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The Merchant of Venice: Schools, Libraries, and Censors

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Introduction

The censorship of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* commenced in this country before the First World War. In 1911, a citizen's committee in Connecticut asked their local school board to "eliminate the study of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* from the curricula of Meriden schools" (Nelson and Roberts 4). The committee argued that Shylock was a "grossly exaggerated caricature of anything human" (4), and the board agreed the play created anti-Semitic feeling. *The Merchant* was subsequently removed as a textbook. The play was banned in Boston in 1937 (Gray 56). Voluntary home study was permitted provided the play and Shylock were not discussed in the classroom. By 1937, over 100 public schools had similar proscriptions (56). In 1940, Hazleton Spencer added her support of those schools that "wisely removed" a work with an "anti-Semitic edge" (Spencer 239). In Florida in 1987, the Bay County Superintendent of Schools Leonard Hall banned 64 books within parts of his district, including *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Merchant* (Associated Press; Delfattore 105-107). Students could still read the play, outside of class. No teacher could discuss it within a classroom that had received notice that it was "forbidden" material (Delfattore 107). Some parents protested and asked that the classics be restored. Eventually, a compromise between the school board and the parents was reached. A more lenient "review process" would decide which classics would be part of the curriculum (112). Superintendent Hall proved he was not unique, "not alone in his conviction that no literary merit justifies the use of books that present immoral behavior" (113). Through legal wrangling, Hall's decision was reversed in time for the following fall term.

High court decisions have not assured the protection of classics in the classroom, including *The Merchant*. Although protest over the book has decreased in the last fifty years, the problem is not completely dormant. ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom writes that as of 19 November 2007, "there have been no reported challenges to *Merchant of Venice* [sic] in our database since 1990" (Campbell). Other web sites refer to distant prohibitions that do not seem to impact required reading courses today. The University of Pennsylvania reports a banning of *The Merchant*, yet, this occurred almost thirty years ago ("The Online Books Page"). What is one to believe about the present threat of censorship? One the one hand, from ALA, there is no documentation of a challenge to *The Merchant* in the last 18 years. ALA also states it "does not claim comprehensiveness in recording challenges" (ALA Top 10). It should be considered that other districts have removed *The Merchant* without reporting the outcome. Gladys V. Veidemanis reports the play "largely eliminated from the secondary curriculum" in the early 1990s (371) although ALA reported no challenges after 1990. Though precise information is wanting for the cause of the elimination, Veidemanis infers that it is due to a perceived bias of anti-Semitism. Another writer confirms trouble for the play. Robert J. Wilson reports, "Between 1988 and 1995 the teachers of Suffern High School were forbidden from teaching *MV* [The Merchant] despite numerous verbal protests from the faculty of the English Department" (44). When a new superintendent arrived in 1995 to the Ramapo Central School District in New York, the play was reinstated officially. Wilson complains that the effort was insufficient. "Suppression wimpers" as Shakespeare's Othello replaced *The Merchant*: old copies of the

latter were “removed” and new copies were not budgeted for replacement (Wilson 44-45). Based upon articles from Wilson and Veidemanis, it can be inferred that there are still unreported cases of opposition to the play that have resulted in a decision not to adopt it in the curriculum.

The teacher and librarian must prepare themselves to explain Shakespeare's message of humanity to those who object that Shylock is an instrument of intolerance. Prejudice is often discussed by teachers in light of historic background. Documents for the phenomenon of anti-Semitism in Elizabethan England vary in scope, some of them encompassing the literature and theater of that era, and others referring to politics. From Christopher Marlowe, we learn that “According to the strict letter of the law, there were not supposed to be any Jews in Elizabethan England” (Bakeless 178). All Hebrew people had been legally expelled by centuries earlier by King Edward I. In *Shakespeare of London*, Marchette Chute goes so far as to state that Shakespeare “had no opportunity to see any real Jews” (176). Regardless, from the Dark Ages through the Middle Ages, Jews were people who many believed “had caused the Black Death by poisoning wells,” and it was thought they were “generally conspiring to overthrow Christendom (Wistrich 29). Another stereotype was that if they were not killing Christians, they were cheating them through usury. “Jewish usury was likened to the practice of female prostitution” (Shapiro 99). The stereotype was a contrast to historic fact. From the Expulsion of 1290 until the 17th century period of Readmission, the Jewish population was almost nonexistent, and the Jewish activities were negligible in Great Britain. “For nearly four centuries England disappears almost entirely from the horizon of the Jewish world” (Roth 90). Yet, the hostility to them continued.

