

“A DAUGHTER, LOST”:
JEWISH REPRESENTATION IN PERFORMANCES OF *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

by

Madeline Ann Stone

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Approved by:

David Orvis, Ph.D., Thesis Director

Susan Staub, Ph.D., First Reader

Germán Campos-Muñoz, Ph.D., Second Reader

Jennifer Wilson, Ph.D., Departmental Honors Director

I. The Efficacy of Staging Bigotry

In August 2019, against the backdrop of reinvigorated BLM protests around the U.S. and across the globe, NPR's *Code Switch* podcast released an episode titled "All That Glisters Is Not Gold," which takes its name from a well-known passage in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (2.7.65). In the first of the episode's two segments, we hear about a mostly white high school theater troupe preparing to put on a production of *Merchant*. According to Jeanne Harrison, the director for this student production, *Merchant* has "always felt dangerous" (NPR, 2019) and was selected only after two Jewish students spoke up in favor of the choice and the importance of staging *Merchant* at the current cultural moment. Pointing to instances of anti-Semitic hate crimes and hate speech popping up across the country, students involved with the production believe that the play's portrayal of anti-Semitism in the past can help create powerful dialogue on the anti-Semitism of the present. Or as one student puts it, "Not putting on this play would be an admission that they prefer to avoid these issues rather than talk about them" (NPR 2019). Although the director and cast do concede that certain changes would be required to ensure proper framing of the play's difficult subject matter, participants mostly seem in agreement that the difficult work of performing the play would be worth promoting more public dialogue about intolerance and oppression. Nevertheless, there is palpable tension among some castmates, particularly those tasked with hurling anti-Semitic insults toward the character of Shylock who in this production is, in fact, portrayed by a Jewish student. For this student, as well as for the troupe's lone student of color playing the role of Portia's waiting maid, safe words to pause rehearsal and regular breaks to share and process feelings have been incorporated into the

troupe's routine. Whether these and other measures were indeed sufficient is a question asked as the segment concludes, and the responses from previous interviewees sound much less certain. Thus, the first segment concludes by asking listeners to ponder whether even a well-meaning production committed to equality and social justice can ever fully or finally disentangle itself from the racist tropes and rhetorics that pervade the play.

In the second segment, Ayanna Thompson, an Arizona State University professor who specializes in Renaissance drama and issues of race in performance, is far less ambivalent in regards to *Merchant*. "There are three toxic plays that resist rehabilitation and appropriation," Thompson observes, "and they are *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *Taming of the Shrew*" (NPR, 2019). Thompson expounds on how constructions of race began in early Renaissance plays such as *Merchant*. In her experience studying these difficult texts, Thompson recounts how there have been multiple black men who have played Othello that she has had to counsel in order to help them get through the trauma of playing a character rooted in such deep racism. From this experience, as well as her vast knowledge about the other toxic play's original cultural context, she makes the daring conclusion that such plays should cease to be performed by any company, whether amateur or professional. She furthers her point by stating that although there is a desire to make them progressive texts, these plays still end up taking us to a very regressive and uncomfortable standpoint.

Although I am inclined to agree that a production can be well intentioned and still traffic in harmful stereotypes and oppressive language, Thompson's assertion that the only ethical response to plays such as *Merchant*, *Othello*, and *Shrew* is to banish them from the stage forever seems to ignore, at least for three plays in particular, extensive stage histories out of which new

possibilities for performance and interpretation continually emerge and influence perceptions of the so-called Shakespearean original. In what follows, I argue that another way to respond to the toxicity of *Merchant* and other plays is already possible, and to my mind preferable to calls for removing them from repertory permanently. One could perhaps argue that banning the play from performance is tacit admission that we are somehow better off not taking on or confronting issues of anti-Semitism in popular works of the West, as if downplaying or looking away has ever accomplished anything other than emboldening anti-Semites.

Concerns about the play's toxicity seem especially rooted in early depictions of Shylock and the cluster of anti-Semitic tropes around which his identity is fashioned. Juxtaposing this figure of Shylock with more recent portrayals in stage and film productions of *Merchant*, I hope to demonstrate that the villain-or-victim binary opposition so often imposed on Shylock, and by proxy on other Jewish characters who convert as soon as opportunity presents itself, has minimized attempts at intersectional analysis that would bring into view structural inequalities and interlocking systems of oppression that are embedded within Venetian society and culture at every level and that impact the lives of the plays' Jewish characters in different ways. Focusing primarily on portrayals of Shylock and Jessica in three recent performances of *Merchant*—the 1980 BBC production, the 2004 Radford film, and the 2016 RSC production—I aim to show that increased attention to intersectionality in this work provides a model for exploring this fraught father-daughter relationship without reducing it to, and in so doing legitimizing or perpetuating, the overdetermined binary opposition between Jew and Christian. This focus on *Merchant* in performance will enable careful consideration of costume choices as well as physical attributes of Shylock and Jessica as necessarily embodied and enacted at the intersection of gender and

religious identity. In addition, my analysis will consider how in exercising artistic license or creative authority over a theatrical production or film, directors have a choice between implementing or neglecting intersectional frameworks for understanding the play's historical and cultural contexts. Although it has become standard practice in productions of *Merchant* to foreground the harsh treatments against Jews in the period, the plight of women such as Jessica, who are forced to negotiate misogyny and patriarchal ideology within and beyond their own communities at the same time that they face rampant anti-Semitism, appears nowhere in this historical-contextual apparatus. If none of the productions examined in this thesis project manages to capture the full complexity of Shylock and Jessica's relationship in *Merchant*, as a cluster they demonstrate how an intersectional approach can make and remake a so-called toxic Shakespeare play into a productive site for grappling with, as opposed to passively reproducing and perpetuating, interlocking systems of oppression both in the worlds of Shakespeare's plays and in our own.

II. Shylock, His Jewishness, and Otherness

Shylock as well as Jewishness in the making of *The Merchant of Venice* can be further understood through the multiplicity of stereotypes toward Jewish individuals that circulated in the period and continue to circulate today. Prior to the time period *Merchant* was written in, it is important to note that England between 1290 and 1656 was said to be "defined by the fact that Jews had been banished from it...representations of Jews and Judaism were implicated in the central analogy of the letter and the spirit" (Codin 27). According to Brett Hirsch, it is most beneficial to look at the ill-informed attitudes towards Jews as well as other minorities due to

new ventures in overseas trade that became popular around 1555. Hirsch comes to the conclusion that Antonio's use of the services Shylock has to offer reflects widely held attitudes during this time period regarding the anxieties of Western Christians, bringing the English specifically into contact with other cultures as well as introducing them to competing arrangements of values (Hirsch 32). Such travel and trade not only brought the English into contact with other cultures, but also introduced them to competing regimes of value such as Judaism. Such regimes of value may have even informed the caricatured aspects of Shylock, as seen when characters such as Gobbo describe him as "the very devil incarnation" (2.2.26-27). From this and other derogatory descriptions of Shylock, it could perhaps be argued that portrayals of Shylock as malicious are almost inevitable. Judaism, among other forms of identity, is often exclusive in its unique defining factors. A Jewish individual can practice their traditions while being a convert to the belief system, but someone can also be considered Jewish in terms of ethnicity, practice the beliefs or be a complete atheist, while still be Jewish. In terms of occupation, Shylock notes that Antonio, and presumably others, is "wont to call me usurer" (3.1.47), one of the few professions able to be held by Jews living in Christian societies, as the Church prohibited Christians from lending money with interest. Based on the above mentioned variables, Michael Shapiro observes that Shylock's "Jewishness may best be described as superimposition upon medieval stereotypes of various contemporary ideas about Jews—cultural, biological, and theological" (Shapiro 6). Although the pejorative conception of Jews was slightly more nuanced on the Elizabethan stage, pervasive Jewish stereotypes that further exploit Christian fears have made it so Shylock's development throughout the play will always, to some extent, be rooted in malicious caricature.

