

PRODUCTION AS TRANSLATION:  
*THE MERCHANT OF VENICE* ON THE "FOREIGN" STAGE

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In recent years, seventeenth-century classical drama has increasingly traversed national borders and become accessible to "foreign" audiences through modern productions based on translations and / or new versions that interrogate the original textual authority. The very act of translation, of denying a classical author such as Shakespeare his language, presents a challenge to the universalizing tendency of traditional stage history with its essentialist assumptions that classical texts "are stable and authoritative, that meaning is immanent in them, and that actors and directors are therefore **interpreters** rather than **makers** of meaning" (Bulman "Introd." 1). In any reading of performance, whether past or present, the critic's task is, as Cary Mazer reminds us, "an act of contextualizing, of **historicizing**, the performance in its cultural moment" (149).<sup>1</sup> The performance text<sup>2</sup> is itself historically contingent, the outcome of a process Patrice Pavis terms its "concretization," wherein "signifier (literary work as thing), signified (aesthetic object), and Social Context. . . are variables. . . which can be more or less reconstructed" (*Crossroads*

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27). Yet post-structuralist forms of thinking about plays—whether based on issues relating to gender, to performance, or to materialist interpretations of history—persist in initiating their inquiry with a central tenet of the old approaches: they start with the written text. Traditional stage history has long underscored the primacy of the text; for example, Harley Granville-Barker, in his *Preface to Lear*, states that the individuality of the play “is made manifest by the form as well as the substance of the dialogue, by the shaping and colour of its verse and prose,” and this crucial element, encountered only in the English text, “is, of course, of primary importance for producer and actors” (25). John Barton, former artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, pushes this assertion further, saying that “Shakespeare **is** his text”:

The clues in the text are much richer and more numerous than at first appears. And though the possibilities are infinite, we can only sift the fruitful from the perverse by getting our teeth into the text and the verse itself. If the textual points are ignored, then it’s pretty certain that Shakespeare’s intentions will be ignored or at least twisted. . . . Shakespeare **is** his text. So if you want to do him justice, you have to look for and follow the clues he offers. If an actor does that then he’ll find that Shakespeare himself starts to direct him. (167-68)

The universalizing truism of the stable and authoritative text, however, is almost always turned on its side by the mere fact of contemporary performance which, as John Russell Brown points out, generally involves some form of “adaptation, transposition, misrepresentation, spectacular simplification, or novel accretion” (22).<sup>3</sup> Inga-Stina Ewbank, who has produced translations of plays by Ibsen and Strindberg for productions by the National Theatre, the Peter Hall Company, and the Royal Shakespeare Company, puts it simply and clearly: “Any production is a translation.” Of foreign language

productions, then, the motivating question is perforce more extreme: "What happens when Shakespeare is manifestly **not** his text?"

If, in the process of linguistic and cultural translation an essential element of the original is made redundant, it is equally true that some foreign performances may have a more immediate access to the power of classical plays. The contemporaneity of the target idiom, in modernizing the archaism and remoteness of language that can create difficulties for late twentieth-century audiences works to bridge the inevitable gap between past text and modern context. Pavis points to a key contradiction in the process of linguistic translation for the stage when the source text is archaic or classical:

In such cases, the translation will be more readable for a target audience than the source text (in the original language) would be for the same audience. Hence a paradox: Shakespeare is easier to understand in French and German translation than in the original, because the work of adapting the text to the current situation of enunciation will necessarily be accomplished by the translation. Shakespeare thus lives on in French and German, while being long since dead in English. ("Translation" 28)

A linguistic rendering is but one element of the overall act of dramaturgical analysis which "consists of concretizing the text in order to make it readable for a reader / spectator. Making the text readable involves making it visible—in other words, available for concretization on stage and by the audience" (28). Thus, as Dennis Kennedy points out, performances of Shakespeare in a target tongue perforce foreground non-verbal elements of production, exploring "scenographic and physical modes more openly than their Anglophone counterparts, often redefining the meaning of plays in the process" (6).

Playing classical theatre in a different tongue may also underscore political and polemical interpretations—past and present—that might

otherwise go unnoticed. Kennedy offers a seeming challenge to the materialist insistence on contextual particularity by interrogating the idea that “Shakespeare can be contained by a single tradition or by a single culture or by a single language”:

In the end Shakespeare doesn't belong to any nation or anybody: Shakespeare is foreign to all of us. In the theatre we will continue to see a range of attitudes to the ownership of the plays, just as we see in contemporary Shakespearean scholarship. Some productions will want to point up the otherness of the texts, others will continue to want to possess or absorb them. (16)

Kennedy's aim is not so much to divorce the plays from the social and historical conditions of their original performance as to dispel “the myth of cultural ownership.” This metalinguistic, transcultural perspective is essentially an extension of Robert Weimann's observation of more than thirty years ago, that “today **any** Shakespeare staging has to come to terms with the tension between Renaissance values and modern evaluations” (“Past” 115). Combining Marxist thought and historical methodology in exploring how the theatre could reclaim in Shakespeare a popular tradition, Weimann posited the “unity of history and criticism by which the past significance and the present meaning of Shakespeare's theatre” could be explained in terms of its “structural quality” and its “social function”:

On the one hand, Shakespeare's theatre is irremediably a thing of the past; on the other, his plays have survived the conditions from which they originated and are continually revitalized on the modern stage. . . . The tension between what is past and what lives for us today is obvious; and yet, from the point of view of the function of literary scholarship, it seems impossible to relegate the pastness of Shakespeare's

theater to the “pure” historian and its contemporaneity to the “pure” critic or modern producer. (“Popular” xiii)

The dialectic between a work’s origins in the past and its effects in the present, between “history” and “interpretation,” is key for an understanding of the way in which foreign renderings of a play through translation may reassess the possibilities of the original.

