

Some Reviews of Winterston's A GAP OF TIME (Hogarth Shakespeare) 2015

1. At nearly every live rock performance I've attended, from big arena to bar band, the audience's loudest whoops and whistles come the moment an artist launches into an unexpected cover song. In some ways, a cover song says to the audience: I'm not only an artist; I'm also a fan.

The "cover novel," the concept behind [Hogarth's new series](#) in which a contemporary novelist retells one of Shakespeare's plays, is a trickier beast. Retelling a myth or canonical tale can feel like a paint-by-number exercise – the plot is too familiar, and while updating the setting and detail may be a playful game, the final product is less satisfying than a novel invented, seemingly, from thin air. Thankfully, Hogarth leads off the series with one of the most gifted writers working today, Jeanette Winterson, taking on the formidable "Winter's Tale," and the result is a shining delight of a novel.

One of the difficulties, I'd imagine, of "covering" Shakespeare would be dealing with the incredible coincidences of plot, which seem effortless in a good production but might feel forced or clumsy on the page. "The Winter's Tale," one of Shakespeare's last plays, might be particularly problematic in this regard, as it relies heavily on the suspension of disbelief while marching to its rather cheery end. But Winterson's gift for capturing unspoken emotion with powerful but never overwritten lyricism creates a cast of characters whose points of view are fascinating and sometimes harrowing to inhabit, fully employing the novel form's unique ability to illuminate the interiors of the actors on the page.

It's fitting that King Leontes is now Leo, an arrogant, paranoid hedge fund manager in post-crash London, and his pal King Polixenes is now Xeno, a dreamy, introverted video game designer. Winterson invents a back story of a deeply buried sexual relationship between the two, which makes Leo's overblown rage and irrational envy at the outset even more credible than it is in the original.

Leo, convinced Xeno is having an affair with his very pregnant wife, MiMi, a popular singer-songwriter, tries to kill Xeno in a parking garage, rapes MiMi in their own bed and sends the eventual newborn, the foundling Perdita, off to New Bohemia (a cover version of New Orleans). The opening acts of the novel are propelled by an intricately suspenseful series of scenes that capture the raw violence stemming from greed, envy and paranoia. A subtle cultural critique of hypermasculinity, and the attendant violence fueled by money (specifically the loss thereof), ripples meaningfully beneath the novel's surface.

Winterson's great gift is capturing the emotional heft of her stories with sentences that hum along, beautiful, unexpected and swift. The story escalates scene by scene, and characters grow more unpredictable and interesting. There are a few stumbles here and there, when the idea of a cover version feels a tad limiting. Some of the dialogue, for instance, takes on a kind of maid-butler vibe that may work onstage but feels too heavy-handed and expository for a novel, as when Pauline, the couple's personal assistant, tells Xeno, "Get over here; I need to talk to you." "What's the matter, Pauline?" he

asks, and she replies, “I’m uneasy”; all that’s missing are stage directions. A few allusions to Shakespeare and “The Winter’s Tale” itself also feel like small jokes that
45 need not have been made, as they take away from the vivid dream Winterson is spinning.

But after all, the spirit of this series is both playful and reverent. Shakespeare plots are great fun while being somewhat difficult to untangle. Winterson wrestles wonderfully with a perplexing text and emerges with a complicated, satisfying and contemporary
50 tale that stands wholly on its own, despite the Bard’s significant shadow. But then again, show me a novelist who isn’t under that shadow. For that reason, and because Winterson makes this cover business look easy, I imagine many novelists are salivating for the chance to write the next book in this promising new series.

DEAN BAKOPOULOS OCT. 20, 2015

55 <file:///C:/Daten/AMSP/over-sixties%20Jan%202016/Reading%20Group/Shakespeare%20novels/winter's%20tale/%E2%80%98The%20Gap%20of%20Time,%E2%80%99%20by%20Jeanette%20Winterson%20-%20The%20New%20York%20Times.htm>

60 2

The Gap of Time by Jeanette Winterson review - an elegant retelling of Shakespeare This Winter’s Tale ‘cover version’, set in wealthy London and the deep south, kicks off a new series of Shakespeare for the 21st century



65 Liltling tribute ... Jeanette Winterson. Photograph: Sam Churchill

[Sarah Crown](#) Wednesday 7 October 2015

Next year marks the 400th anniversary of the death of [William Shakespeare](#) - following, so the story goes, “a merry meeting” with [Ben Jonson](#) during which he “drank too hard”. Four centuries later, the world remains in thrall; around the globe, commemorations are
70 already under way. With the launch of the Hogarth Shakespeare, then, Vintage imprint Hogarth Press is entering a crowded market, but there is no chance of it getting lost in the scrum. Back in 2013 the publisher announced it had [commissioned a range of A-list writers](#) ([Margaret Atwood](#), [Anne Tyler](#) and [Howard Jacobson](#), among others) to “reimagine Shakespeare’s plays for a 21st-century audience”. Their remit was to move
75 the plays from stage to page; to turn them into novels that would be “true to the spirit” of the originals but which, beyond that, could travel wherever they pleased. Rewriting Shakespeare: for sheer, straight-up chutzpah, it doesn’t get bigger than that.

Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* is the first in the series, and her position at the front of the pack leaves her peculiarly exposed. While those who come after will be
80 judged at least in part against each other, for Winterson, at this point, it's her words against Shakespeare's. Judiciously, she soft-pedals the comparison by positioning her novel as a response rather than a revision; her task was made easier, too, by the fact that, when it came to the question of which play she would tackle, she was absolutely clear in her mind. "All of us have talismanic texts that we have carried around, and that
85 carry us around," she has said. "I have worked with *The Winter's Tale* in many disguises for many years ... And I love cover versions."

Cover version is right: there is a lovely, lilting cadence to Winterson's tribute to Shakespeare's penultimate play, and music itself is a presence throughout: as metaphor, mood-setter and even, on occasion, catalyst. The time in her novel is something like
90 now; the action transplanted from Shakespeare's fantasy kingdoms of Sicilia and Bohemia to London's rich, ruthless, high-rise core, and to a deep south American city reminiscent of New Orleans, where the nights are "hot and heavy" and the hospitals have "baby hatches" in which lost children can be found.

King Leontes - whose venomous accusations of adultery against his wife, Hermione, and
95 Polixenes, his childhood friend, galvanise the action in *The Winter's Tale* - becomes Leo, a hedge fund manager who uses money and status to bludgeon his way through the world. Hermione is made over into French chanteuse MiMi, whom we first see "smiling, happy, heavily pregnant"; Polixenes is Xeno, a quixotic video game designer whose ambiguous sexuality creates the tension on which the story turns. The characters are
100 contemporary, but the novel maps itself on to the play, plot-point by plot-point. Xeno learns that Leo, mad with jealousy, plans to murder him; he flees. Leo accuses MiMi of infidelity. MiMi gives birth to a daughter, Perdita, whom Leo cannot accept as his own, so he bribes his gardener (a modern-day member of his retinue) to get rid of her.

All of this is stylishly done. Winterson's replacement of Leontes' court with today's
105 money markets - the real seat of contemporary power - is smart and witty, and Xeno's professional forays into virtual reality give her scope to retain some of the play's more mystical elements without calling the novel's realism into conflict. There are occasional jolts (the character of Autolycus, reimagined as a used-car salesman, loses something in translation), but the richness of her language, the swing and swoop of her sentences,
110 smooths out the transitions and eases us over the joins. What's more, despite her faithfulness to Shakespeare's storyline, Winterson manages against the odds to keep us gripped. By providing her characters with rich backstories (Leo's seeming insanity in the opening scenes makes a horrid sense in light of the history Winterson imagines for him), she wins our sympathy and so injects a real sense of jeopardy into a familiar tale. It's no
115 mean feat.

But while this fleshing-out enriches the novel, it also removes that element of the play which makes it so powerful. *The Winter's Tale* splits audiences: an odd, jumbled, tonally dissonant but ultimately transcendent affair, it delights some and alienates others, but whether you're a fan or not, its power is undeniable. And that power derives
120 from the fact that so much of what happens within it (in particular the famous closing

scene, in which the statue of Hermione turns out to be Hermione herself) remains unexplained. Where Winterson furnishes us with interpretations of the characters' behaviour, Shakespeare leaves spaces; baffling blanks into which we're obliged to project our own reckonings. Ultimately, the provision of concrete explanations is reductive: they close the play's possibilities down.

125 "The past is never dead," said [William Faulkner](#), "it's not even past" - and if *The Winter's Tale* offers us any message, it's this. The play itself, first published in 1623, is still with us, too - and we come back to it not because it offers answers, but because it poses questions to which we have to find answers of our own. *The Gap of Time* is Winterson's answer, and it's a good one: compelling, entertaining and elegant.

130 Shakespeare's play, though, contains the possibility of all our answers - which is why, if people are still around 400 years from now, they'll no doubt still be watching and reading it.

135 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/07/gap-of-time-jeanette-winterson-review-shakespeare>

3.

The Gap of Time by Jeanette Winterson, book review: A modern rewriting

140 An ingenious updating of Shakespeare that avoids the temptation to become a mere jeu d'esprit

- [Lucasta Miller](#) Thursday 1 October 2015



Deeply felt novel: A Winter's Tale by William Shakespeare (oil on canvas) by William Hamilton (1751-1801) Guildhall Art Gallery

145 Split down the middle into a tragic first half and a comedic second, Shakespeare's late play *The Winter's Tale* mingles fairytale coincidence with psychological realism so unapologetically that some people have always found it hard to take. Not so Jeanette Winterson, whose new novel is a modern rewriting of the story which pays tribute to its imaginative riches and message of human hope and redemption.

150 Myth and fairytale have long been integral to Winterson's vision, seen in works ranging from her classic first novel, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985), to lesser-known outings such as *Weight* (2006), her retelling of the Atlas legend, and even her delightful children's book *The King of Capri*.

155 Her own history - movingly and thrillingly told in her autobiographical *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* (2012) - is something of a real-life fairytale. Herself a modern changeling, she was adopted as a baby by the extraordinary Mrs Winterson, whose gargantuan personality and religious superstitions would have crushed a lesser spirit. Instead, the young Jeanette transmogrified her experiences - and early exposure to the resonant language of the Bible - and remade herself into one of the most original literary voices of our time. She knows what she is talking about when she quotes Ezra Pound's "make it new" in this book about the relationship of past to present.

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The Gap of Time transplants Shakespeare to contemporary London. Leo (Leontes) is no longer king of Sicilia but a master of the universe with a hedge fund, a helicopter, and a personality that verges on the sociopathic, while his wife MiMi (Hermione) is a famous French folk singer. As in the original, the dramatic events get going when Leo freaks out in unfounded suspicion that his wife has been sleeping with his best friend, Xen (Polixenes). Winterson fleshes out the well-established critical convention which finds a homoerotic charge in their relationship by making them former lovers at their public school, while updating Xen into a US-based writer of computer games, and a commitment-phobe who can't make sense of his own emotions.

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170 Leo refuses, against all evidence, to believe that MiMi's newborn daughter Perdita is his. As one of the super-rich, he can use his money to do whatever he likes, so he has the baby abducted and sent across the Atlantic, supposedly to Xen. However, his plans go awry and in New Orleans ("New Bohemia"), she is rescued from a hospital "babyhatch" by a bar owner and piano-player, Shep (the Shepherd), who brings her up and nurtures her well for 18 years.

175 Perdita grows up to become a musician like her lost mother, and - with every symbolic coincidence in place - falls in love at 18 with Xen's son and heads for London, where she makes herself known to her real father. The original play's denouement provides perhaps the single most moving moment in Shakespeare, when the statue of Hermione, thought
180 dead, comes to life. Here, it takes place at a concert at the Roundhouse, where MiMi appears on stage, having spent the intervening time as a recluse in Paris. As in a fairytale, and arguably in *The Winter's Tale* itself (the phrase meant a folk tale to Shakespeare's original audience), the protagonists are universal types placed in universal situations designed to highlight the basics of human response to the raw events of life,
185 from birth to sex to death.

What is lost in this treatment in terms of character individuation is found in the symbolic unfolding of a narrative whose component scenes are viscerally rendered, as when Leo, in his crazed, pornographic, sexual jealousy - an offshoot of his over-reaching, ultimately self-defeating, desire for control - gets an employee to fit a hidden webcam
190 in his wife's bedroom, and misinterprets all he sees to fit his darkest fantasies. The voyeurism is there in Shakespeare's original; Winterson finds a way to make it new.

Throughout, Winterson's "cover version", as she calls it, remains very faithful to its source, often with great ingenuity and always with good humour. The pedlar Autolycus, for example, becomes a used-car salesman with a genius for riffs on the Oedipus
195 complex. Shakespearean jokes often fall flat for modern audiences; Winterson provides some updated laugh-out-loud moments (as when Leo takes in a copy of *Nuts* to show his Kleinian analyst, whose world revolves around the good breast and the bad breast), and some delightful one-liners on everything from the contradictions of capitalism to the way in which Château d'Yquem tastes like golden syrup mixed with mould to the
200 uninitiated.

Yet this is also a deeply felt, emotionally intelligent and serious novel, which resists easy answers and yet expresses the hope that human beings can muddle through, and that bad pasts can have good outcomes. What could have been a cynically postmodern

205 jeu d'esprit pulsates with such authenticity and imaginative generosity that I defy you not to engage with it. The style is relaxed and easy but never flabby: a literary "art lawful as eating", to quote Shakespeare's original. Winterson's faith in what she calls, in her postscript, the "written wor(l)d I can't live without" shines through. If Shakespeare's play, her near-namesake, has as much personal resonance for the novelist as it appears, she must have been in a good place to have written this Winterson's tale.

210 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-gap-of-time-by-jeanette-winterson-book-review-a6675676.html>

4. The Gap of Time by Jeanette Winterson, review: 'poignant'
[Joanna Kavenna](#) 1 October 2015 • 8:00pm

215 That play was Shakespeare's own retelling of Pandosto by Robert Greene, with further possible borrowings from Francis Sabie and Plutarch, among others. It is a dreamlike fable, riddled with folkloric archetypes - the humble child who turns out to be a princess, the king who squanders his kingdom.

[Jeanette Winterson and Howard Jacobson on retelling Shakespeare's plays](#)

220 Winterson's "cover version" transplants the story to contemporary London where Leo, a banker who was sacked after the 2008 financial crisis, accuses his pregnant wife, MiMi, of having an affair with his best friend Xeno.

225 Carnage ensues: Leo's son Milo dies, and his daughter Perdita is abandoned somewhere in the United States and reared by Shep, defined rather starkly by the jacket blurb as "a black man". MiMi, a famous singer, is silenced by the death of her son and the disappearance of her daughter. Tony Gonzales does not "exit, pursued by a bear," but is murdered instead. Autolycus becomes a "wheeler-dealer. A dealer in wheels. A soapbox salesman with a silver tongue," and proprietor of Autos Like Us.

[Where My Heart Used to Beat by Sebastian Faulks, review: 'a masterpiece'](#)

230 Shakespearean archetypes are invoked and recast: the arrogant banker, who falls from grace; the beautiful, martyred wife; the humble girl who fails to understand her worth.

235 Yet, in the contemporary psychoanalytical style, Winterson also reveals backstories and inner traumas. Leontes and Polixenes - "twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' th' sun" - are reimagined as former schoolboy lovers, who bonded over familial asperities: "Both boys had been sent away by fathers who gained custody over unfit mothers. Leo's mother had left his father for another woman. Xeno's mother was alcoholic and mentally unstable."

240 After the 16-year gap of time, we discover that Zel, Xeno's son, has a troubled relationship with his solipsistic father, and his father is troubled by doubts in turn. It is a relief to discover that Perdita, though once abandoned, is consistently wry and jovial, even as she falls in love with Zel: "Perdita watched his mouth as he talked. She liked what he was saying. But he could have been saying Yogi Bear Eats Peanut-Butter Sandwiches."

The prose is spartan, to denounce any suggestion of Shakespearean pastiche. Sometimes I wondered why on earth Winterson had thrown in her lot, mostly, with sober literary realism when she might have cast her characters into the wild storms of her exceptional hyper-realist imagination instead.

245 But, towards the end, Winterson breaks the self-imposed spell. Xeno explains to Perdita that he has designed a computer game called "The Gap of Time", based on the dream of French poet Gérard de Nerval, in which a trapped angel asks a child to cut its feathers away, so they can flutter above the "decaying houses". One feather is the Flight of Love and one is the Flight of Time.

From this eerie precept, Xeno has fashioned a game in which "dark angels of death... turn man
250 against woman, woman against child". Each character in the novel has their equivalent avatar, and "at any point in the game you can deep-freeze an action, an event, a happening and return to it later - because, perhaps, you can make it unhappen".

Xeno's game supplies a parallel world in which sorrowful mortals are potentially redeemed. It's a lovely, poignant concept, and hints towards a different possibility for this novel, something more
255 disturbing and strange. But Winterson has paid her dues, with interest.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/the-gap-of-time-jeanette-winterson-review/>

5.

260 Hogarth, the American fiction imprint of Random House, has been commissioning novelists to write new updated versions of Shakespeare's plays, a project timed to coincide with next year's 500th anniversary of his death. There is nothing new or deplorable in the venture. People have been adapting and revising Shakespeare for centuries.

265 In the late 17th century, the Poet Laureate, Nahum Tate, gave us King Lear with a happy ending. Shakespeare's plays have been made into films, operas and ballets. Robert Nye made a fine first-person novel of Falstaff in the 1970s. Giles Gordon, my much missed friend and agent, commissioned and edited a volume of "Shakespeare Stories" more than 20 years ago. I can't lay my
270 hand on my copy, but I remember that I wrote the Othello story, making him a champion heavyweight boxer. So I can't feel indignant about the Hogarth project.

Howard Jacobson, taking on The Merchant of Venice, says authors must be "mad" to have a go at rewriting Shakespeare. Mad or not, the request to do so is surely hard to resist. Actually I don't think it's mad at all. Shakespeare is still there. Nothing you do can harm him. At worst, you make yourself look inadequate, but, since we are all inadequate in comparison with Shakespeare, this
275 can't matter.

Jeanette Winterson was assigned, or has chosen, The Winter's Tale. It's a puzzling play, like most late Shakespeare, one that, even without that most famous of stage directions – "exit, pursued by a bear" – offers a puzzle, a flight from realism, a sort of fairy story; and this suits her. She has a talent for coming to things from an odd angle. Dr Johnson judged that the play "with all its absurdities is very entertaining", a criticism that might be applied to much of Winterson's work. The play ends, you will remember, with a statue of the dead queen coming to life. Winterson says there are three possible endings to a story "if you put aside And They All Lived Happily Ever After". They are "revenge, tragedy, forgiveness. Shakespeare knew all about revenge and tragedy. Towards the end of his working life, he became interested in forgiveness". Forgiveness is the message – if it is a
285 message – at the heart of his late plays, where dark clouds are shot through with sunshine, and then dispelled by it.

Shakespeare's story begins in a royal court, but kings are out of fashion now. Instead of a king, Winterson has one of the modern masters of the universe, a hedge fund mogul called Leo. Like Shakespeare's king, he is given to jealousy. He gets an assistant to install a webcam in his wife's bedroom. The man he suspects is his oldest and best friend, Xeno – as schoolboys, they were lovers. Jealousy is one of the most corrupting of emotions. Winterson shows how it twists the afflicted one's understanding or perception of reality. Leo is unsure of the paternity of his new baby (though he has tools not available to Shakespeare's king). But the jealous man believes what he hopes to believe, which is also what he fears.

The second part of the story, pastoral in Shakespeare, is set in New Bohemia. (Shakespeare gave Bohemia a sea-coast, perhaps on account of ignorance, perhaps to assure them he is writing fantasy.) Winterson's New Bohemia is equally charming. There, a boy and girl, both aged 17, meet and fall in love. But they don't know who they are, and they understand very little of the world. Still they, like the other characters, will learn that. They will learn too that "time that runs so steady and sure runs wild outside of the clocks. It takes so little time to change a lifetime and it takes a lifetime to understand the change". Well, that's how it may seem anyway. Shakespeare, Winterson reminds us, "loved disguises, one thing or one kind masquerading as another – a girl who's a boy who's a girl. That things are not what they seem is the terror and the glory of *The Winter's Tale*".

Winterson is faithful to both the narrative and the spirit of the play, while transposing it to an utterly different and modern setting. She does this so deftly, with such authority, that her novel can surely be enjoyed by readers who have no knowledge of Shakespeare's original, and this, I suppose, is one of the demands made by the Hogarth editors. But, of course, acquaintance with the play enriches the novel. Winterson is light, witty and inventive. But she is also at home on the dark side, adept at portraying the destructive nature of suspicion, jealousy, acquisitiveness, greed and the urge to command and dominate. She is faithful to her understanding of Shakespeare's purpose. There are elements of the fairytale in both play and novel, but there is a significant difference. In a fairytale, the threat comes, she observes, from outside. "Shakespeare, anticipating Freud, outs the threat where it really is: on the inside". When we harm others, we harm ourselves too – and may even be driven by the wish to do so. There is lightness here, in the frisky prose and the author's delight in invention, but you are never free of the awareness of the dark shadows where danger and corruption lie in wait.

<http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/culture/books/book-reviews-the-gap-of-time-by-jeanette-winterson-1-3905707>

6. Jeanette Winterson's scintillating, clever **The Gap of Time** (\$15, 273 pages) is the first of the novels commissioned by the Hogarth Press in honor of the 400th anniversary of [Shakespeare's](#) death, each of which takes one of the Bard's plays and rewrites it as a novel. "The Gap of Time" is a "cover version" of "The Winter's Tale," "a play about a foundling ... about forgiveness and a world of possible futures — and how forgiveness and the future are tied together in both directions. Time is reversible."

Ms. Winterson's language, while retaining elements of grace and poetry, is contemporary, bold and, at times, brutal.

Leo is a rich London hedge fund "king;" his wife, MiMi, is a French singer and songwriter. Leo is convinced that MiMi is unfaithful and that the child she is carrying is not his but that of his best friend, Xeno, an American creator of computer games.

When the baby girl, Perdita, is born, Leo bids his gardener, Tony, take the child, along with money, to Xeno living in a New Orleans type city. Unable to find Xeno, and fearing a robbery, Tony places the baby in a Baby Hatch — a device outside a hospital where foundlings can be placed rather than leaving them on a doorstep. In a modern version of [Shakespeare](#)'s famous stage direction — “Exit, 335 [Antigonus] pursued by a Bear” — Tony is murdered and the baby is retrieved by Shep, a black musician, who raises the “little lost one” as a sister to his son, Clo.

Perdita and Zel, Xeno's son, fall in love. Xeno has become a sullen alcoholic. When Perdita discovers who she is, everyone goes to London, “[a]nd the story fell out stone by stone, shining and held, the way time is held in a diamond, the way the light is held in each stone. And stones speak, 340 and what was silent opens its mouth to tell a story and the story is set in stone to break the stone. What happened happened. But. The past is a grenade that explodes when thrown.”

Leo is confronted. MiMi (who has been living as a recluse in Paris) is reunited with her daughter, and all is forgiven, with Ms. Winterson leaving open the question of whether there is a “happy ever after.”

345 It is the act of forgiveness which reverses the gap of time created by Leo's mindless jealousy, reminiscent of Othello's. But while Othello's crime results in despair, Leo's ends with hope.

Vinegar Girl (\$25, 237 pages) is Anne Tyler's version of “The Taming of the Shrew,” which although fun, lacks the vitality of “The Gap of Time.” Kate Battista is more victim than shrew, a competent teacher who runs her widowed scientist father's household. Her teen-aged sister, Bunny, 350 may be boy crazy, but she is not [Shakespeare](#)'s selfish Bianca.

When Dr. Battista's treasured Russian lab assistant, Pyotr, needs a miracle to renew his green card, Kate is cajoled into marrying him. “Don't you think I'm worth more than this? I shouldn't have to go through with this! I deserve to have a real romance, someone who loves me for myself and thinks I'm a treasure.”

355 The pro forma arrangement turns into a love match, and although Pyotr has none of the charm and sex appeal of Petruchio, he does love and treasure Kate.

Anne Tyler's Kate would never “place [her] hands below [her] husband's foot,” but she does acknowledge that “It's hard being a man ... They're a whole lot less free than women are,” and like [Shakespeare](#)'s Katharina, she has no trouble obeying when Pyotr says “Kiss me, Katya.”

360 **Shylock Is My Name** by British author Howard Jacobson (\$15, 275 pages) is a different kettle of fish, a thought-provoking, complex discussion of what it means to be a Jew, while also a mordant, darkly comic novel.

In a Cheshire cemetery, Simon Strulovitch, “a rich, furious, easily hurt philanthropist with ... a distinguished collection of twentieth-century Anglo-Jewish art and old Bibles, a passion for 365 [Shakespeare](#)” meets and befriends Shylock, “an infuriated and tempestuous Jew.”

Shylock is [Shakespeare](#)'s character from “The Merchant of Venice,” as interpreted by Mr. Jacobson. Shylock voices the indignities, humiliations and ridicule he suffered. Both Jews have daughters who turned their backs on Judaic traditions and ran off with Gentiles.

Strulovitch's 16-year old daughter, Beatrice (“A magenta spray of hair, her glance a gleam of 370 mulberries, words like plums in syrup”) has run away to Venice with Gratan, a several times married footballer “with a weakness for Jewesses.” The liaison was arranged and manipulated by

spoiled heiress Plurabelle and her friend, D'Anton, a well-traveled French-Guinean importer and lover of beautiful things.

375 Strulovitch wants either his daughter's return, or revenge by having the footballer circumcised. D'Anton, who desired to buy a painting owned by Strulovitch, offers himself, should the footballer not return with Beatrice.

380 There being no "news from the Rialto," Strulovitch insists on his revenge. This time it is Shylock who urges that "the quality of mercy is not strained." Revenge takes a twist and Strulovitch is humiliated, but unlike [Shakespeare's](#) Shylock, is not punished and accepts his humiliation with a gracious gesture.

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415 When Dr. Battista's treasured Russian lab assistant, Pyotr, needs a miracle to renew his green card, Kate is cajoled into marrying him. "Don't you think I'm worth more than this? I shouldn't have to go through with this! I deserve to have a real romance, someone who loves me for myself and thinks I'm a treasure."

The pro forma arrangement turns into a love match, and although Pyotr has none of the charm and sex appeal of Petruchio, he does love and treasure Kate.

420 Anne Tyler's Kate would never "place [her] hands below [her] husband's foot," but she does acknowledge that "It's hard being a man ... They're a whole lot less free than women are," and like [Shakespeare](#)'s Katharina, she has no trouble obeying when Pyotr says "Kiss me, Katya."

Shylock Is My Name by British author Howard Jacobson (\$15, 275 pages) is a different kettle of fish, a thought-provoking, complex discussion of what it means to be a Jew, while also a mordant, darkly comic novel.

425 In a Cheshire cemetery, Simon Strulovitch, "a rich, furious, easily hurt philanthropist with ... a distinguished collection of twentieth-century Anglo-Jewish art and old Bibles, a passion for [Shakespeare](#)" meets and befriends Shylock, "an infuriated and tempestuous Jew."

430 Shylock is [Shakespeare](#)'s character from "The Merchant of Venice," as interpreted by Mr. Jacobson. Shylock voices the indignities, humiliations and ridicule he suffered. Both Jews have daughters who turned their backs on Judaic traditions and ran off with Gentiles.

435 Strulovitch's 16-year old daughter, Beatrice ("A magenta spray of hair, her glance a gleam of mulberries, words like plums in syrup") has run away to Venice with Gratan, a several times married footballer "with a weakness for Jewesses." The liaison was arranged and manipulated by spoiled heiress Plurabelle and her friend, D'Anton, a well-traveled French-Guinean importer and lover of beautiful things.

Strulovitch wants either his daughter's return, or revenge by having the footballer circumcised. D'Anton, who desired to buy a painting owned by Strulovitch, offers himself, should the footballer not return with Beatrice.

440 There being no "news from the Rialto," Strulovitch insists on his revenge. This time it is Shylock who urges that "the quality of mercy is not strained." Revenge takes a twist and Strulovitch is humiliated, but unlike [Shakespeare](#)'s Shylock, is not punished and accepts his humiliation with a gracious gesture.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/mar/23/jeanette-wintersons-scintillating-clever-bthe-gap/>