Moreover, scholars such as Lisa Lampert have reflected on the crucial importance of anti-Jewish stereotypes to Western Christian societies. She argues that “the interrelated questions of who was a Jew, who was a Christian, and who was English had taken on new urgency and immediacy” (Lampert 138). Judging by England’s small but visible Jewish community at the time, Lampert regards the cultural preoccupation with the nature of Jewish “Otherness” as illustrative of the conflicted nature of Christianity itself. This conflictive nature is further elaborated on by John Gross as he criticizes Shylock’s villainy through the misconceptions that the Jewish and Christian characters enforce throughout the play text. Gross is quoted saying, “the notion that Judaism has an inadequate grasp of the concept of mercy is a travesty — as much of a travesty as it would be to suppose that Christianity has an inadequate grasp of the concept of justice” (Baker and Vickers 38). Furthermore, depicted as infinitely intertwined, Shylock’s religion and ethnicity often find expression in terms of caninity, a toxic trope based on past stories regarding Jews and their so-called threat to Christians. Shylock is not just “Othered” for his Jewishness; he is, in fact, thought of as less than based on a plethora of anti-Semitic myths that are obviously still widely believed in during the writing and early performances of *Merchant*. The issue of caninity, in particular, derives from the myth that Jews prayed on young Christian men in pursuit of ripping the flesh from them. In Act I Scene III, this is stated as a fate Shylock is expected to accomplish in the play when he states, “Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken / In what part of your body pleaseth me” (1.3.162-163). This myth causes a kind of hysteria in Christians, who perceive Jews simultaneously as blood-thirsty and as lesser-than. But beyond the deeply inserted anti-Semitic tropes within the playtext, performances of *Merchant*

have elicited numerous insights about how these harmful stories can be reflected in not only narrative but recital.

Throughout the play text, there is a comparison between Shylock's Jewishness and his caninity. He is often belittled by Christian characters through claims about his currishness, referring to him as "the dog Jew" (2.8.14) and "inexecrable dog" (4.1.130), both of which dehumanize and reimagine as beastly the Jewish moneylender. In earlier productions, including Edmund Kean's in the eighteenth century, the character of Shylock bends with a cane, as if his outer deformity represents his inner depravity and beastliness. This physical alteration of Shylock made it so he could not directly face the other actors, but instead had to look upward at the others as a dog might look at a man standing over him (Yachnin 10). In such depictions of Shylock's caninity, there was also an element of cannibalism that was a part of the lore surrounding the fear of Jewish predatory behavior toward Christians. It is considered to be a part of "blood libel," that is, the widespread slander that Jews are always on the look-out to capture Christians, especially young males" (Yachnin 10). In Jessica's own power of manipulating those around her to assist in covering up her own conversion and social climbing, she also sets out to repudiate such caninity from herself as when she states that she is, "...not to [Shylock's] manners" (2.4.19). There is acknowledgement within the play text of these harmful myths and stereotypes. They exist within this narrative with a presence so strong and known that in her efforts to social climb, Jessica herself feels the need to object to them on her own behalf.

Although Shylock's Judaism can be read as built upon harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about what it means to be Jewish, Shakespeare still calls into question important talking points on what it means to be a Jew on the stage and beyond. According to Lara Bovilsky,

through Portia and Jessica, “the play proposes a definition of Jewish-Christian difference centering on the ethical and cultural elements of gentleness” (Bovilsky 49). This dichotomy can also be seen through Shylock as well as the other Christian characters in the play. For example, although Shylock is given lines perpetuating stereotypes of his hatred and ill-will towards Christians through lines such as, “If I can catch him once upon the hip, / I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him” (1.3.46-47), the characters who actually fall through with such punishment and anger are the Christian characters. Although Shylock is granted through law to take “thy pound of flesh” (4.1.321) from Antonio as he does not pay back his loan, the law flips in favor of the Christians as Antonio states that Shylock shall “presently become a Christian”(4.1.403) and sign over “of all he dies possessed / Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter” (4.1.405-406). Although scholarship from individuals who oppose the staging of *Merchant* tends to focus on the harmful stereotypes portrayed through Shylock, these stereotypes can also be viewed as critiques towards the people that use them. As Shylock is given dialogue that may portray him as villainous, the Christian characters offer a sense of hypocrisy that exists within anti-Semitism both in the modern world as well as the Elizabethan stage.

III. Depictions of a Jewish Shylock on the Stage

Although scholars debate whether it was Richard Burbage or Will Kempe who first played the role of Shylock, what is widely accepted is their approach to his character as well as how he has continued to reflect audience expectations and indeed prejudices. According to records, it is thought that one of the earliest portrayals of Shylock was originally played by Will Kemp. As an actor thought of as a leading comic, “...the portrayal was harshly comic and

influenced by the traditions of *commedia dell'arte*, or, perhaps, played in the red wig and false nose worn by villainous Jewish characters in the medieval Mystery plays” (*Royal Shakespeare Company*). Based on records of Elizabethan England’s staging, spectators of early portrayals of Shylock most likely would have preferred an unsympathetic Shylock, and thus his earliest performances likely would have matched the caricature of the villainous Jew; thus, outrageous behavior coming from this first Shylock would have come as no shock to the Elizabethans, many of whom doubtless shared Christian hatred toward him (Lelyveld 39). The subsequent stage history indicates that acting troupes have vacillated in their portrayals of Shylock and his daughter Jessica. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, it would be a stretch to say that productions pushed back against anti-Semitic stereotypes. Indeed, the play was quite popular in Nazi Germany, if that gives any sense of *Merchant’s* role in perpetuating such stereotypes. Nevertheless, there is evidence that some productions prior to the twentieth century endeavored to make Shylock less an “Other” and more a sympathetic character if still the play’s villain. Our understanding of this stage history brings into sharper focus both the costs and benefits of more recent portrayals of Shylock and *Merchant’s* other Jewish characters.