The particular pertinence of José Carlos Plaza’s 1992 staging of *The Merchant of Venice* at the Centro Dramático Nacional in Madrid<sup>4</sup> is not so much that it coincided with the quincentenary of the expulsion of the Spanish Jews by the Catholic Kings, but that it accompanied global events remembering the historical co-existence of three cultures in Medieval Spain, and more particularly, the fifteen-hundred year Jewish presence, which was itself solemnized at the end of 1991 with an exhibition on “La vida judía en Safarad” in Toledo’s Sinagoga del Tránsito.<sup>5</sup> More broadly, this *mise en scène* of *Merchant* in Spain was touted “an antiracist outcry,” underscoring questions of social morality that dominated Elizabethan England but that also speak forcefully to our post-Holocaust world. For Plaza, the play is

*una obra complejísima y al mismo tiempo clara, dura, y divertida. Es un grito contra el racismo, que con una envoltura como de cuento de hadas, encierra el terrible drama de unos pueblos que no llegan a entenderse, porque la raza blanca se cree en posesión de la verdad. . . . Desgraciadamente el mensaje de la obra está de plena actualidad ahora que el racismo y la xenofobia han revivido. De lo que habla Shakespeare es de la clemencia, una palabra que esta sociedad parece haber olvidado, y sobre todo de la igualdad entre los hombres más allá de la raza y la religión y que es imposible entenderse si existe un fascismo interior. (Gil)*

If *Merchant* resonates diachronically with issues of equality and justice—the accordance of rights to aliens against xenophobia, the acceptance of cultural difference in “the other” versus racial intolerance, and the changing role of women in the face of patriarchal authority—this mounting reverberates synchronically with a discriminatory incident a month before opening night that resulted in the death of an indigent, Dominican, immigrant, working mother in an affluent Madrid suburb.<sup>6</sup> The tragic coincidence reinforces a basic tenet of play production: the theatre, whether classical or modern, functions as a barometer of society, and directors will not select a text for performance until they perceive its connections with the movement of the times. Plaza comments:

*Difícilmente podría encontrarse una mayor igualdad entre la Venecia descrita en la obra y nuestra sociedad actual: unas capas sociales poseedoras de la verdad absoluta, dominadas por un pensamiento: “nuestra forma de vivir, nuestros valores y características son únicos, y fuera de nosotros solo está el error.” Unos grupos sociales hipócritas, incultos, incapaces de ceder ni un pedazo de miserable terreno que han conquistado a través de las rapiñas que ellos declaran “legales,” pero capaces de **hablar** de caridad, de compasión e incluso de amor hacia los demás. Shakespeare centra su obra en un pleito entre dos formas de entender la vida, pleito que siempre ganarán los que ostentan el poder, porque son los que imponen las armas del combate; ése es el enorme error de nuestro Shylock, creer que usando la ley de los otros, puede llegar a ganar. ¿Puede haber algo más “contemporáneo”? Esa guerra la expresó de la manera más meridiana una “señora” de las nuestras, una buena persona, que declaraba en TV: los dominicanos perturban el orden y la limpieza. ¿Qué orden y qué limpieza? ¿Para qué plantearse si nuestro orden y limpieza son los justos? ¿Qué necesidad*

*hay de pensar en las causas que originan las conductas? Lo malo es lo malo y lo bueno es lo nuestro.*

Performance history indicates that *The Merchant of Venice* has invited more “tampering and revision” than any other of Shakespeare’s plays, having been perpetually adapted “not only to the prevailing theatrical technology and taste, but to ever-changing social and political contexts as well” (Bulman *Merchant* 27).<sup>7</sup> Plaza’s Spanish *Merchant*, in exemplifying what Kennedy has dubbed “foreign Shakespeare” or “Shakespeare without his language” (1), must deal with the ineluctable historical fact that this theatre is a thing of the past yet is continually being revitalized in the present. Virtually unique in the history of Shakespeare in Spain, it stands in contrast to the stage annals of Golden Age Spanish theatre in that any one *mise en scène* of the text can be seen in the light of a performance tradition spanning four centuries. It is not surprising, therefore, that it shows affinities with both Henry Irving’s bench mark production of 1879 and Jonathan Miller’s subversive rejoinder of 1970 in which Lawrence Olivier played Shylock.

Suggestive of Irving’s Victorian production set in Renaissance Venice,<sup>8</sup> Plaza’s pre-show opens on the slow pace of life in the mercantile quarter of the Rialto, where Levantine Jews and Moslems stroll about effecting their daily negotiations in a mythical atmosphere of mutual tolerance.<sup>9</sup> A practicable bridge spans an illuminated quaywall that is cast in shades of red and gray. During Bassanio’s lyric conjuring, the canal bridge descends and the upstage quaywalls open to illuminate Belmont’s lady, as though she were being seen in his mind’s eye. Here the simultaneous presence, and the indistinct merging, of seemingly opposite worlds help to make correspondences between them apparent. If the scant use of props in a neutral space enabled Shakespeare to establish a pattern of scenic juxtapositions, Plaza’s rhythmic staging works to generate fluid transitions despite elaborate, representational scenery. The parallelisms between Venice and Belmont that form the structural core of the text have long been recognized: if the merchants

are motivated by the accumulation of wealth albeit capricious trade ventures and debt, the women are concerned with the acquisition of a husband in the face of restrictions on the freedom either to “choose” or to “refuse” (1.2.22-23; Bulman *Merchant* 11, 15). In the production, the connections between Venice and Belmont implicit in Antonio’s and Portia’s opening lines—cf. “In sooth I know not why I am so sad” [1.1.1: *Es verdad que no sé por qué estoy tan triste*] (97)] and “By my troth Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world” [1.2.1-2: *La verdad es, Nerissa, que mi pequeño cuerpo está cansado de este gran mundo* (111)]—are represented visually not only through effects of scenic juxtaposition but also of costuming and set design.<sup>10</sup> The black, funereal gowns of mistress and maid blend in lugubrious harmony with the black decor and recall Antonio’s tenebrous garb. Mirrors camouflage back and side walls, at once reflecting the lady’s heavy spirit and reverberating upon both the merchant in his lovesick sadness and the wooers in their amorous and pecuniary (pur)suits. Belmont is a melding of “*cristal, espejos, delicadeza, tonos suaves y cierto aire de cárcel de cristal o jaula de oro*” (MF 54).