The case of Dr. Lopez is illustrative of the Elizabethan age's prejudice. The royal physician, who converted from Judaism to Christianity, was convicted of attempting to poison the monarch. When he was executed on orders of Queen Elizabeth I, his death was not completed in seclusion in order to set an example. The doctor was hung publicly in a ceremony open to the entire London community, in grotesque exhibitionism. The renowned Shakespearean scholar Stephen Greenblatt quotes a witness who acknowledged that Dr. Lopez professed love to Queen and Christ and “coming from a man of the Jewish Profession, moved no small Laughter in the Standers-by (Greenblatt).”

Shylock and the Haven of the Courts

In spite of the anti-Semitic depiction, one that mirrors the sentiment of the Elizabethan audience in which he was created, Shylock appeals to the sympathy of teachers and critics. He shows himself “both the embodiment of an irrational hatred and a credible human being” (Murry 39). He is a powerful character in the injuries he has suffered. Teachers and librarians see Shylock as more than a violent caricature. They want to protect the play in a secondary school curriculum. They understand that what is objectionable must not be suppressed when it has instructional merit. However, many of the arguments used to sway the public are legalistic. They argue that the Constitution denies restriction to materials and assures a freedom of access. Educator Joan Delfattore writes, “The crucial role that school boards play in deciding whether certain literary classics violate community moral standards was illustrated by case after case in the 1980s” (112-113). *Case after case*. It is through the law that education leaders are often taught to justify a controversial work. Power is at issue, and the legal basis for book selection, not the ideology of a critical heritage, measures the relevance and props up the poignancy of books. The ACLU argued in one case that, “There must be some First Amendment recourse against the tyranny of board taste. Literary classics generally considered part and parcel of a liberal arts education cannot be constitutionally bannable because a board doesn't ‘like’ them” (qtd. in Delfattore 117). In the case referred to, the ACLU lost their appeal, and subsequently, teachers in Columbia County Florida were unable to teach Aristophanes or Chaucer for advanced high school students during the 1980s (118).

How Library Leaders Prepare for Future “Trials”

It is difficult to find an educational authority that gives a national perspective on censorship while integrating literary qualities as a point of reference. However, there are good contemporary collections on the history of controversial books. One by Karolides, Burrell, and Kean gives a solid presentation. In

Censored Books: Critical Viewpoints, their engaging essays show that the “literary scavengers” (164) cover up the joys of the classics. They favor a legalistic approach which places the literary discussion as a tool of persuasion in a secondary role. A block quote from the United States Constitution leads off the Introduction (xiii). A further quote from the combined efforts of the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association affirms the student’s right to access. There is no quote from Aristotle on Greek drama or epic poetry, no quote from Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare, nor any words from a current interpreter on Mark Twain. Legal theory is the dominant recourse for appeal in challenges from censors, according to guides such as *Censored Books*.

The American Library Association is an assembly of leaders that traditionally provides a united voice for education in the school library. One turns to ALA’s “Intellectual Freedom” web site to find their “Censorship Basics.” Here, one would expect a holistic guide to defend a canonical work. ALA commences with a legal quote:

“If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.” — Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan, Jr. in *Texas v. Johnson*.

