

trick is to know one's destiny at the right time" (p. 27), but how does one master this "trick"? And are we to equate a "trick" with moral superiority? Furthermore, if one indeed does rely upon the benign justice of time, how account for Bassanio's original loss of Antonio's first loan? Again, are we to attribute Portia's winning the trial case to benign casualness or to a well-reasoned plan of attack in which she outwits Shylock *legally*? She first appeals to Shylock's sense of mercy; when this fails, she then tempts him by appealing to his reputed greed for money; when this fails, she then succeeds by rigorously applying the legal implications of the "merry bond." It is the scrupulous application of legal reasoning which undoes Shylock, not the fortuitous benignity of chance.

5. Finally, Barnet sums up his case by concluding that "the man [Shylock] who hoards wealth which he acquires through the immoral sale of time continually destroys his own happiness and is—with the passage of time—hoist with his own petard" (p. 30). This may be perfectly true—as a generalization; but, within the context of the play, it is not true. In the bond that Shylock draws up, he does not stipulate any interest rate to be paid—usurious or otherwise.<sup>1</sup> He wants Antonio's pound of flesh if the loan is not paid in time. Furthermore, at the court trial, Shylock is offered many times the original 3,000 ducats if he were to spare Antonio's life, but he refuses. He wants only the pound of flesh. Why?

Although Shakespeare followed the conventions of his time, he was by no means merely a conventional playwright. Imbedded in his conventions are not only the proprieties of *his* time but a morality not subject to the caprices of any time. And this implied morality suggests that Shakespeare is not concerned here with the immorality of usury or the blessings of a prodigal generosity or a reliance on a *carpe diem* philosophy. It is not Shylock's usury which is being attacked but rather the niggardliness of spirit which spits upon a man because he is of a different religion. *The Merchant of Venice* is Shakespeare's denunciation of a culture which is so inhumane that it forces a man of feeling to demand a pound of flesh as a salve to his mangled dignity as a human being. And thus the story of the three caskets assumes a meaning which goes far beyond offering guidelines on how to choose a marriage partner: Antonio, Bassanio, Gratiano, with their golden generosity and silver sociability, pale into obliquity next to the seemingly lead casket of Shylock's buried humanity.

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Note

<sup>1</sup> Is Professor Barnet aware of the fact that it was legally

permissible to charge up to ten percent interest rates in Elizabethan England? See Bernard Grebanier, *The Truth about Shylock* (New York: Random, 1962), p. 86.

*Mr. Barnet replies:*

Let me begin with a sentence from Mr. Birnbaum's last paragraph: "It is not Shylock's usury which is being attacked but rather the niggardliness of spirit which spits upon a man because he is of a different religion." Although readers as diverse as Harold Goddard and Harry Golden have argued along these lines, I can only say that I believe there are sounder critics (e.g., C. L. Barber, John Russell Brown, and Barbara Lewalski) who assist a reader to see that Shylock's religion is a way of life, and that this way of life is contrasted unfavorably with the gentile-gentle way.

I don't want to argue my case over again, or to try to summarize those portions of earlier criticism that seem valid and helpful, but I will offer very brief comments on each of Birnbaum's numbered points. (1) See, in i.iii.130-31, the reference to barren metal breeding, and in i.iii.88 the reference to "venture" or risk. (2) Of course the play follows the conventions of comedy. That is not in question; the question is, What is Shakespeare saying by means of the conventions? My article tried to set forth some of what I think he was saying. (3) True, Bassanio apparently has very little to risk; but he is willing to risk it all. (4) Perhaps I should regret my use of "trick," in "The trick is to know one's own destiny at the right time," but I thought the context indicated that by trick I meant "difficult and delicate matter." And indeed I meant—in the context—to say that an apt response implied moral superiority, a superiority rooted in right instincts. (5) Commenting on my statement that "the man who hoards wealth which he acquires through the immoral sale of time continually destroys his own happiness and is—with the passage of time—hoist with his own petard," Birnbaum says, "This may be perfectly true—as a generalization; but, within the context of the play, it is not true." I am not concerned with the possible truth of the statement "as a generalization"; the statement was meant to describe one motif of the play, and I can only leave it to other readers to decide whether or not it accurately does so. Finally, let me add that in the Introduction to *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Merchant of Venice* I try to discuss complementary motifs.