Apart from what earlier several productions have done in terms of vilifying Shylock’s character, glimpses of empathy for Shylock are not altogether absent from productions after Shakespeare. In 1814, Kean might have portrayed Shylock as villainous, but also played him with a “complicated sympathy” that was unique compared to Shylocks prior (Page 116). In response to what was at the time a fresh take on the character, William Hazlitt penned a scathing review of Kean’s unsettlingly dynamic Shylock: “Shakespeare could not easily divest his characters of their entire humanity: his Jew is more than half a Christian” (qtd in Hazlitt 19). In

this critique, Hazlitt lapses into the play's own discourse, associating redeeming qualities with Christianity. This idea, stating that Shylock as well as Jewish people in general are only partly human, which is to say Christian, defines much of the public's responses to productions of *Merchant* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Yachnin 13).

Unsurprisingly, in a post-holocaust world, portrayals of Shylock become increasingly more sympathetic, as if trying to make amends for the atrocities waged against Jews in Hitler's Germany. After seeking refuge from the Nazis in Poland, an actor of the German stage by the name of Alexander Granach mounted a defense of Shakespeare's Shylock in then-current theatrical productions: "Shakespeare was anti-Semitic, but the genius in him defended Jews as they had never been defended before" (qtd in Warnke and Shandler 74). Furthermore, in a mock trial involving the play's characters, Granach established the stage's mission not only to perform Shylock as a revolutionary, but also to embrace this character as "Jewish performative polemic against anti-Semitism; and the Jewish embodiment of Shylock as authenticating Shakespeare's creation" (qtd in Warnke & Shandler 74). Nina Warnke and Jeffrey Shandler offer this as proof that in adaptations in a post-Holocaust world, most staged Shylocks are more often than not rendered as emphatically more sympathetic; if there's a villain to be found amongst the play's character, one need look no further than the Christian's who spit upon and hurl slurs at Shylock. As this brief summary of the play's stage history indicates, only relatively recently has the play become a site for contesting, rather than merely representing so as to reinforce, harmful Jewish stereotypes. Yet, this valiant effort comes with its own potential setbacks. Casting and performance choices for Shylock may make for a more sympathetic portrayal of the play's most well-known and oft-studied Jew, but it also creates differences and even rifts between Shylock

and other Jewish characters, both in terms of gender and of class. Although the aftermath of Shylock's conversion is not represented, such tensions can be seen perhaps most clearly through the characterization of his daughter, Jessica.

IV. Jessica's Faith, Classism, and Sexism

In early modern plays, vulnerable women will often fulfill the role of "the enslaved, sexually subjugated prisoner under the purpose of reframing Christian men as empowered saviours" (Gillen 208). Jessica appears to meet precisely this demand, as when Lancelot seeks refuge under a new, non-Jewish master. Jessica remarks, "And, Lancelet, soon at supper shalt thou see / Lorenzo, who is thy new master's guest" (2.3.5-6). Jessica's abhorrence of her own father, often interpreted as rejection of her own heritage when stating, is most clearly in a declaration to Lorenzo: "If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife, / Become a Christian and thy loving wife" (2.3.20-21). Referring to home life as perpetual "strife," Jessica furthers a narrative of reaching personal as well as economic success and superiority through her escape from Shylock with some of his wealth in hand and her promise to convert to Christianity. Expanding upon this knowledge and that of staged conversions, scholars debate not only if, in fact, Shylock would be considered a Christian after his forced conversion after the trial scene, but also whether Jessica's conversion reflects her true wishes with regard to her faith or whether it represents an opportunity to emancipate herself from her father's tyrannical rule. For Jessica, as for Shylock, it is neither force nor a change in faith, as true belief in a high power cannot be compelled (Pettigrew 274). As for Lorenzo, his own view on his eventual wife and Christian

convert Jessica can be seen in either light. He could view Jessica as already redeemed and saved, as exemplified in his description of his Jessica's skin color: "'tis a fair hand, / And whiter than the paper it writ on / Is the fair hand that writ" (2.4.13-15). In contrast to her father, Jessica appears to assimilate without issue, using her gender and perceived difference from her father to join Christian society and, thus, too, as a member of Venetian society.

Upon examining the religious language Shylock and Jessica use throughout the play, Shylock distinguishes his own Jewish fate when referencing Old Testament teachings at several points throughout the play. Jessica, who although separates herself by regarding her own father a "devil" (2.3.2), encourages no solidifying claim for a genuine interest towards a change in religious faith. Although both are evidently saved through their conversion to Christianity, Jessica and Shylock are described in strikingly different terms throughout the play. For Jessica's part, associations with the devil never emerge from the play's Christian characters. Indeed, it is Jessica herself who professes clear disdain for her "devil" (2.3.2) father. Moreover, she elicits no terms of judgment for fleeing her father and running off with his money. At her father's window, Jessica says, "Ere, catch this casket; it is worth the pains. / I am glad 'tis night, you do not look on me, / For I am much ashamed of my exchange" (2.6.34-36). While expressing shame at the means by which she is seeking liberation, Jessica is nonetheless exerting agency as a woman, a willful convert, and soon a full member of Venetian society.

Despite the problems inherent in interpreting a character's silence, one might plausibly read Jessica's silence regarding her father's forced conversion as tacit approval of this act.

According to Suzanne Tartamella, the so-called illusion of such depth often "chafes against our expectation for comic closure, in which the main characters on stage [whether speaking or not]

tend to reflect a special kind of harmony, a social unity that transcends, even subjugates, the complexities of individual character” (100). While it is safe to say that not all silences are in fact created equal, gender creates even more division in what is often conducted by such silences. In accordance with what Tartamella says of a woman’s silence, an audience is encouraged to interpret Jessica’s reluctance to speak about her father’s forced conversion, which is to say, “weigh the likelihood of unvoiced indecision or suspended judgement within Jessica herself” (Tartamella 91). Jessica’s moments of silence, punctuated by brief lines such as “I am never merry when I hear sweet music” (5.1.77), thus could be analyzed with the same scope of importance as Shylock’s numerous monologues are. In other words, gendered silence in *Merchant* is active rather than passive, and acting troupes might make much of such moments to capture Jessica’s agency despite inequalities in gender, class, ethnicity, and, of course, religious profession.

Thus, while much critical attention is directed toward Shylock, further exploration of Jessica, along with the play’s other Jews, yields further insights about the inequities waged against Jewish women. Michelle Ephraim, for instance, has argued that Jewish law, often stereotyped as rigid and oppressive, as when Jessica proclaims her father is “a merry devil” (2.3.2), can be read through an intersectional analysis to reveal a more complex portrait of Shylock’s daughter. Indeed, such analysis prevents any oversimplified analysis about what motivates Jessica to abandon her father and wed a Christian and become a Venetian citizen. Although it is important to note that patriarchal Judaism does exist and has an extreme impact on the lives of Jewish women, feminist theologians have argued a case for the female autonomy that exists in traditional rabbinic commentaries on Jewish law. Feminist critics such as Ephraim

embrace the view of *Merchant* as a tool to “collapse Shakespeare’s dichotomy of oppressive Jewish father/miserable Jewish daughter and to explore how the play can generate the interpretive possibility of a daughter who ultimately values her Jewish identity as fundamental to her conception of selfhood” (Ephraim 343). Instead of viewing Jessica’s conversion as a loss of a piece of herself, it can instead be a form of female empowerment. Becoming a Christian becomes a conduit for Jessica to become a Venetian citizen with previously inaccessible rights.