One should not underestimate the need to defend against censorship with legal rhetoric. This paper argues that it would be a stronger bulwark if ALA provided a nexus between literary appreciation and the law in the safeguarding of classics. While reading itself is considered to be a self-evident and Constitutionally protected right, ALA does not have a developed resource to show that classics such as *The Merchant* can be discussed to teach the power of racial and religious intolerance. No teacher or librarian would choose or defend any writing without considering its authorial intent, and no elaboration of the role of that intent is given by ALA. One searches through the Intellectual Freedom manual and finds numerous court decisions. There is a “Conducting a Challenge Hearing” site and a “Coping with Challenges: Kids and Libraries” site and a broader “Coping with Challenges: Strategies and Tips for Dealing with Challenges to Library Materials” site, none of which answer the question of the “why” young patrons should read great works to find a comprehension of such contradictory themes as revenge and compassion. The concentration is “how” students have a legal right to read. We know that right is always circumscribed by the content and the purpose of the writer. The right to read in ALA’s Library Bill of Rights should be more than a liberty to access and learn texts because they are written. The librarian must be seen in role of an educator, as a champion of renowned literature even when certain works are part of a polemic.

This paper does not argue that ALA’s declamations are ineffective tools for legal debate. It recognizes that teachers and librarians prepare themselves for legal skirmish through electronic education provided by ALA. On their web site “What You Can Do To Oppose Censorship,” there are substantial quotes from such luminaries as Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, Noam Chomsky, and Bill Moyers. However, there is no substantial quote from a literary authority, recent or ancient. There is no pronouncement on access that uses a literary perspective to show why such authors as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Mark Twain, James Joyce, or Toni Morrison have their educational value. Freedom foundations, civil liberty groups, legislative acts, and even links to news reports are listed, but no literary authorities.

In their section “Court Cases,” ALA turns to the courts as the first line of defense for books that are challenged in libraries, including the school library. There are over 80 federal and state court rulings, some explained in block paragraphs. There is one case that directly involves *The Merchant*. Under the main “Court Cases” section, “The Right To Read Freely” subsection has the dispute between the City of New York and the petitioner who wanted both *The Merchant* and *Oliver Twist* banned from the city classrooms and school libraries (ALA “Court Cases”). In *Rosenberg v. Board of Education of City of New York*, 92 N.Y.S.2d 344 (Sup. Ct. Kings County 1949), anti-Semitism was at issue (Karolides 376-377; Gray 56; Yale 937-939). The plaintiff argued that Shylock and Fagin were stereotypes that denigrate the Jewish race, and consequently, Shakespeare and Dickens were, in those two works, inappropriate authors for students. Justice Anthony J. Di Giovanna ruled against the plaintiff. Though there is no

reference to the indispensability of *The Merchant* or *Oliver Twist* for young readers who seek the power of literature, there is an eloquent plea for the protection of works where racial distortion is not the clear purpose of authors and educators. Justice Di Giovanna wrote that the New York City Board of Education “acted in good faith without malice or prejudice and in the best interests of the school system entrusted to their care” (ALA “Court Cases”). The court demonstrated its own literary merits, recognizing the importance of the author’s craft and denying in both cases that that craft had been used for denigration:

Except where a book has been maliciously written for the apparent purpose of promoting and fomenting a bigoted and intolerant hatred against a particular racial or religious group, public interest in a free and democratic society does not warrant or encourage the suppression of any book at the whim of any unduly sensitive person..... The necessity for the suppression of such a book must clearly depend upon the intent and motive which has actuated the author in making the portrayal. (qtd. in Karolides 376-377)

The reasoning is revealing. The Court assumes intent when that quality is what is being challenged. An “unduly sensitive person” protests in vain only after a plurality of literary testimony explains the greatness of the portrayal of Shylock. This villain’s conduct may be monstrous, indefensible, and censorious without it.