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**Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, and Samuel Clemens**

To the Editor:

Judith Fetterley's observation that Mark Twain's attitude toward Tom Sawyer had changed between *The*

*Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (87, Jan. 1972, 69–74) is sound and illuminating, although she ignores the fact that Huck is his own narrator and that *his* perception of Tom changes notably in the course of his book. The extent to which Huck is a persona for Mr. Clemens-Twain is a question worth exploring further.

It has been pointed out frequently that Huck's decision not to return Jim to slavery is his coming of age. "All right, I'll go to hell" is the declaration of independence with which he marks his passage of the rites of puberty. Less attention has been paid to the fact that his subsequent encounter with Tom is the stuff of tragedy, not comedy. It is not just the uncomfortable encounter of the grown-up adolescent with the still-childish one that makes the ending so awkward; what Huck finally sees in Tom is unendurable, and if the function of art is to make us endure the unendurable, it is still hard to do it in a book for boys. Louisa May Alcott, who managed to make the intolerable position of women in her society suitable material for the entertainment of adolescent girls, was quite right when she advised the Concord Public Library that Mr. Clemens' book was too strong for children.

Huck has always accepted humbly and unquestioningly the view that society is right and he is wrong. Mark Twain, however, never allows the reader to share Huck's view of himself; at every point in the story the boy's naïve and uncritical observation is used with the bitterest irony to show us the viciousness and stupidity of the society which rejects him.

When he and Tom meet again it may be that Tom also has grown up; his fantasies are no longer acted out by willing children at play but by reluctant men who endure real pain, terror, and humiliation for his pleasure. Tom is much more than Huck's friend; he is his hero, his alter ego (the point is made explicit by the confusion of identities in the final scenes), his bridge to respectable society. When Huck is forced to realize that Tom is cruel, dishonest, and incapable of the sort of human feeling which has developed between Jim and himself, there is nothing left for him but dropping out. Nevertheless, his valedictory line: "Aunt Sally, she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before," is lamentably weak as compared with "All right, I'll go to hell."

This weakness has puzzled critics ever since the book began to be thought a subject for serious criticism. Miss Fetterley's identification of Huck with his author suggests an explanation which carries us out of the self-contained world of the novel. In the letters to Howells which she quotes, Clemens was clearly identifying with Tom. If in *Huckleberry Finn* he does partially identify with Huck, he is forced back at the end of the book to the painful realization that this dichot-

omy can exist only in his imagination. In spite of the insight and the wish so clearly expressed in his nom de plume, the author cannot in real life be separated from the man, and if Clemens has submitted to being "sivilized," the twain must suffer the consequences.

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### Mau-Mauing the Epiphany Catchers

To the Editor:

I cannot agree with all the specifics of Sidney Feshbach's argument in his comments (in "Hunting Epiphany-Hunters," *PMLA*, 87, March 1972, 304–06) about Robert Scholes's letters on epiphany. But I share what I gather is Mr. Feshbach's basic view: that epiphany is central to understanding James Joyce's art and Stephen Dedalus' "manner of looking and chronicling . . . events" (p. 305).

Curiously, however, Mr. Feshbach commits an error which weakens what would otherwise have been a stronger argument. For in his examination of three related incidents in the *Portrait*,<sup>1</sup> he is forced to say that "although two of the three passages are not included among [Joyce's original manuscripts of] the Epiphany-texts, they resemble the one that is" (p. 305). The "one that is" is Epiphany No. 5 in *The Workshop of Daedalus*.<sup>2</sup> But immediately after the passage in the *Portrait* based on that epiphany (p. 68) occurs the third of the three related scenes in this section of the novel, and as a matter of fact it too is based on a manuscript epiphany (No. 3 in the *Workshop*, p. 13): that epiphany begins, "The children who have stayed latest are getting on their things." The parallel passage in the *Portrait* begins, "In the hall the children who had stayed latest were putting on their things" (p. 69). As I have shown elsewhere, this epiphany was adapted by Joyce (both for *Stephen Hero* and for two passages in *Portrait*) with extraordinarily interesting and subtle variations.<sup>3</sup>

In any case, the importance of this epiphany within Joyce's novel does, I think, tend to support Mr. Feshbach's general claim that Mr. Scholes's negative views of the concept of epiphany would not have been shared by James Joyce.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Chester G. Anderson and Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1964), pp. 67–70.

<sup>2</sup> *The Workshop of Daedalus: James Joyce and the Raw Materials for A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed.