594).

³⁴ Father Henry Garnett to Fr. Robert Persons, 6 September 1594 in Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, vol 4 (London: Burns and Oates, 1878), 45-8 at 46.

³⁵ "Papers relating to the English Jesuits" (BL Additional MS 21203); Foley, *Records*, 164-90 at 170.

³⁶ *Comoedia Genandt Dass Wohl Gesprochene Uhrtheil Eynes Weiblichen Studenten oder Der Jud Von Venedig* (V.iii) in Johannes Meissner, *Die Englischen Comoedianten zur zeit Shakespeares in Oesterreich* (Vienna: Carl Konegen, 1884), 131-89; Ernest Brennecke with Henry Brennecke, *Shakespeare in Germany 1590-1700 With Translations of Five Early Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 174. I am grateful to Kirk Melnikoff for this reference.

³⁷ John Taylor, “Gods Manifold Mercies in these miracvlovs deliverances of our Church of *England*, from the yeare 1565 vntill this present, 1630. particularly and briefly Described,” in *All the Workes of Iohn Taylor The Water-Poet ... With sundry new Additions, corrected, reuised, and newly Imprinted* (London: James Boler, 1630), 3rd sequence, 142-6 (Mmm6^v-8^v). The poem’s running title is “The Churches Deliuerances.” See stanza 13 (p. 145, Mmm8^f).

³⁸ Thomas Dekker, *The Whore of Babylon* (London: Nathaniel Butter, 1607), H^v; Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic*, ch. 4.

³⁹ Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 260-1.

⁴⁰ David Cesarani, *Reporting Anti-Semitism: the “Jewish Chronicle” 1879-1979*, The Parkes Lecture 1993 (Southampton: University of Southampton, 1993), 3. See also Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876-1939* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), Ch. 1.

⁴¹ Cesarani, *The “Jewish Chronicle” and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 82, and more generally 70-88.

⁴² Lee, *A Life of William Shakespeare*, 68, 68 n.1.

⁴³ James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).