Scholars Commend *The Merchant*

Teachers and librarians should have access to works that animate *The Merchant’s* themes. It is the knowledgeable critic, as well as the persuasive jurist, who understands our dissatisfaction with religious prejudice. Martin Coyle’s *The Merchant of Venice* can commence an engrossing classroom lecture. This “casebook” has cogent essays from current experts. Their writing explains how students can “think afresh” (ix) on issues of the play. The inquiries of the guide not only explain how the play can be taught, but why it should be taught in the classroom. Coyle’s work is an inheritor of a long line of aesthetic criticism. William Hazlitt is one of the most important and influential Shakespearean essayists of the early 19th century in Great Britain. He interprets Shylock with a provoking blend of philosophy with natural law:

This is a play that in spite of the change of manners and prejudices still holds undisputed possession of the stage....[Shylock] becomes a half favourite with the philosophical part of the audience, who are disposed to think that Jewish revenge is at least as good as Christian injuries..... The desire of revenge is almost inseparable from the sense of wrong; and we can hardly help sympathizing with the proud spirit, hid beneath his “Jewish gaberdine,” stung to madness by repeated undeserved provocations, and labouring to throw off the load of obloquy and oppression heaped upon him and all his tribe by one desperate act of “lawful” revenge.... (qtd. in Baker and Vickers 32)

Hazlitt is one of many critics who demonstrate that iniquity must be recognized, not suppressed. Consider what the Victorian poet and critic Algernon Charles Swinburne writes as he interprets anti-Semitism as a literary device to illuminate injustice.

The Merchant of Venice is perhaps the greatest and most perfect example of tragi-comedy on record. The tragic figure of Shylock, less sinned against than sinning, is thrilled and vivified by comic as well as terrific touches of character and emotion.... But here as always Shakespeare is ahead of all men: his plea for righteousness, his claim for manhood, his appeal for charity, could not have been so keen, so profound, so durable in the final impression of their force if they had been put into the mouth of a good Jew, a moral and sentimental sufferer, as now that they find fierce and tigerish utterance from the bloodthirsty lips of a ravenous and murderous usurer. (qtd in Baker and Vickers 259)

For a recent and more controversial critic, consider Harold Bloom, the Yale University Sterling Professor of the Humanities and English. He writes:

One would have to be blind, deaf, and dumb not to recognize that Shakespeare's grand, equivocal comedy *The Merchant of Venice* is nevertheless a profoundly anti-Semitic work..... That Shakespeare himself was personally anti-Semitic we reasonably can doubt, but Shylock was one of those Shakespearean figures who seem to break away from their plays' confines. (Bloom 171)

The bitterness of Shylock so impresses us that it is always a surprise to be told how small a part of the play is spoken by him: only 360 lines and sentences. His utterances manifest a spirit so potent, malign, and negative as to be unforgettable. (Bloom 274)

What is unforgettable in *The Merchant* must not disparage it; it must not resign the play to a secondary school oblivion. Hazlitt, Swinburne, and Bloom bolster the rationale for the play's selection. Their confident prose conjures up the force of Shylock. They transform angry orations into a work of art for those new to Shakespeare. Shylock's humor, malignity, and downfall are championed by the ingenuity of classic essayists.

Those who guide national library policy can integrate legal and literary authority. A liberty to read can coexist with an assembly of interpretive voices from English criticism. Appreciative essayists show there is eloquence in the most choleric of villains. The dissatisfied patrons who challenge school procedure could see more persuasive arguments when dramatic analysis and Constitutional liberty melded into one defense.

Does Shakespeare Have A Privileged Status?

Does Shakespeare have a privileged status within school curriculums, one which protects him from a correct understanding of his disturbing characterization of the Jewish people? A Shakespeare detractor may ask, "It should not be whether anti-Semitism should be explained, but whether Shakespeare's canonicity should be justified. *The Merchant* is just another unbalance in our education system. The play has an aura which should be broken. Because he wrote it, teachers preach it, regardless of whether there is an obvious parallel between Shylock and other propaganda against the Jews. His caricature inflames religious hate to young minds. What educators need is to do is to dismiss the 'expert witnesses,' and realize that Shylock's declamations are not so profound as to excuse the characterization of Jews as mercenary devils."

One responds to such a criticism by concurring in the assertion of Shakespeare's privileged position. Such a status may displace authors whose rank does not assure them of a voice in the classroom. Shakespeare's status is embedded in our curriculum. The majority of educators take it as axiomatic that he is worthy of reading. The next step is to show that there is a potent voice in his appreciation. The critics who have made him valid in the junior high schools and high schools can help to do the same in a knowledgeable communication with potential censors. It is true that the play's status is not universally recognized, and there are a few scholars who show different assumptions for merit and interpretation. At present, most librarians and teachers interpret the literary corpus to conclude that Shakespeare's art is necessary for the classroom. That substantiality is the basis for reading him and keeping his works on library shelves.

Others may oppose this approach to *The Merchant* because standards of appreciation change. It is true that librarians and teachers have often used an "interpretive" argument to ban a book, and not all arguments are constant. A flexible acumen should not discredit current efforts to include the teacher/librarian as a measurer of a canon, one who can articulate the value of controversial works and show their inclusion of relevant themes. Since *The Merchant* earns a place on schoolroom and library shelves by a historic praise of its artistry, that praise should help to explain it within the province of the law. The venerable literary courts bridge the understanding between pedagogy and legal authority. One does not wish to "privilege" the critic before any Supreme Court, or to draw a fine demarcation between the persuasion of jurist and essayist. This is no intention to "privilege" the classic. The blending of legal and literary guides is not an exclusion of non-masterpieces from literary and legal praise, nor is it

proposed that justification from each source must be proved before a book can be taught or purchased. This paper only wishes to recognize that Shakespeare's works have a unique artistic greatness and relevancy. The obligation to read *The Merchant's* should be based in critical and legal analysis. A fluid ground for appreciation maintains the connection between art, law, and education. There is ample evidence within a long critical history that pathos, not anti-Semitism, is found by reading, watching, listening, and most especially, by *discussing* *The Merchant*. This knowledge, coupled with a familiarity in the legal protection of school books, prepares for a defense of the play.

The Role of the Teacher/Librarian

The heading above is taken from the first chapter of Doiron and Davies' *Partners in Learning: Students, Teachers, and the School Library*. They recognize that effective and diverse communication has become a required area of expertise for the librarian:

With the changes in the function of the school library have come the redefining role of the person in the school library. Effective teacher-librarians combine their knowledge of resources with their knowledge of information skills to develop sound pedagogical strategies that nurture a love for literature, build aesthetic and creative experiences, develop critical thinking, and produce effective users of information. (7)

It is no longer desirable for the school librarian to find a narrow niche solely in information gathering. The "aesthetic and creative" process is now central to a redefined role. The role as an "expert in resources" (7) is still vital. What has been added is an ability to encourage literacy in conjunction with an appreciation of the classics. School librarians have a retooled program: "They have broadened their traditional roles of storytelling and story reading to include programs that deepen students' understanding of the importance of writers and all those associated with the creation of new materials" (8). Appreciation and literacy have blend harmoniously as goals.

Explicators should reach out to the censors. Shakespeare's fluency is established by the pulse of the critics. For the school librarian, there are many sources that help pursue a defense of the artistic efforts of *The Merchant*. In 1987, James Gellert wrote of a "contentious and protracted debated" in his article "Shylock, Huckleberry, and Jim: Do They Have a Place in Today's High Schools?" (40). If *The Merchant* and the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are to be guarded, then the "literary quality" must be developed, since it is a quality that "has not been fully explored" (40). Gellert gives a detailed history for both works in matters of censorship, and some of his points have been covered in this paper. The conclusion that Gellert reaches is important for the teacher/librarian who discusses *The Merchant*. "But as the play develops, Shakespeare adds a complex dimension to Shylock's characterization, one which demands a holistic analysis of Shylock the man" (41). It is through Shakespeare's "moving speeches" (41) that a sensitivity to persecution emerges. Shylock is worthy of discussion, not censorship, because of the drama in his abuses. There is an "inherent artistry" (42) in the play that requires it to be taught to students who wish to examine ideal ethical standards and historic persecutions.

There is another article pertinent to the librarian who wishes to scrutinize the teacher methods for other Shakespeare's works. In her article "Censorship and the Myth of Appropriateness: Reflections on Teaching Reading in High School," Vicky Greenbaum explains the teacher as an active participant in endorsing literary standards. She asks, "How do we, as teachers, encourage readiness in readers for challenging literature of all kinds? Shall we teach the art of insightful reading, or shall we live in fear that parents and other well-meaning arbiters may bar Shakespeare and other challenging texts from the curriculum?" (Greenbaum 16). Her question can be extended to the school librarian, as defined by Doiron and Davies. This educator is now a nurturer of literature, an actively informed teacher. Greenbaum's response to the "well-meaning arbiters" is applicable to all who select any Shakespeare's works for study. Greenbaum scrutinizes the sexuality of Hamlet, which some parents believe is inappropriate to the "innocence" of youth (17). She writes:

Students reading Hamlet need to see illustrations of the Shakespearean Theater, to read original history texts from which Shakespeare drew his tales,..... students may benefit from being asked to imagine their way into a distant context provided by Shakespeare or another author. (17)

The librarian who works with the English teacher validates great books. Teaching Shakespeare, or any controversial classic, helps to “convey meaningful and significant human content” (17). The “well-meaning adults” (17) who object can be answered and assisted through a conversant pedagogy. “Literary merit” (17) must be communicated to other adults, whether they question the appropriateness of *The Merchant* or Hamlet or a book from a current Nobel Prize winner. Doiron and Davies write that the library resource center should be a “reading center” that helps students “develop real appreciation for literature” (68). The school librarian, in close association with teachers, is an interpreter of literature who can reorient detractors to what Greenbaum calls the “futility of censorship” (17), that which deprives students of the endowment of our teaching canon.

Other educators, in dual roles of teacher/librarian, have understood the impact of a literary approach to would-be censors. Pat Scales, a middle school librarian and a teacher of children’s literature at Furman University, has created an “Educator’s Guide” for approaching censorship. She recognizes a Constitutional liberty to read *The Merchant*, which she lists in her survey of Censored Books. She also constructs her idea of liberty to read in a literary perspective: Along with debating on the Constitution, “it is important to introduce students to a variety of genres, and a multitude of literary themes.” In “Teaching Ideas,” she encourages the teacher to help students explain a censored book by tackling the basis for the challenge. This direct approach to a work’s contents is a cognitive activity that requires an appreciation of the dynamics of the work.

Pat Scales confirms dynamic between the deliberation on censored books and the appreciation of student growth. The teacher/librarian, as defined by her and Doiron and Davies, protects a liberal education. Librarians can use an active pedagogy to respond to censors and encourage inquisitive students. Web site discussion can be expanded to affirm great literature and the freedom to read. As a teacher who developed a secondary school guide for *The Merchant of Venice*, this author has prepared for a hostile response from a student or a parent who believes the play upholds anti-Semitism. As a holder of an MLS degree, he realizes the responsibility of teacher and librarian to articulate a defense of the play’s objectionable passages. An electronic reference outline connects to home and school and gives instant evidence of the play’s worth and legal protection. Below is a guide for online and print resources for *The Merchant*. This author will discuss the Reference Section with the school librarian. If adopted on the school’s web site, it will facilitate discussion for those students, parents, and teachers who wish to understand the misfortunes of Shylock in a legal, historic, and literary background. It is hoped that the guide will be expanded and annotated as new sources are found.

Online Reference Section: A Resource Guide to *The Merchant of Venice*

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Future Study

The school librarian is an active participant in the support of literary standards. This paper is addressed to those librarians who face challenges with *The Merchant* or other classics that some regard as injurious to students. The conclusions aim to steer all participants in the debate to constructive discussion. Future study can include an analysis of legal expenses when discussion fails. One potential project would be to compare the legal fees of multiple school districts who have been engaged in lawsuits over controversial works.

A database search was made to calculate the legal fees incurred when courts decide on the appropriateness of library material. Multiple searches were made through the following the databases: Academic Search Complete; Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text (LISTA); LISA: Library and Information Science Abstracts; and LexisNexis Academic. The Boolean searches were completed using a variety of combinations. Some of them included the use of "libr*" with the following terms: "law cost," "law fee," "law expense," "legal cost," "legal fee," "legal expense," "court fee," "court cost," and "court expense." Searches were also performed with various combinations of "libr*," "cost," and "litigation." Among the retrieved articles, there were few statements about exact litigation costs. Below are some of the results. In 1996, the Connecticut Library Association Executive Board voted to solicit \$500 to fight the Communications Decency Act (Connecticut). In 2000, in British Columbia, \$1 million was spent in a legal debate on the use of materials on same-sex marriages; a decision was reached so that the disputed books could be used in kindergarten "by teachers via libraries" provided that parents were notified in advance (Bolan). For anticipated Supreme Court litigation in for 2004, concerning the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), ALA Executive Board permitted \$1.7 million in funds to help the attempt the repeal CIPA; ALA desired to protect the Internet activities of "all patrons," including adults, from being filtered at the library (Oder).

Although the above citations give an indication that legal costs are formidable, no studies were found that could be used to anticipate legal fees for the school library's defense of a challenged work. Consultation with the Government Documents Department of the University of North Texas Libraries gave the following information on public records that might assist with research on past cases and build models to determine legal costs and the financial sources to meet those obligations (Kaufman). To acquire documents about a school district, one can request information directly from the city's school administration. Many city departments of education have web pages for Freedom of Information procedure. The one for New York City, for example, can be found at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/SCA/DoingBusiness/FreedomRequests/default.htm>. To find out about open record procedure on the state level, one can access <http://www.rcfp.org/ogg/>.

Conclusion

For almost a century, detractors have argued that *The Merchant* is burdened with religious prejudice. They try to banish it from schools and school libraries. Most educators who examine the play know Shylock is not a sign of obloquy against Jews. Defenders have been urged defend the play through a Constitutional right to read. Commentators of literature are not cited on parity with the experts on legal discourse. The high school teacher who teaches *The Merchant*, and the school librarian who keeps it on the shelf, can use literary expertise with legal authority to fully defend the selection of the play. When a web site collection of multiple assets is built, then legal and literary judgment will together answer the wrath of the censors.

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The Merchant of Venice is filled with ambiguity; between what one says and who one is. Some feel that Shakespeare wove together two ancient folk tales; one involving a vengeful, greedy creditor trying to literally exact a pound of flesh, and the other a trial for marriage suitors. Shylock and Jessica from the 'Merchant of Venice,' Act II, scene ii, by Gilbert Stuart Newton 1830. There are three suitors involved in three interrelated plots. The dominant theme is complex in The Merchant of Venice. It is much more universal than specific religious or racial hatred; it centers on the polarity between the surface attractiveness of gold and the intrinsic and religious values such as mercy and compassion that should stir the soul of man. The play is also filled with many beautiful quotes. But The Merchant of Venice is a play that's kind of none of the above and also all of the above. The point is: this play defies characterization. We like to think that maybe, just maybe, this is Shakespeare's way of telling us that plays "and people, dagnabbit" can't be characterized by a few elements (like religion or genre) alone. Luckily, we're here to help your high school students plumb the depths of this play and make sense of its many facets. In this guide, you'll find an opportunity to address the elephant in the room: anti-Semitism in The Merchant of Venice. an exploration of the abstract idea of justice and how it works in the play. Instructions for You. Objective: Wait "The Merchant of Venice is actually classified as a comedy? Let's review for a minute.

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