Portia’s description of her “princely suitors” (1.2.35ff) reads as benign banter in response to Nerissa’s optimistic and humorous provocation. This is a game they have played before, not so much to spew xenophobic barbs about national characters as to allay feelings of frustration and dread over “the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father” [1.2.24-25: *el último deseo de un padre muerto ha puesto freno a los deseos de una hija viva* (111)]. Despite an internal struggle between patriarchal duty and female independence, this Portia is a rock of control and courtesy during Morocco’s casket lottery. If her attendants wax ethnocentric and run off tittering as the Prince enters, this Portia is conscious of the Moor’s “*inteligencia, su habla poética, su orgullo de raza, como hijo del sol, su deseo de eliminar los prejuicios y comunicar amor*” (MF 58). Morocco’s bravado is excessive, but he loses with dignity. A production mounted in the Spain of 1992 would perforce respond to the tenor of the times, downplaying the bigotry



implicit in “Let all of his complexion choose me so” [2.7.79: *Que me elijan así todos los de su tez* (185)]. Portia’s low key delivery focuses attention on the relief she feels at her own reprieve rather than on xenophobic or racist bias. Arragon, in contrast, is a macabre specter of a man, “*terrible, toda la España calderoniana, el negro solemne, los rigores de la iglesia inquisitorial, el orgullo del imperio, la falta de sentido de humor hacia sí mismo, la sobriedad exterior*” (MF 68). His effeminate vocal instrument, which cracks on “Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves” [2.9.36: “*Quien me elija tendrá lo que merece*” (195)], is as much at odds with the sobriety of the Gregorian chants that accompany his entourage, as with the severity and formality of the cartwheel ruff and black velvet doublet slashed with purple inserts that comprise his dress. Arragon’s stress on the disjunction between surface and inner value—“Let none presume / To wear an undeserved dignity: / Oh that. . . clear honour / Were purchas’d by the merit of the wearer!” [2.9.39-43: *Nadie debe / asumir dignidades improprias. / Ojalá que. . . el honor preclaro / por el mérito propio se obtuviera* (195)]—would resonate especially with a Spanish audience. Their chronic obsession with honor, embodying a rudimentary contradiction between the apparent and the real nature of people and things, between presumed worth and true value, was so ingrained in the collective structure as to be baptized the motivating theme of the drama of the period. If this Spanish production not only rebukes, from within its own cultural foundations, both the corrupt derivation of social standing and the all too frequent misreading of externals, it also effects the autocensure of self-congratulatory excess by mordantly mirroring a Spanish nobleman too taken with his own “deservings” (2.9.57) and dubbing him a fool. As courteous as Portia is to Morocco, she is curt to Arragon. Belmont, then, is a place where the opposition between outward show and inner merit is reckoned with seriously.

The Portia who witnesses Bassanio’s bout with the caskets is not the phlegmatic observer of earlier lotteries, but the engaged, albeit “forsworn” (3.2.14), partner in a hazardous tryst. Dancing around with

sweeping movements, she opens up like a burgeoning flower, as opposed to her previously laconic disposition. The electricity between the pair results in their lips almost touching, but they both pull back in time. Bassanio receives no special prompting insofar as the telltale song is omitted, not simply because the rhyming of “lead,” “bred,” and “head” (3.2.63-72) would be lost in translation, but more crucially because such contrivance would impugn this Portia’s intelligence, sensitivity, and prudence. The joyous “extasy” (3.2.111) experienced by Belmont’s lady upon the felicitous emergence of her counterfeit is requited, because this Bassanio is truly taken with this Portia and for all the proper reasons. In her own right Portia, according to Ana Belén who interpreted the role, “*es muchas mujeres al mismo tiempo. Es inteligente, tiene sentido del humor y ha llegado a cierta libertad a través del entendimiento. Aunque es cristiana. . . sabe comprender la grandeza del judío*” (Sánchez).

José Pedro Carrión’s Shylock hearkens back to Irving’s characterization both in terms of physical appearance and personality traits. In Victorian times, Shylock was no longer portrayed as the stereotypically comic villain with certain visual, vocal, and behavioral attributes and properties (e.g. red wig and beard, hook nose, shawl, knife whetted on the sole of a shoe), nor as the unnaturally volatile, histrionically vengeful personage ferociously fleshed by Charles Macklin (1741) and romantically rendered by Edmund Kean (1814), but rather as an inherently dignified, patriarchally noble, defensibly vindictive victim of Christian bigotry.<sup>11</sup> In Plaza’s production, music of Hebraic incantation anticipates the transition from Belmont to the segregated but prosperous Old Ghetto, where Levantine Jews like this Shylock reside. Earth colors and reds predominate in the suspended rugs that form the backdrop; the moneylender’s quarters are situated within a tenement that faces inward, as was the law for the Jews restricted to the canal-surrounded section of Cannaregio after 1516. Shylock’s fur-trimmed gaberdine of maroon tones blends with the decor, giving him a refined, patriarchal air; he also sports a tricorne

after the fashion of Italian Jews. In the director's casebook, he is broadly conceptualized as follows:

*Personaje cómico y trágico, de unos 50 años. Trágico por su situación de emigrante despreciado y utilizado. Cómico por sus actitudes tan inflexibles, tan raciales, tan obsesivas, tan maniáticas. Introverso, pero enormemente apasionado. Muy cerebral al mismo tiempo para los negocios. Tradicional, conservador hasta el fanatismo. Muy astuto, teatro y falso. Sabe ocultar sus temores o sus ofensas, pero bajo esta apariencia de frialdad es un volcán a punto de estallar. (MF 56)*

From the moment of Shylock's entrance with Bassanio in 1.3, it is obvious that disparate modes of thinking, pacing, comprehending, and calibrating divide the worlds of Jew and Christian. Shylock is sardonically comical and self-possessed as he responds with slow movements and repetitive speech to his interlocutor's frenzied fixation on whether he is to be steered, pleased, answered (1.3.6-7). The lender's controlled echoing of earlier points contrasts with the borrower's impatient questioning; the phonic quality of "*lo ponderé*" (123)—the Spanish translation of "I will bethink me" (1.3.26-27)—resonates with Shylock's ironically ponderous tempo and intonation that belie a secret savoring of this somewhat unorthodox solicitation of services. The cultural and racial subtext simmering under his laconic rejoinders rises to the surface, and playacting merges with reality as he physically upstages a guileless Bassanio in agreeing to sell, talk, and walk with the Christians but not to eat, drink, nor pray with them (1.3.30ff.). Money thus means less to him than the mores that make up his inherent self; in fact, his insistence on the bond later on will be motivated by the idea that external profit is no substitute for essential humanity. That the line, "For I did dream of money bags to-night" [2.5.18: *esta noche soñé con sacos de dinero* (167)], is cut also works to

refocus the received notion that Shylock is only about material wealth. The omission in performance of “Cursed be my tribe / If I forgive him!” [1.3.46-47: *Maldita sea mi tribu / si le perdono* (125)] further suggests that Shylock’s (re)actions are motivated, not so much by a hunger for collective vengeance, as by a desire for individual equality.<sup>12</sup> Although treated as a *persona non grata*, Shylock still dominates the scene, continuing to humiliate his foe by his feigned forgetfulness and daft Old Testament digressions, which cause Antonio to pace with hands on hips and lose vocal control. Shylock’s wallowing in the small victory of publicly making a mark on his Christian persecutor is less a function of malice than a human response to many years of harassment. In his superior intelligence and shrewd wit, he cannot ignore so patent a challenge to proffer his bond “(in a merry sport)” [1.3.141: *por hacer un chiste* (131)] for the forfeit of a pound of flesh. Neither party takes this modest proposal seriously, because it is inconceivable that the merchant would ever face forfeiture. The director’s casebook calculates the bond’s value in dramatic, social, and symbolic terms:

*Aparentemente este es el tema desencadenante de la obra. Pero para Shylock en estos momentos no es nada más y nada menos que un símbolo de pacto. . . es un pacto de sangre. Un pacto de dos pueblos, Algo casi sagrado. Basado únicamente en la necesidad de Shylock de ser considerado por Antonio como un igual. Por ellos puede hasta ceder los intereses, olvidar los insultos y desprecios. Su meta es ser considerado un hombre, no un animal. (MF 57)*

Plaza’s casting of *Merchant* as a “tragedia del judío abandonado” (Molina, “La risa”), or as “el grito de Shakespeare contra el racismo” (Pascual), was fortified by occasional cuts (e.g., 1.3.46-47 [125]; 2.5.18 [167]) as well as by textual juxtapositions and extratextual interpolations. These modifications, broadly in keeping with the tradition of Irving and Miller (1970), function to enhance the Jew’s anguish in his forced

compliance with the penalties of the court (4.1) after the treble loss of daughter, ducats, and jewels (2.6). By subjecting Antonio to Shylock's primordial cries on three separate occasions, they also work to effect the Christian's confrontation with the perennial prejudice and alienation his Hebrew counterpart has had to endure. Plaza's innovative staging puts to effective dramatic use two intercalated conversations where a text, initially re-presented secondarily by an onlooker, is uttered by the primary speaker only to be redone as originally intended by the secondary personage, whose more or less partisan perspective is patently foregrounded in the retelling. Ultimately this process serves, not simply to heighten personal characterizations and acknowledge a common humanity binding even admittedly irreconcilable individuals, but also to illustrate how the essence of a text can be manipulated or distorted so as to render it subjectively arbitrary. This issue is at the heart of Shylock's and Portia-Balthasar's encounter with a teetering Venetian legal system which, by extension, becomes a caustic commentary on the inherent contradictions and paradoxes upon which the entire social structure rests.

Of key importance is the combined interpolation and juxtaposition that occurs between 2.6 and 2.7: just after Jessica's flight and Antonio's news to Gratiano that, because the wind has turned, Bassanio's ship will sail almost immediately for Belmont; and just before Prince Morocco's casket lottery in Belmont. The following sequences materialize: Antonio leaves; Gratiano calls after him and exits; Antonio reenters with Bassanio downstage; Shylock appears upstage upon the bridge and lets out a primitive cry for Jessica that reverberates in Antonio's ears; Antonio speaks the words and enacts the gestures reported by Salerio to Solanio in 2.8.35-49 (MF 189); Antonio remains alone downstage in the spotlight; Hebraic chants rebound and Shylock reappears upon the bridge uttering the lamentations parodied by Solanio to Salerio in 2.8.15-22 (Molin 187); Antonio hears Shylock's torment and turns away; Moslem rhythms mark the transition to Belmont. In the first of these two interpolated conversations, Antonio

puts forth the best image of himself, showing his customary generosity and *esprit de corps* in urging Bassanio neither to speed back for his sake nor to fret about the bond but to tend to his love. Nevertheless, Antonio's body language and affect belie the calm exterior, revealing the pain of isolation and abandonment. All of this Salerio faithfully replays despite a certain hidden resentment of Bassanio's affective and social intimacy with the older merchant:

And even there (his eye being big with tears),  
Turning his face, he put his hand behind him,  
And with affection wondrous sensible  
He wrung Bassanio's hand, and so they parted. (2.8.46-49)

[*Y entonces, con los ojos en lágrimas, / volvió la cara y alargó su mano hacia atrás. / Y con cariño notablemente expresivo, / apretó la mano de Bassanio; así se despidieron* (189).]

If Salerio's report on Antonio's verbal and non-verbal expression is a reasoned account of what he, along with the audience, actually witnessed, Solanio's version of Shylock's profound affliction is a malicious parody of what "really" happened. Meandering through the streets of Venice with a prayer shawl draped over his head and shoulders, Shylock pauses on the bridge behind the lone and rueful specter of Antonio, assumes a fetal position, and cries out against his misfortunes as a father betrayed by his own flesh and blood:

My daughter! O my ducats! Oh my daughter!  
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!  
Justice! the law! My ducats, and my daughter!  
A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,  
Of double ducats, stol'n from me by daughter!  
And jewels—two stones, two rich and precious stones,  
Stol'n by my daughter! Justice!—find the girl,

She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats! (2.8.15-22)

[*¡Mi hija! ¡Mis ducados! ¡Ay, mi hija! / ¡Huir con un cristiano!  
¡Mis ducados, cristianos! / ¡Justicia! ¡Ley! ¡Mis ducados, mi  
hija! / Una bolsa, dos bolsas llenas de ducados, / de ducados  
de dos, ¡que me robó mi hija! / Y joyas, y dos piedras preciosas  
como dos huevos, / Árobadas por mi hija! ¡Justicia!  
¡Encontradla! / ¡Lleva encima las joyas y el dinero!* (187).]

In this set histrionic display of agony, this Shylock places more stress on “daughter” and “justice” than on “ducats” and “stones.” Antonio, visibly affected by those audible lamentations, turns away. While Shylock’s words and physical positioning are reliably reenacted by Solanio, his emphases are disparagingly distorted so that the focus is on material loss alone, rather than on human as well as monetary deficit: not only has his daughter been carried off by a Christian, but his own flesh and blood has pilfered from him. Shylock’s reaction to these losses has long invited stage business beyond the text (e.g., Irving and Miller), eliciting more sympathy for the wronged party than virtually any other scene in the play (Bulman *Merchant* 38, 76-77). The mirroring of Salerio’s straightforward description of Antonio’s final moments with Bassanio, and of Solanio’s slanted representation of Shylock’s grief over Jessica’s stealing away, work both structurally to enrich the rhythmic pattern of correspondences and thematically to enhance the image of the outsider-as-victim spurned by those in power.

Shylock’s primordial pain is all the more believable when it is seen in the context of his domestic life (2.5). This father and daughter share a strong familial bond based on love, duty and obedience to patriarchal values; the director’s casebook describes their covenant thus: “*Jessica es el tesoro más apreciado por Shylock y por eso la protege en exceso. Está acostumbrado a ser obedecido. La considera parte de su vida, de su propiedad. Es una relación jerárquica teñida por un inmenso, sobrio amor*” (64). Shylock’s deep caring for Jessica is apparent when

he tenderly adjusts her veil and kisses her on the forehead as he departs to dine with the Christians. Clearly, this Jessica's antagonism toward her father's closed, somber world of customs and rituals has been abetted by servant and confidant Launcelot Gobbo. His physical aspect, gestures, vocal patterns, and patched clown's costume smack at once of *commedia dell'arte*, *gracioso*, and *pícaro* traditions at the same time that they parody the anti-Semitic, Renaissance caricature of the diabolical Jew with hooked nose, gnarled hands, twisted fingers, and shrill voice. By proclaiming Shylock "the very devil incarnation" [2.2.26: *el demonio en persona* (141)], Launcelot becomes an ironic representation of the roots of racial prejudice, which is brought about more often than not by the displaced projection of one's own undesirable characteristics onto another individual or group. The servant's fiendish deportment thus works to heighten the master's avowedly dignified demeanor. The aversion Jessica feels in her father's house is translated into love for Lorenzo, but at a certain price: her disclosure in Belmont that Shylock would prefer Antonio's flesh to the sum owed (3.2.285-87) is blurted out as though she were trying to score points with the Christians, but her words and outstretched arm are passed over. Although Lorenzo treats her as though he does "love her heartily" [2.6.52: *le doy mi amor* (177)], and the ostracism she experiences is covert, disloyalty to her disparaged heritage does not win her acceptance by the dominant class. Jessica sees that Christian manners are not always so commendable; the more she is made to seem like "Lorenzo's infidel" in the barren company of the Christians, the more poignant Shylock's grief at her betrayal is seen to be.

All Shylocks have to decide when they resolve to exact the forfeit for the bond. In this production, 3.1 is pivotal. Shylock, having draped a prayer shawl over his head and shoulders as an outward token of his religious roots, stands upstage on the canal bridge with his outstretched arms touching the quaywall. This image evokes that of the Western Wall, as it was redubbed in 1967, which was said to wail along with the Jews who over the centuries overcame the most arduous obstacles to



stand in that Moslem quarter and pray for the return of their nation. Historicity is thus linked with contemporaneity. If, in Elizabethan times, the Jew “was the scapegoat of Christendom and the usurer the scapegoat of a nascent capitalism” (Mahood 21), in today’s world, such victimization finds expression broadly in the disparity between those with and without power, that is, between “*nosotros y los otros*” (MF 69). In making Shylock the target of their anxieties over the economic crisis in Venice, Salerio and Solanio turn verbal taunting into physical aggression as they block the Jew in, jostle him, deprive him of his prayer shawl, throw him to the ground, step on him, and hold him there. In raising the debtor’s possible losses at sea, they spark the creditor into further rage, but their intended derision backfires. From his prostrate position, Shylock expresses his innate superiority to the “beggar” Antonio who now would do well “to look to his bond” [3.1.41-42: *Que vele por su pagaré* (203)]. The Christians at once loosen their grip; he rises and, with a dignified gesture, adjusts his cape. It has occurred to him for the first time that the bond may be exploited as an instrument of retribution. As with Olivier’s Shylock, this Shylock has been prompted by all of the baiting “to think about the merchant as a scapegoat for his own loss of Jessica” (Bulman *Merchant* 89):

*Shylock se revuelve como un animal herido, su monólogo es una queja profunda. “Escupe” cincuenta años de humillaciones. Vuelva en Antonio toda su capacidad de odio. La huída de Jessica ha sido la gota que colma el vaso. A partir de ahora va a hacer lo que han hecho con él. Hasta ahora el plan de Shylock era realmente una broma, con deseo de congraciarse con los cristianos, y a partir de ahora se ve con armas en su poder. Shylock oculta su dolor de padre con las humillaciones de la raza y la pérdida económica. Su monólogo es el grito de un pueblo a la venganza, al igual que el pueblo cristiano se venga cuando le hacen una ofensa. (MF 69-70)*

The governing idea of the set speech on the common (in)humanity of Christian and Jew, pronounced with Shylock burying his head in a crumpled prayer shawl, is underscored in the closing phrase: "The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction" [3.1.65-66: *La infamia que me enseñáis la pondré en ejecución, y mal habrá de irme para que no mejore la instrucción* (205)]. The Tubal of this production is consoling and bolstering, as evidenced in the protective way in which he alternates the information on Jessica's expenditures with Antonio's defaults. This fellow Hebrew's interjection of an apprehensive "Oh no" once Shylock has asked him to secure an officer reminds the audience that this man is both a creation and victim of society. That Shylock precedes "I will have the heart of him if he forfeit. . ." [3.1.116-17: *Conseguiré su corazón si ha de compensarme* (209)] with an interpolation of the earlier phrase, "The villainy you teach me I will execute," drives the latter point home.

The Venetian courtroom is a neutral space; the Duke, richly robed in gold, sits on a raised throne in front of a backdrop with the emblem of a lion, which ironically embodies royal power. A leader in decline unable to see or speak with clarity, this Duke is a parody of justice, recalling the Venetian Doge's historically ineffectual role wherein he "could not act as sole judge in any court, though he could add his voice of the appointed judges" (Mahood 16). In the initial phase of the trial, this Shylock exudes intelligence, pride, strength, experience, survival. He is temperate in his discourse because he knows that the interests of the ruling class are implicated: "If you deny [the bond], let the danger light / Upon your charter and your city's freedom!" [4.1.38-39; *Si me lo denegáis, que los males recaigan / sobre los privilegios de esta libre ciudad* (259)]. The pound of flesh that he will have "is dearly bought" [4.1.100: *la compré cara* (263)], not simply because it will satisfy a personal loathing and a professional grievance, but more radically because it is a challenge to the presumed equity and disinterestedness of the decrees of Venice which depend for their force on the granting of judgment (4.1.101ff.). To refuse justice to the alien holder of a bond

would damage the city's reputation for fair dealing and be discouraging to foreign merchants. Shylock has no patience for Bassanio's senseless gesture of handing over double the sum owed, evidenced by his letting single ducats drop to the floor. His manner of insisting repeatedly on having his will, and finally his turning declaration into interrogation—"shall I have it?" [4.1.103: *¿la tendré?* (263)]—lay bare the court's bind, for to show partiality in the case of the merchant is to risk exposing its justice as a mockery. As Eagleton puts it:

To catch the Christians out in a **particular** juridical shuffle is of course to discredit the law in general, just as to lend out money gratis *à la* Antonio is to affect the general rate of exchange in the city. What is at stake in the courtroom, then, is less Shylock's personal desire to carve up Antonio than the law of Venice itself: will it maintain its proper indifference to individuals, penalize one of its own wealthy adherents at the behest of an odious Jew? The answer, of course, is that it will not; but in order to avoid doing so it must risk deconstructing itself, deploying exactly the kind of subjective paltering it exists to spurn. (38)

The production's tottering Duke is too myopic to break the impasse, let alone read Belario's letter, upon which all are compelled to depend if Venice's socio-political structure is not to teeter on anarchy.

That the scarlet robed Portia-Balthasar, once in the courtroom, is aware of the human history of "*odios casi ancestrales*" (MF 78) pressuring Jew and Christian is apparent from the personalized tone of the set "quality of mercy" speech. She talks directly to Shylock who pulls away but soon turns back apparently moved, so that she can grab his lapels in an ironically Christian effort to reach him "*de ser humano a ser humano*" (MF 78). With the irreversible, "My deeds upon my head! I crave the law" [4.1.202: *¿Caigan mis actos sobre mi cabeza! Ansío la ley* (273)], the prosecuting alien nevertheless takes a definitive

step that simultaneously isolates him from his fellow Hebrew onlookers and drives the “upright judge” to a mercilessly precise interpretation of the text which mirrors Shylock’s obsessive insistence on the letter of the bond. What ensues is a competition of clever quibbling; this Shylock and this Portia have met their match in the other’s “inhuman legalism” (Eagleton 37). The furor over whether the request for a surgeon is “so nominated in the bond” [4.1.255: *¿Está así mencionado en el pagaré?* (277)] is the moment of Shylock’s undoing; his pressing the letter of the law beyond its logical limits induces Portia to undertake her own too literal reading, insisting that not one drop of blood be shed in exacting a pound of flesh. If Shylock has dismantled the law by unmasking its contradictions, he has paid a huge price for a small victory, insofar as his case depends on the system’s essential impartiality. For Plaza, Shylock’s defeat stems in large part from “*la creencia en una ley de hombres, hecha por hombres, para protegerse*” (MF 79). The Christians not only have abused the law to deny him the tenets of the bond, but they have “mercifully” spared the Jew’s life through a forced conversion to Christianity which, in our day, would involve the salvation, not so much of the soul, as of minority rights.<sup>13</sup> What Bulman says of Miller’s conception of the victim’s fall would apply to Plaza’s as well: “Shylock’s case may blow the sanctimonious cover of Venetian law and expose it as the handmaiden—or whore—of those in power, but this production does not allow us to forget that Shylock suffers nonetheless” (*Merchant* 94).

Shylock’s final exit at the conclusion of the trial, but before the *finis* of Act 4, is conceived by Plaza so as to cast a shadow on the comic resolution of Act 5, thereby underscoring *Merchant*’s resistance to harmonic closure (Howard 122-25). In defeat José Luis Carrion’s Shylock, appropriating the heroic tradition of Irving and Olivier, returns to his characteristically dramatic demonstration of pain and grief, which he displayed on the Rialto just after Jessica’s flight (2.8.12ff) in the not-so-distant presence of Antonio. This Shylock and this Antonio are inextricably—and paradoxically—linked both as professional

competitors and fellow men despite inimical evidence to the contrary. On a superficial plane, they share parallel, if not mutually dependent, economic concerns which are expressed in an identical equation of corporeal and material survival. If the moneylender protests to Portia as judge, “you take my life / When you do take the means whereby I live” [4.1.372-73: *la vida me quitáis / cuando quitáis los medios con que vivo* (287)], the merchant pronounces to Portia as his friend’s wife, “Sweet Lady, you have given me life and living; / For here I read for certain that my ships / Are safely come to road” [5.1.286-88: *Mi buena dama, vida me habéis dado y medios de vivir, / pues aquí me aseguran que mis barcos / a salvo están anclados* (325)]. But more fundamentally in this production, they are deeply bonded by the pledge and forfeiture of the surety that acknowledges a common human affinity at the same time that it negates it: “The bond, in one sense destructive of human relations, is also, perversely, a sign of them; the whole death-dealing conflict between the two men is a dark, bitter inversion of the true comradeship Shylock desires, the only form of it now available to him” (Eagleton 43).

That Shylock initially billed his contract as a “kind” offer (1.3.138)—has in Plaza’s reading not merely merry connotations but more serious undertones, implying “*una posibilidad de pactar con los cristianos, de ser admitido con todas sus creencias y costumbres, de llevar a cabo una reconciliación del pueblo judío y el pueblo cristiano*” (MF 56). This prospect, however, is thwarted by domestic and mercantile losses as well as by a history of racial hatred, which the director interprets much as Eagleton does: “The ritual carving up of Antonio, coolly appropriating part of his body, is a kind of black mass or grotesque parody of eucharistic fellowship” (43).<sup>14</sup> This vision is enacted in performance when Antonio and Portia—the two individuals most responsible for Shylock’s physical and spiritual collapse upon hearing the terms for the retrieval of half of his goods (4.1.376)—rush to raise and sustain him. Scarcely able to walk, he staggers out with

Gratiano's two equally repulsive images ringing in his head, the gallows and the font (4.1.396).

Shylock's extended exit *à la* Irving is succeeded by the emission of an interpolated, Olivieresque "NOOOO" whose keening impact creates an absent presence on stage throughout the final romantic comic scene.<sup>15</sup> The entire court, pierced by the innovative scream of negation, stands immobilized in open silence; Antonio, visibly shaken by this second brush with Shylock's shattering vocalizations, is attended by a solicitous Bassanio. That the consequences of the making and breaking of the bond are devastating for victor and vanquished alike turns the trial at once into an indictment of all forms of inhuman exploitation and discrimination and into a paean to human equality and solidarity. The paradoxes of triumph and defeat incarnate in this sad stage spectacle are reflected in the title of the production's *Program Notes*, "*Perder y no ganar*" (MF).

In contrast to the dirge with which the Venetian courtroom scene ends, the Belmont of Act 5 is bathed in soft music, bluish lunar reflections, and an algae-filled lake created by green lighting effects. Lorenzo and Jessica are outwardly at peace with each other, revealed as they dance their way through the fates of tragic lovers which they recite in unison. The Jewess' wine-colored dress merges with the milieu (and with the red and pink gowns worn by Portia and Nerissa). As Lorenzo comments on the sweet harmonies of the musical sounds echoing in their ears, Jessica perches on the ground with her bouffant skirt encircling her like a tulip in full bloom. Nevertheless, her sad mien and physical distancing indicate that she is finally out of tune with the concord of the musicians' touches. Launcelot's intrusive entry to announce the return of his current master in some ways parallels Jessica's unnatural eruption into the Christian community. If the servant's boorish ranting is at odds with the seemingly harmonious ambiance, the former mistress' remorseful silence is a sign of the tragic discord that the rejection of her filial, religious, and cultural ties implies beyond Belmont's conventionally comic coda. During the precarious reaffirmation of the

lovers' alliances with the redesignation of the rings, Jessica's ambiguous affective state of approach and avoidance is physicalized through her disjointed positioning upstage left. She remains distanced to the last, hesitating to join Lorenzo even after Nerissa moves him upstage right, directly opposite her. Jessica eventually runs toward Lorenzo to exit, but only after a pregnant pause. Her isolation clashes with the bodily bonding of Portia and Nerissa as they walk and talk in unison and so make their husbands wonder, as Gratiano puts it, whether they have been cuckolded before they deserved to be (5.1.265).

In their feminine solidarity, these wives seem to know how to handle their fickle husbands to the point of having them grovel at their feet (Bassanio) and be slapped into line (Gratiano); the more or less playful contact implies that these couples are, for the present, reconciled. Nevertheless, a pall is cast over the production's final moment, insofar as Antonio remains alone on stage facing the audience and illuminated by the light of the new day. The piercing reprise of that horrific "NOOOO" suddenly erupts inside his head; the Jew's cry of repudiation redounds throughout the theatre, echoing in the ears of the audience as they file out of the Teatro María Guerrero.<sup>16</sup> This novel revival of Shylock's offstage scream intensifies the contradictions inherent in a situation teetering on dissolution all the while that it miraculously resolves itself, only to be deconstructed by a shattering presence of absence in the end.

## Notes

- 1 That in any criticism of performance, the critic is bound by the perspectives of his or her own time and place is evidenced by critical efforts to historicize John Styan's vintage book, *The Shakespeare Revolution* (1977). If its achievement was to make stage production central to a critical history of Shakespeare in the twentieth century, it is now judged wanting for having failed to take into account, as Bulman states, "the radical contingency of performance—the unpredictable, often playful intersection of history, material conditions, social contexts, and reception that destabilizes Shakespeare and makes theatrical meaning a participatory act" ("Introd." 1); see Mazer and also W. B. Worthen.

- 2 Contemporary work in theatre semiotics evinces that the dramatic text is but one element in a “powerful intertextuality” which, as Keir Elam states, constitutes the “written text / performance text relationship”: “Literary critics have usually implicitly or explicitly assumed the priority of the written play over the performance, the latter being more often than not described as a ‘realization’ (actual or potential) of the former. . . . But it is equally legitimate to claim that it is the performance, or at least a possible or ‘model’ performance, that constrains the dramatic text in its very articulation” (208-09).
- 3 The relationship between a dramatic text and its performance is further complicated by the work of textual editors such as Gary Taylor and Michael Warren on *Lear*, who have shown that the play exists as multiple texts whose variations may be explained in part by modifications made for, or during, performance.
- 4 A version of the production analysis of *Merchant* that follows has also appeared in a collection of essays edited by A. Robert Lauer and Henry Sullivan.
- 5 A number of essays in Kedourie’s recently published volume on the Sephardi experience before and after 1492 reexamine the period of relative tolerance during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—termed *convivencia*—but which in actuality combined a Christian hostility toward the Jews with a certain degree of grudging endurance (MacKay); the rising current of intolerance and persecution which resulted in the horrific pogroms of 1391 and moved towards expulsion in 1492 (Gutwirth); the origins, nature, and consequences of the expulsion whose underlying goal initially was not so much to drive out Jews as to (en)force their conversion and excise the threat they were said to pose to *converso* judaizers or secret Jews (Kamen); and the fate of the *conversos* (Beinart). A new phase of Spanish-Jewish history began in the nineteenth century when the Inquisition was abolished in 1834 and the Decree of Expulsion was repealed in 1858. If the policies of Kings Alfonso XII and XIII furthered an enlightened treatment of the Jews, the passage of a law in 1924 by Primo de Rivera, allowing any individual of Spanish ancestry living abroad to become a Spanish citizen without ever having entered Spain, provided the legal basis for Franco’s later rescue of Sephardic Jews threatened with annihilation in Nazi-occupied Europe (see Lipschitz).
- 6 The indiscriminate shooting of Lucrecia Pérez by an ultra-rightist member of the national police force on 13 November 1992 in the abandoned Aravaca discotheque-turned-shelter, “Four Roses,” incited an official declaration against all forms of discrimination which *El País* ran on 17 November 1992: “*El Congreso de los Diputados . . . manifiesta su total rechazo de cualesquier expresiones de racismo*



*y de xenofobia y alerta a la sociedad sobre la necesidad de vigorizar la cultura del respeto a la convivencia plural sin concesiones de ninguna clase a toda tentativa de responsabilizar públicamente a colectivos o razas, generalmente los más débiles*" ("Parlamento" 15). The prosecution that in 1994 condemned the assassin Luis Merlino to a fifty-four year prison sentence, and awarded the victim's daughter twenty million pesetas in damages, issued the following statement: "*Suplico a este tribunal que evite que alguien tenga la tentación de matar a su vecino por haber cometido los tres pecados de Lucrecia: ser extranjera, negra y pobre*" (Frade).

- 7 See Bulman (*Merchant* 143-54) for a discussion of "Shylock and the pressures of history," above all Merchant's appropriation by political regimes including Germany's Third Reich; and Shaked and Oz for a record of the play's stage legacy in the cultural context of Israel.
- 8 Irving's mounting was a testimony to the Victorians' penchant for historical accuracy and archeological realism over the artifice of Romanticism: "Behind the wall of a quay, which spanned the entire upstage area, ran a canal in which a small ship was moored: it was outlined against a backcloth depicting the imposing colonnade of the Doge's Palace in the distance. Steps at stage centre led from a rostrum down to the quay, littered with bales left there by coolies" (Bulman *Merchant* 33; Hughes 252).
- 9 "Venice," Bulman states, "appealed to the Elizabethan imagination as a place where mercantile interests and social privilege were not mutually exclusive. An opulent centre of world trade and banking, founded in liberty and famous for toleration, Venice represented a vigorous fusion of cultures where those on the margins of society—Jews especially—did business daily with those at the centre" (*Merchant*, 14; see also Grubb 43-44). Mahood (15) says that the plot of *Merchant* turns on two received facts of the time, "that Venice recognised bonds to foreigners entered into by its own citizens, and that it gave foreigners full access to its courts." More particularly, the myth of Venice was based on the belief that the Republic's Jewish community was a privileged group: it had the same rights of indemnification in the courts as other foreigners; it was permitted openly to practice its religion; and it was entitled to lend money at interest. The reality, however, was that Jews were tolerated in Venice, "not out of humanitarian feelings, but because their moneylending was an essential service to the poor and saved the authorities the trouble of setting up the state loan banks which, by the end of the century, had largely taken over the function of the Jewish moneylenders on the mainland."

- 10 Citations from the Spanish version of *Merchant* and production notes refer to the translation casebook by Molina Foix, hereafter cited MF with page numbers. The interconnection between linguistic translation and *mise en scène* is further evidenced if we peruse the more recondite *El mercader* realized by the Instituto Shakespeare under the direction of Manuel Angel Conejero.
- 11 Bulman (*Merchant* 34), drawing on a description from *The Spectator* 8 November 1879, says that Irving's Shylock "was dressed soberly, not unlike the other men doing business on the Rialto: his fur-trimmed brown gaberdine, faced with black, and a short robe underneath it were relieved by a multi-coloured sash; and on his head he wore a cap with a yellow stripe, an historical emblem of Jewish oppression." Put another way, he was "a picturesque and refined Italianised Jew, genteelly dressed, a dealer in money in the country of Lorenzo de Medici" (Fitzgerald 131).
- 12 Lines in this speech are often omitted in productions so as to shift the play's perspective and increase sympathy for Shylock as the victim, rather than the deserving recipient, of social ostracism and racial prejudice: for example, Miller's 1970 production, which cut the speech in its entirety; and David Thacker's 1993 Royal Shakespeare Company production, which cut "If I can catch him once upon on the hip" (1.3.42). Plaza's production suppressed no lines, but it may be that the phrase loses some of its (Old Testament) force in translation: "*Si alguna vez le puedo atrapar*" [123: cf. Conejero, "*Si cae alguna vez entre mis manos*" (1.3.39)].
- 13 Miller's distinction between Christian and genetic anti-Semitism is worth recalling: as a Renaissance playwright, Shakespeare had inherited the idea of the Jew as a people who had failed to see the light, as the perpetrator of a spiritual fault rather than a genetic error. For the racist anti-Semite of the twentieth century, Jews who underwent baptism were only compounding the sin by concealing their Judaism; the font gave way to the gas chamber. According to the medieval view, the font could eliminate the Jew's acknowledged failure to see the gift of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. For the Nazis and twentieth-century racism, however, the Jew remained genetically a Jew and therefore the carrier of a genetic fault transmittable by marriage and breeding. (See *Shylock*.)
- 14 For Molina Foix, there is a connection between this Venice and horrific aspects of contemporary society: "*La pasión sanguinaria, no muy veladamente canibalística, de Shylock bien podría ser—como sugiere Terry Eagleton—'una forma de misa negra o parodia grotesca de la comunión eucarística,' por medio de la cual alcanzaría en términos desaforados, invertidos, góticos, que en nada difieren de los de ciertas novelas y películas modernas sobre el terror al cuerpo resuelto con el destrozo*

*del cuerpo, la camaradería con los ricos cristianos que el judío buscó y no encontró, y a resultas de cuyo fracaso se precipitó en el abismo que después la Venecia de los mercaderes llena de insultos y vejaciones" (91).*

- 15 Olivier's heroic finale as Shylock is revealing: When he hears the penalties against an alien, "he turns round to utter a cry that will not come . . . . His quivering hand reaches out for the rail to steady himself; he can stand everything except Antonio's vicious demand that he become a Christian, at which he flops over the rail, his head hurtling towards the floor." After muttering "I am content" (4.1.390), "his rigid frame is carried from the court. A few seconds elapse before a cry is heard—sharp and intense at first and then barbarically extended—that reminds one of a wolf impaled on a spike and dying a slow death" (Billington 88-89).
- 16 Cf. the final moment in the Miller/Olivier production during which the Kaddish, the liturgical prayer of Orthodox Jewish lamentation and mourning, is intoned offstage as Jessica reads the special deed of gift, looks ruefully at Antonio who extends a hand to her, but walks off alone (Bulman *Merchant* 98).

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