It is therefore important to utilize pertinent feminist scholarship to begin filling in textual and performative gaps in Jessica’s character. By closing these gaps, feminist critics start to reimagine Shakespeare’s Jessica as a site of tension between female sexual/emotional independence and traditional, patriarchal Judaism. Ultimately, “their religious texts are deeply invested in the idea that Jewish faith, culture, law, and ritual are fundamental to the Jewish woman’s most satisfying conceptions of selfhood” (Ephraim 339). Despite her theft of her father’s gold and her marriage to Lorenzo, Jessica is, at best, ambivalent about familial and marital attachments. In imagining and articulating Jessica’s desires for both autonomy and Jewish identity, a thorough debate presents itself on Shylock’s Jewishness as well as how his role was received by movie-makers and actors in adaptations throughout time. The lack of attention towards Jessica’s intersectionality and role throughout the story is essential in understanding how to unravel this seemingly “unsalvageable” (NPR, 2019) play from the anti-Semitism it was written upon. Throughout the remainder of my thesis, I will take up above mentioned debates explored by several acting companies in recent productions of *Merchant*.

V. BBC’s *Merchant*: A “Fair” Jessica and “Devil” Shylock

Representation, especially for marginalized or otherwise underrepresented groups, is obviously important, but what recent adaptations of *Merchant* establish is that even if a production aims at a more progressive interpretation and performance, it can still fall short in undoing anti-Semitic tropes found within the playtext. To begin with, the BBC's 1980 production of *Merchant* seems to make every mistake in trying to increase representation of Jewish characters, arguably making Shylock even more offensive than the words the Christian characters spew would have one believe. Nevertheless, the production is acutely sensitive to hitherto under examined class differences, particularly through seemingly minuscule choices on behalf of the actress who plays the role of Jessica. Jack Gold's choices in how visually to portray Jessica and/versus Shylock are a perhaps more telling narrative, offering a glimpse into how other productions might take up Jessica's subjugation as a Jewish woman.

Gold's Shylock is a gentile's version of what a Jew looks like. But, to make things more interesting and perhaps more poignant, the director Jack Gold as well as Warren Mitchell who plays Shylock are both Jewish. Unlike other productions, Gold's *Merchant* sets out to make Shylock as even more of an outsider. Miriam Gilbert discusses this directorial choice by perceiving that, "Warren Mitchell's small stature immediately sets him apart from the Venetians who always seem to tower over him; in his first entrance, he's a dark silhouette, framed by a dark archway, and underscored by sinister-sounding chords" (Gilbert 303). In addition to Gilbert's analysis, throughout the entire production choices in scenery are seemingly consistent and deliberate in their employment of certain colors and architecture to enhance characterization. For example, when we first see Shylock, he is a black silhouette under an arch. Compared with the seemingly light and open setting generally employed when Christian characters and wealthy

Venetians appear in the production, Shylock's first appearance as a mere silhouette could perhaps serve as a continuation of an earlier tradition that views Shylock unequivocally as the play's villain. In comparison, the home of Christian characters are virtually always containing open spaces decorated with columns and stairs. This backdrop speaks to differences in class and citizenship, as well. Whereas the spaces consisting of columns use white and green muted tones that give off a much more pristine and refined setting.

Wardrobe likewise suggests what we are to make of how characters within Venetian society. Although his given lines are the same as above, the ominous, symphonic, and slow moving but persistent beats of the music as his first introduction gives the audience an immediate feeling of Shylock being the enemy. Immediately we are meant to wary of Gold's Shylock.



Figure 1 Warren Mitchell as Shylock (left), BBC Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice, directed by Jack Gold, BBC, 1980.



Figure 2 Leslee Udwin as Jessica (left), BBC Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice*, directed by Jack Gold, BBC, 1980.

Played by Mitchell, Shylock is given all black clothing, a black Kippah, curly gray hair, tan skin, and a hooked nose (see figs 1 and 2). Emphasized most famously in WWII Nazi propaganda movies, this fearmongering using exaggerated features and costuming dates back to Shakespeare's day and indeed prior to then. Mitchell's Shylock also tends to alienate him, removing many humanistic qualities from him as a character. James Bulman further criticizes Mitchell's Shylock by stating, "...implacable in his hate, [Shylock] gloats over his bond, waves his knife in the faces of his adversaries" (Bulman 106). Thus, these choices seem intended to invoke anti-Semitic caricature, even if the aim is to undermine the legitimacy of such characteristics through eloquent, impassioned delivery of lines such as the "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech.

From the beginning of the BBC's *Merchant*, there is a clear attention made to class relations in the wardrobes of the characters as well. In the first scene we see Bassanio, Graziano, and Lorenzo adorned in dark, seemingly velvet clothing with golden embellishments and structured seams. Even Portia is first seen wearing a light green gown and a golden, delicate

crown. Shylock, on the other hand, is given all black layers of clothing raggedly draped onto the actor with a matching black kippah, one almost comically too large for his head. A reminder to the audience that he is, in fact, Jewish, the oversized kippah also signals Shylock's social status. At the same time these differences in clothing invoke anti-semitic stereotypes, the prominent placement of the kippah might nonetheless serve to elicit sympathy from an audience well aware of the atrocities of the holocaust.

In stark contrast to her father, Jessica has very fair skin and delicate facial features in Gold's *Merchant* (see fig. 2). Her costume also shows inconsistencies with regard to her Jewish heritage. If Shylock is a conservative Jew, as evidenced by his never being seen without a kippah, it follows that Jessica should be wearing a Star of David necklace. That she does not suggests a distance between father and daughter at the moment we first see them together. To further separate her from her father, Jessica wears a dress similar in structure to that of Portia and her female friends in Belmont. Prior to meeting Lorenzo, however, Jessica's dress is an orangish red color also found in the background of the neighborhood Shylock and Lancelot Gobbo inhabit. Gobbo, as a parallel, is also wearing draped, almost ragged clothing, also in a brown color matching the copper color pallet of their living quarters. After both Jessica and Gobbo join Lorenzo and begin interacting with other Venetians, their color of clothing immediately changes. Instead of deep reds, Jessica wears beautifully draped white gowns, whereas Gobbo wears a similar costume of a type of jester but in deep blues. Despite this more drastic shift, Jessica's denial of her Jewish heritage in her choice of clothing and accessories signifies that she has already decided to leave her father; until that moment arrives, she is merely playing a part.

What's more, her many similarities to Portia, evident from the production's early scenes, indicate she has agency akin to "fair" Portia (1.2.189).

These clear decisions in the appearance of our characters do not end in wardrobe choices and physical features, but extend to the actors' choices in line delivery. In his meditations on Christians has perpetual enemies to his tribe, Shylock often breaks the fourth wall, speaking to audiences as much as to fellow characters. Thus, at the same time that the play's Christian characters are spewing their vitriol at Shylock, he is turning to spectators to appeal for sympathy, as in his "Hath not a Jew eyes" monologue. He lays out the hypocrisy of a Christian's hatred toward his faith when stating that he is "Fed with the / same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to / the same diseases, healed by the same means" (3.1.59-61). Pointing out the example Christians provide Jews, Shylock continues, "If a Jew wrong a Christian, / what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong / a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian / example? Why, revenge!" (3.1.67-70). Mitchell's Shylock delivers these lines as a slow, orchestral swell builds, perhaps underscoring the scene's crucial importance. Salerio and Solanio are laughing through the entirety of the monologue—or at least until Shylock points out Christians' bad example. As John Cooper observes, this speech tends to elicit great sympathy for Shylock's character, regardless of what precedes or follows it. Cooper writes, "There is no need to rehearse the reactions to this speech by critics who have found Shylock to be a sympathetic character, but it is worth noticing that even critics who insist on Shylock's villainy also find it a powerful appeal to the audience's sympathy and sense" (118). The fact that these characters laugh until Shylock brings the hypocrisy of their beliefs into the monologue shows that there are clear apathetic feelings towards Shylock speaking his truth unless their own religion is involved. In

breaking the fourth wall and addressing the audience through this production, Shylock invites spectators to join him in judgment of Salerio and Solanio as well as the play's other Christian characters.

At first glance, Leslee Udwin, who plays the role of Jessica, might not appear to encourage as sympathetic a reception as Shylock. Upon closer inspection of her character's development, however, we are able to glean more about the fear and anger Jessica has toward her father and the complex feelings that emerge as a result. Although she is regarded as "fair Jessica" (2.4.31) in the play text, a characterization borne out in Udwin's fairer skin and gentle features, at times her line delivery does not match such a description. The main moment that stands out are first in Jessica's "I have a father, you a daughter, lost" (2.5.30) speech. Although she has anger in her voice, paying attention to her face tells a different story. Camille Slights, talking specifically about the BBC's Jessica, nicely summarizes this difference in reaction: "Her willingness to lose a father does not imply that she is pursuing personal happiness in preference to broader social and spiritual values. Her break with her past is precisely a decision to forfeit her isolated security as a rich Jew's daughter in order to become part of the . . . harmonies that bind people together in Christian society" (Slights 364). At the above mentioned moment, observant spectators will notice tears welling up in Jessica's eyes. This detail is so minor that it may escape notice, but in the final scene of the entire play, the complexity first conveyed in this gesture becomes more explicit. After being handed the deed to all of her father's possessions after the trial, spectators see her in the background reading the document with an expression of profound sadness. As the last character we see on stage in this production, Jessica's reaction to her father's punishment is what spectators is the last, lingering image for spectators to glimpse. Despite this

production of *Merchant*'s seemingly offensive portrayal of Shylock, the production nonetheless offers a complex portrayal of Jessica that calls our attention to her subjugation as a Jewish woman. Instead of simplifying Jessica's choice of leaving her father to be of a more affluent states as a Christian woman, this production instead chooses to complicate this decision as well as the emotional toll it takes on her after the fact.

VI. Radford's *Merchant*: A Simplification of Anti-Semitism

First released in 2004, Michael Radford's *Merchant* offers spectators a historical lens through which to view Christian characters' treatment of Shylock and Jessica. Underscoring historical and cultural context, Radford's film aspires to condemn the play's Christian characters and, in so doing, stage a powerful corrective to previous traditions that traffic in virulent anti-Semitic myths and tropes. Interspersed with opening shots of Venice are a series of captions informing spectators about the horrific treatment of Jews in the sixteenth century. We are told, for example, that "Jews were forbidden to own property, so they practiced usury" (*The Merchant of Venice* 2:15), a overt defense of Shylock's profession. We also see shots of Venetian men adorned with crosses shouting anti-Semitic epithets, followed by another caption explaining that open disdain for Jews was expressed by "religious fanatics," while "sophisticated Venetians" turned a blind eye (*The Merchant of Venice* 2:23-2:32). We then see acts of violence against Jews: several are thrown off a bridge, and we see Shylock spit on by Antonio in a scene that visualizes what Antonio admits to doing in Shakespeare's play text (see fig. 3).



Figure 3 Antonio (Jeremy Irons, right) spits on Shylock (Al Pacino, center) in the marketplace, *The Merchant of Venice*, directed by Michael Radford, Arclight Films, 2004.

In response to Shylock’s claim that Antonio has previously “spit upon my Jewish gaberdine” (1.3.106), Antonio declares, “I am as like . . . / To spit on thee again, and spurn thee, too” (1.3.123-24). Although the first piece of historical context is needed in setting up the cultural conditions of Shylock’s occupation and status, the depiction of Christian characters as unabashedly prejudiced threatens to undermine the claim that such treatment is the work of a minority group of “religious fanatics” as opposed to evidence of structural inequalities in early modern Venice. This film from this early statement seems to want to minimize anti-Semitic sentiments during the period, suggesting it was only the opinion of a lunatic fringe, when in fact historical investigations reveal that such sentiment was embedded within hegemonic culture. This decision to add as well as subtract material from the ‘authentic’ production of *Merchant* is met with mixed reviews from different critics when discussing how we are to grapple with a play with such deeply rooted anti-Semitism. Laury Magnus, for example, argues that, “...the quest for authenticity is in itself problematic. Some original performances of *Merchant* in contemporary venues...have provoked reactions from audience members of intense, violent hatred or revulsion

toward Shylock” (Magnus 108-109). In opposition, Maria-Clara Galery regards any sort of change from an ‘authentic’ production of *Merchant* as problematic. She states, “Arguably, in any production of Shakespeare, for the stage or the screen, the director will make cuts to the text... when the cuts involve the elimination of antisemitic material, several issues are raised...when one erases antisemitism from the play, one erases history” (Galery 118). I happen to find a grey area in both of these arguments. Although authenticity to the anti-Semitism within the play text is often what solidifies such harmful ideas, in a post-Holocaust world this play is often regarded to historians as “a history play, a document of antisemitism” (Galery 118). Deleting every single anti-semitic element would be an erasure of history to learn from.

Setting their preliminary discussion about a proposed loan in what appears to be a butcher’s market, the film suggests that the interaction among Antonio, Bassanio, and Shylock is framed, and perhaps necessitated, by systemic violence. Although there are no major changes or cuts to the dialogue, the scene is shot in a way that draws our sympathies toward Shylock rather than Antonio or Bassanio. In striking contrast to the BBC production, in Radford’s film Shylock is calm and logical in his responses to Antonio’s and Bassanio’s vicious language. Taking creative liberty with the play’s setting, the film allows Shylock to consult privately with fellow Jews while meditating on Antonio’s animus for people of their faith: “He hates our sacred nation... / Even there where merchants most do congregate, / On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift, / Which he calls “interest.” Cursèd be my tribe” (1.3.48-51). Rather than deliver these lines angrily, Al Pacino’s Shylock offers a measured response that suggests he is concerned as much with making bad investment as investing with his sworn enemy. Likewise, when Antonio states, “Shylock, albeit I neither lend nor borrow / By taking nor by giving of excess, / Yet, to



Figure 4 Zuleikha Robinson as Jessica, The Merchant of Venice, directed by Michael Radford, Arclight Films, 2004.

supply the ripe wants of my friend, / I'll break a custom" (1.3.63-66), the titular merchant seems to let down his guard to the point of vulnerability. Just as quickly, however, Antonio reminds us that he, not Shylock, is the aggressor leveraging his status as Venetian citizen and member of the Christian majority against the Jew. Completely unaware of the profound irony in his statement, Antonio says of Shylock, "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose! / An evil soul producing holy witness" (1.3.107-108). We are again reminded that Shylock has been forced into the role of villain, or more precisely scapegoat, by Venice's Christian majority. In this film adaptation, Jeremy Irons's Antonio oscillates between inviting sympathy over his unrequited love for Bassanio and scorn for his reprehensible treatment of Shylock. If Pacino's Shylock expresses rage and disdain at certain moments in the film, spectators have been afforded ample historical and cultural context to explain, perhaps even legitimize, such aggression.

In our first introduction to Zuleikha Robinson's Jessica, the blue hue of the scene immediately creates a sad, dark, and cold contrast to scenes that precede it. From this scene onward, unlike the other productions we have seen, there are clear markers in the production's understanding of Jessica's actions. First of all, in contrast to the BBC production, Robinson's Jessica bears no resemblance to Portia, whether in dress or in physical features. As opposed to exhibiting fair features associated with the play's Christian characters, Robinson's Jessica has a darker complexion and textured long black hair. Moreover, whereas in the BBC and RSC productions Shylock has a discernable Yiddish-sounding accent, in contrast to the British accent of other characters, both Jessica and Shylock are not distinguished from Christians in this manner. This portrayal not only sets up Jessica to be of a more dynamic and fleshed out character, but also makes her seem more divided in her intentions of running away from her father. After delivering her letter to Lorenzo to Gobbo, she turns back into her room and gazes at herself in the mirror while pondering "becom[ing] a Christian and thy loving wife" (2.4.6), almost as if she is convincing herself of it. About this moment in the film, Slights observes that it represents an "acute awareness of the conflict between the loyalty she owes her father and the moral disapproval she feels for his manners" (Slights 361). Shots of Jessica's face wearing an expression of stress and apprehension defies oversimplified ideas about why she feels compelled to abandon her father. Far from overjoyed or triumphant in this act, Robinson's Jessica wrestles with the costs and benefits of leaving her father to wed Lorenzo, convert to Christianity, and become a citizen of Venice. This attention to Jessica's situation and emotions enjoins the viewer to contemplate the gravity of the situation, which requires Jessica to turn her back on family in order to make a viable life for herself.

In a similar vein, great emphasis is placed on Shylock's devastation from Jessica's disappearance after she runs to be with Lorenzo. Not only does he sink to his knees in Jessica's room after seeing the open window, but there is also a shot of him roaming the street in the pouring rain presumably looking for her. In eliminating said overdetermined binary opposition between Jew and Christian, adapting this scene to represent a heartbroken Shylock for the search of his daughter reflects what could perhaps be an even more poignant statement toward Jessica and Shylock's relationship. Instead of seeing him as hating Christians for the sake of hating them, Shylock is portrayed as angry, and rightly so, about the systemic inequalities that have enabled such events to transpire without legal recourse. As he reaches what seems to be his breaking point, once again under a blue hue, Shylock finds himself outcast, drenched in the pouring rain, desperately searching for even the faintest sign of his daughter.

What Jessica lacks in lines for the duration of the play, the director makes up for in a series of shots, wide and close-up alike, of Jessica's reactions to various events. There is an awareness of the importance of Jessica's role in the play, as she is not only another central Jewish character but is also Shylock's daughter. This awareness and attention can be seen in the adaptation's choices in representing assimilation through the costume choices of the characters. Before Jessica abandons Shylock to be with Lorenzo, both father and daughter are adorned in vibrant red garb. Jessica, while wearing a more structured gown, similar but not as provocative in comparison, is then seen with a long cape. Covering her dress almost entirely, the cape also matches a deeper, almost brown color that also appears in clothes worn by Lorenzo, Bassanio, and the other non-Jewish male characters. Through costuming, then, we see Jessica's divided sense of self present from the outset.

Conspicuously absent at the moment of her father's judgment in court, Jessica is perhaps too upset to go and see her father in such a state; alternatively, she might not wish to associate with her Jewish father. Of course, the reality might also be a combination of the two. What also stands out in this scene is the inclusion of other Jews who react as Shylock's wealth, occupation, and faith are systematically stripped away from him. One can hypothesize that perhaps she was not allowed to attend as a woman, especially seeing that Portia herself had to dress as a man to appear in court. It can also make, for the sake of her image, a case for the idea that she did not attend the hearing in order to keep her emotions hidden from on-lookers. What is distinguished, though, is a definite sign of acknowledgement towards her father's verdict from Jessica's added scene at the end of this film.

After losing his daughter, his money, his occupation, and his religion, Pacino's Shylock is utterly destroyed, a realization underscored by the film's closing with alternating shots of Shylock and Antonio isolated from the play's other characters. Conversely, Portia and company are in great spirits after the outcome of the trial, Nerissa giving the deed of Shylock's possessions to Jessica: "There do I give to you and Jessica, / From the rich Jew, a special deed of gift" (5.1.312-313). While the hue on screen is once again blue, this coloring is then copied through a single shot of Shylock outside in the rain, disheveled and stripped of his bright red cap. As a parallel, in a shot of Jessica looking over a calm lake with the colors of a sunset drenching every inch of the scene, she is also alone, twisting and looking down at the ring which is now on her finger. The addition of the scene not only acknowledges the high stakes of Jessica's abandoning, but also indicates that she, too, faces the prospect of isolation and/or alienation as a result of her choices.

For this production in particular, creating a less overdramatized version of both Shylock and Jessica and the situations they are in is refreshing, but it does not necessarily follow that the film succeeds in casting off the play text's anti-Semitic tropes and expressions. Film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, in general, create conflicting feelings of effectiveness from scholars. Yong Lan, for example, proclaims that in Shakespeare's plays language is often used to deceive. Whereas, on the other hand, its power also heavily relies on images generated within the mind's eye. She furthers this point by stating, "We could then restate the inner-outer dialectic slightly differently, with regard to Shakespeare performance on film, as two modes of vision, literal and figurative: seeing what is shown, and seeing into it" (Lan 183). In its attempt to offer an unabashedly progressive corrective to previous interpretations of Shylock and his daughter through the medium of film, there remain problems left under examined if not entirely unexplored. As we shall see, class struggle is brought to the fore in RSC's *Merchant*, which utilizes Jessica's and Gobbo's associations to explore structural inequalities much more in depth.

VI. Royal Shakespeare Company's *Merchant*: Attention to Class and Power

What initially stands out in the RSC's 2015 stage adaptation of *Merchant* is the exaggerated style through the costumes as well as its overall set design. When being compared to the BBC and Redford production, through an aesthetically severe difference in detail between the set versus the costumes, there seems to be a greater emphasis on attention to class differences between characters. The RSC *Merchant* deploys a minimalist design, and while costume is quite suggestive about differences between Jews and Christians in the play, the lack of a background

often leaves an empty space that raises more questions than it ultimately answers about Shylock's placement in Venetian society.

The scene is set through a blank stage with a large metronome swaying back and forth throughout the production (see fig. 5). The large wall that is utilized to be the backdrop for the play as well as Jessica's dwelling before she meets Lorenzo is a slate black with brick patterning; other than this, there is no other indicator as to where she lives; spectators are left to imagine the interior of Jessica's bedroom and with it the life she is trying to escape. As the camera pans out in several shots throughout the play, especially when tensions rise in scenes before the trial, the camera catches choirs of children as well as adults seated overhead, lining the perimeter of the top of the theater. You can see as well, in several points throughout the play, when the actors are



Figure 5 Minimalist set design featuring gold wall (back) and metronome (left), RSC Live: The Merchant of Venice, directed by Polly Findlay, Opus Arte, 2015.

not on stage they may be seated to the side (see fig. 5), also sometimes joining the choir in singing. This choice raises more questions than it answers, but perhaps gestures toward the

isolation that various characters reveal as a result of their choices. What can be inferred is that although Shylock never receives true justice in the court scene, history has its eyes on the perpetrators of the injustice directed towards him. As the characters harass Shylock for being a Jew without any obvious repercussions, the people in the choir overhead as well as on the side of the stage are always watching.

Upon our first introduction to Shylock, he and Bassanio and Gratiano are in the midst of a discussion about a loan. Throughout the conversation (1.3), there is a striking difference in how Shylock presents himself and delivers his lines. In a review of this production, Anne Cox writes,

This is a production that fails ignite. There is little made of Shylock's uneasy relationship with the gentiles (but he is spat upon, causing a sharp intake of breath among the audience) or, indeed, his own daughter, whose momentous decision to abandon her faith and marry a Christian, is barely given any stage time. (Anne Cox, *Stage Review*)

What Cox fails to consider, though, is how the production's creative, if at time anachronistic, choices enable a more intersectional and nuanced approach to the social issues broached in this play. As in previous productions, Jessica has comparatively little stage time, not to mention far fewer lines than her more famous father. Nevertheless, efforts in spotlighting and exploring anti-Semitism, sexism, and classism are evident to the patient and attentive playgoer.

In identifying these efforts, we must first recognize that visual markers of Jessica's Jewish identity are impossible to find. Instead, what this production manages to get across is a rather poignant stance in mirroring her character arc with Lancelot Gobbo's. In her first appearance on stage (2.3), Jessica is talking with Lancelot Gobbo. As in the BBC production and

Radford film, Jessica bears little resemblance to her father. As far as clothing goes, it is more believable in accordance to the fact that she is set to not be a conservative Jew like her father, but Shylock is not seen wearing a kippah at any point throughout the play. Shylock is given a blue windbreaker with a white undershirt and basic trousers (see fig. 6), whereas you can see from the portion of her torso that is visible while she is located so high up, that she is dressed fairly conservatively, consisting of a her hair pulled into a bun with a white turtleneck underneath a navy blue dress. With Jessica's conservative style of dress as well as her literal high position on the stage and separated from the world through Shylock, there is a sort of hypocritical metaphor of oppression that exists visually. While Shylock is harassed and literally spit on by Christians

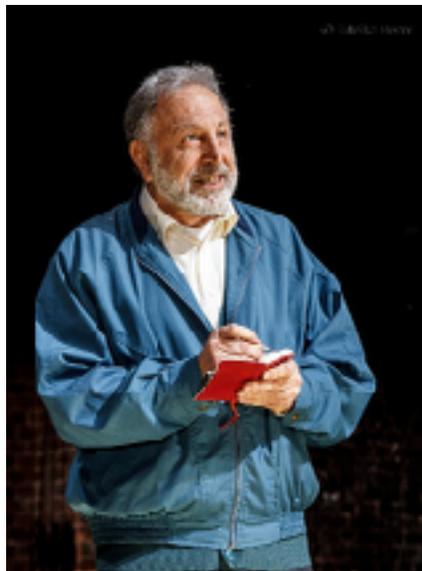


Figure 6 Makram Khoury's Shylock in casual attire, RSC Live: The Merchant of Venice, directed by Polly Findlay, Opus Arte, 2015.

for being Jewish, he has the freedom of dressing how he wishes while keeping Jessica in a tower, lacking her own freedom. Gobbo's apparel also seems aligned with the style choices of Shylock and Jessica while in a different color scheme, instead of wearing blues and whites his dress is basic in uniformity but consists of warmer red and brown tones (see Figure 4). While such

differences might seem miniscule, as we continue on with the story it is apparent that although there are clear decisions of apparel to signify supposed class, there is also consistency with the culture as well as religion of Judaism. Shylock and Jessica are supposed to be signified by in a more present time period. Gobbo reflects this pattern of change in style, in the same situations that are parallel to the actions Jessica takes to social climb.

In particular, these textual contradictions exist mainly in parallel between Jessica and Lancelot Gobbo (see fig. 7), a character who in many facets copies Jessica in his pursuit to reject Shylock and his Jewishness to be of a more affluent class. For example, in the playtext there are several instances where Jessica projects what can only be seen as self-hatred as a Jew onto her



Figure 7 Launcelot Gobbo (Tim Samuels) and Jessica (Scarlett Brookes) embrace, RSC Live: The Merchant of Venice, directed by Polly Findlay, Opus Arte, 2015.

father. Indeed, she confesses as much to Gobbo: “Alack, what heinous sin is it in me / To be ashamed to be my father’s child! / But though I am a daughter to his blood, / I am not to his manners” (2.3.16–19). Although she is aware of how wrong it must be to hate her own father as well as her own culture, she chooses to think of herself as above what may seem as the sort of innate ill-mannered tendencies Shylock seems to be afflicted with throughout the play. In

similarity with Jessica's disdain for her father, Gobbo also recounts his hatred towards his own father as well. He states, "Well, my conscience . . . / says very wisely to me, 'My honest friend / Launcelot, being an honest man's son'—or rather / an honest woman's son, for indeed my father did / something smack, something grow to, he had a / kind of taste" (2.2.13–18). In addition to this dislike, he also holds dislike towards Shylock simply because he is a Jew. When contemplating running away from working for Shylock, he says, "Certainly my conscience will serve me to / run from this Jew my master" (2.2.1-2). Jessica and Gobbo both hold extremely poignant notes on class, as Gobbo makes a deal to serve Bassanio, in hopes of not working under Shylock, the Jew, anymore. Jessica, on the other hand but also similarly, pledges her allegiance in order to gain similar privileges, she accepts marriage to Lorenzo. This attention to socioeconomic status is the most distinguished in the RSC production. In several creative attributes such as costume and performance, both of the actors of Jessica and Gobbo are constructed to be parallels throughout the play. While Shylock's character remains stagnant in his clothing, Jessica and Gobbo transform from their 'roles' pre relationship to the Christian characters and post relationship to Christian characters.

While in the Gold production and Radford film there is clear intent in signifying through visual markers that Shylock and Jessica are Jewish, in the Royal Shakespeare production father and daughter eschew such markers and instead demonstrate their cultural differences through secular clothing. Instead of including usual signifiers of Shylock's faith, the production explores complex social and societal dynamics through encounters and confrontations on a nearly bare stage with characters in nondescript attire. By holding a single metronome against the present-day garments, the production forces spectators to look for other markers of difference, within and

across characters devoted to Christian and Jewish faiths. Consequently, the production blurs the line between faiths in perpetual conflict, and thus, too, on what it means to look or seem Jewish or Christian. Although the actor who plays Shylock has a strong Yiddish accent, one his daughter does not share, this alone is not evidence that the character is a practicing Jew. At best, the accent points to an ethnic or cultural difference.

Throughout the transitions between scenes, there is also a loud ding, or series of dings, that ring, underscoring the ceaseless, even indifferent passage of time first signified in the omnipresent metronome. As we grow closer to the trial, this sound accompanies the growing anticipation about the outcome of Shylock's claim to a pound of Antonio's flesh (1.3.158-60). As the Christian characters remove their coats adorned in luxurious feathers and furs and replace them with black ones, Shylock is left with just his undershirt and vest. As the scene plays out, Shylock protests, "Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that. / You take my house when you do take the prop / That doth sustain my house" (4.1.390-392). One would be hard-pressed to find evidence of Jessica's reaction to this plea; she stands expressionless and motionless throughout. When she exits the stage, we are left to guess if she feels anything beyond mild irritation about what has just transpired. Although this production is unorthodox in its approach to staging *Merchant*, it delivers an exceedingly in-depth as well as intersectional analysis of the anti-Semitism that exists in the play.

The adaptation succeeds in bringing a unique examination of class through its representation of Jessica individually. When first meeting Lorenzo, Jessica wears a trench coat but still located high-up on the stage. In her line delivery, she seems almost apprehensive before accepting Lorenzo's courtship before accepting his offer. As a comparison, as Gobbo is offered

emancipation of his own he offers a similar speech deliverance that indicates that he is perhaps more self-assured. The costuming between Gobbo and Jessica mirrors such verbal interactions and choices made by these characters throughout the play. As Jessica and Gobbo are still under the control of Shylock, Jessica wears the more conservative, muted clothing shown above as Gobbo wears basic, beige pants and an orange t-shirt. After Jessica is betrothed to Lorenzo and Gobbo is released from Shylock's grasp, both transform into outfits that are closer to the clothing that is worn by the Christian characters, but still holding elements held prior. Although Jessica's clothing is less conservative, she still sticks to more muted and structured styles. While Gobbo, while he adds a button-down vest over his shirt, is still wearing clown makeup on his face. Although both Jessica and Gobbo have socially climbed to wear they are, Jessica almost needs to be more 'blended in' with the Christian characters, while Gobbo is still able to wear clown makeup and virtually the same clothes, barely changing who he is while still being granted the privileges that Jessica has converted for. This choice, unlike the near complete transformation in styles by both of these characters in the past two productions, cater towards a more obvious attention towards issues of sexism and classism that exist within the play. As Gobbo is able to receive the same societal privileges Jessica now has, because of her gender, it seems as though she needs to go through even more of a visual metamorphosis to be considered for a higher status.

Although this adaptation takes careful consideration and effort to present Shylock as the victim we first glimpse in Radford's film, it exceeds Radford in its exploration of the complexity of the several types of bigotry that exist in the play. Jessica, objectively, explores the same methods. Just as Gobbo's abandonment and conversion from his own father is a source of

anxiety, Jessica's decision to leave Shylock is a succinct choice in motivation to convert for a better life. It "anticipates Jessica's own abandonment of her father and insofar as Lancelot himself imagines leaving Shylock as a conversion of sort...thus inherits the guilt and anxiety" (Adelman 43). Despite her limited stage time and speeches, Jessica is not meant simply to Other her father in some grand conversion narrative; as the RSC production amply demonstrates, she is a complex character whose choices have profound implications for conceptions of gender and class in addition to religion and ethnicity.

VII. Where Do We Go From here?

In rethinking performative possibilities for *Merchant's* other Jewish characters, we discover new ways of grappling with the play's so-called toxic elements. Even in their deficiencies, productions of *Merchant* raise salient questions about religion, class, and gender (to name just three axes of difference) in Shakespeare's day and our own. At their best, performances enable us to think anew our prior assumptions about the play's cultural work. If none of the productions examined in this thesis project succeeded in avoiding trafficking in anti-Semitic tropes and epithets, each proposes new ways of approaching this element through Jewish characters who have received scant attention in scholarly work on the topic. Jessica's character in particular offers rich opportunities for intersectional analysis of the anti-Semitic discourse that finds expression throughout the play.

To be clear, I respectfully disagree with those who claim *Merchant* "resists rehabilitation." As a Jewish woman who made a conscious decision to embark on comparative analysis of three recent productions of *Merchant*, I do not wish to see this play banished from the

stage or, worse, the classroom. To do so would be to ignore the insights it offers about anti-Semitic beliefs that, alas, have resurged with a vengeance in the last four years. In an ideal world, forms of oppression could be stamped out of existence, but the reality is that anti-Semitism must be confronted to be unlearned. It must be thrown under scrutiny, relentlessly. In my attempts to tackle such a difficult and ugly subject, I have become more convinced of the importance of Jessica's character in the play's representation of bigotry and oppression. By making this claim, I do not mean to suggest that Shylock is less dynamic or complex than Jessica. But if consideration of anti-Semitism in *Merchant* begins and ends with the treatment of Shylock, we leave no space for discussion of gender. If it has become standard practice to read Shylock as the victim of rampant anti-Semitism, that does not mean he should not be held accountable for his treatment of Jessica. Powerful Jewish women are difficult enough to find in literary works, and the prospect of not telling Jessica's story, one I happen to identify with, if only in my struggle to reconcile my faith with my commitment social justice and equality, is too much to bear. Rather than refuse to tell these stories, let us accept Shakespeare's invitation to appropriate, adapt, and reimagine his play texts, playing out so as to subject to relentless critique prejudices that flourish when allowed to propagate uncontested.

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