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## ADAPTING SHAKESPEARE – CONVERTING SHYLOCK IN MICHAEL RADFORD’S *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

### Abstract

This article aims to explore the extension and evolution of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* through Michael Radford’s 2004 cinematic adaptation. By investigating the concept of adaptation and the significance of intertextuality, Shakespeare’s source text is considered alongside Radford’s twenty-first century recreation to reimagine and redefine the construction of Shylock as both a comic and tragic device utilized across film and play. Issues of racial and religious prejudices alongside anti-Semitic views were particularly prominent in Elizabethan England and, by concentrating on recontextualisation, this article looks to expose Shakespeare’s characterization as a reflective commentary concerning societal discriminations at the time of the play’s performance. By focusing primarily on Shakespeare’s Jewish Usurer, Radford is able to reconstruct and reestablish the dramatic devices and characters within the cinematic version, metaphorically converting Shylock from comic villain to tragic victim. Finally, it argues that this dynamic shift inevitably metamorphoses Shylock from a spectator’s perspective and provides Michael Radford with an opportunity to offer a social commentary on social inequality in the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** *The Merchant of Venice*, adaptation, recontextualisation, intertextuality, Shylock, comic villain, tragic victim.

For a number of decades the adaptation of Shakespearean work, whether televised or cinematic, has been contested on a global scale. Critics, as Brode (2000: 3) notes, have questioned the continued existence of Shakespearean cinema as it remains “the only subgenre of narrative film that remains the centre of an ongoing debate – not only among skeptical literary traditionalists but even those cineastes who make the movies – as to whether it has a right to exist.” With both literary and filmic scholars condemning the adaptation and reconstruction of Shakespeare’s plays, it is disconcerting to address why these alternative versions still exist, but perhaps more so to question why they continue to be adapted over a decade into the twenty-first century.

The primary reasoning for this continuation is undoubtedly due to inconsistencies amongst the spectators and directors respectively. Orson Welles, as a stage and screen director, once boldly declared that “Shakespeare would have made a great movie writer”, whilst Peter Hall, also of a similar position to Wells, rectified this statement by announcing “Shakespeare is no screen writer” (Brode, 2000: 3), encapsulating the polarisation of the debate at its superficial surface.

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However, before discussing the issues and debates surrounding Shakespearean works, it is first essential to explore the concept of film adaptation by reflecting upon the varied approaches and understandings of the process. Film adaptation is a relatively young practice which takes previous workings, predominantly from different media, to produce an alternative to the source work. As Hutcheon (2006: 8) describes it, adaptation is a “process of creation”, one which involves both (re)interpretation and (re)creation, yet by appropriating and even retrieving elements of the source work, occasionally the piece can be preserved at the discretion of the adapter. Despite the relative youth of film adaptation, the process of adaptation itself is far from a contemporary concept and was evidently exploited by Shakespeare himself. As Hapggod (1997: 81) argues, “for a largely illiterate audience he transferred from page to stage and from narrative to drama some of the central writings of his time, such as the historical chronicles of Plutarch and Holinshed.” Second, in the exploration of adaptation, the whole spectrum of understandings and explanations for the process should be considered in order to expose the significance and relevance of the practice. According to Hutcheon (2006: 8-9), adaptation can be described as any, or all of the following statements:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognisable other work or works
  - A creative and an interpretative act of appropriation/salvaging
  - An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work
- Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative - a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing.

Like Shakespeare and many others, Michael Radford – screenplay writer and director of the 2004 adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, arguably emulated this transference in his cinematic rendition of Shakespeare’s play. Radford reproduces the social conduct of Shakespeare’s society demonstrating a level of intertextuality. However, the filmic content and the historical and political issues regarding race, ethnicity and religion present in *The Merchant of Venice* are selected and excluded simultaneously by Radford when addressing his twenty-first century audience. Whereas Shakespeare’s play depicts the issues and concerns regarding racial and religious prejudice through the inclusion of specific lines, Radford does so through their omission. In doing so, Radford is able to establish and demonstrate a shift in racial perceptions for a contemporary society, a society that would neither accept nor adhere to a discriminatory collection of characters such as Antonio, Shylock, Lancelot Gobbo, Salarino, Solanio, and Portia, to name but a few.

Radford’s cinematic (re)production can be deemed an extended intertextual engagement with Shakespeare’s play as Radford manages to alter the presentation of the social principles of a late-sixteenth century Venice by transporting the primary and secondary plot of the play into the twenty-first century. By transforming Shylock and recontextualising him, Radford is able to integrate Shylock into the adaptation as a victim of the anti-Semitic inhabitants of Venice as opposed to the villain of the seventeenth century stage, given that the villainous status is inevitably deemed unacceptable to the post-Holocaust spectator.

Although intertextuality can rely solely on the pre-existing work, Radford is able to demonstrate otherwise in his *Merchant of Venice*. Disregarding Shakespeare’s original play as the “other work” by selecting cast members from motion pictures of a similar genre, the director is able to construct a character that responds to the expectations of the audience. For instance, Joseph Fiennes who portrays Bassanio in Radford’s cinematic adaptation, also played William Shakespeare in John Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love*, whilst – as Crowl notes – “there are touches of some of Pacino’s famed screen portrayals from Serpico to Sonny Wortzik to Roy Cohn in his Shylock” (2006: 118). Yet, as Allen (2011: 1) insists:

[t]he act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext.

Regardless of the intelligence behind intertextual casting, if the receiver is not acquainted with the previous work of the actor's cast the connections remain unappreciated, which can potentially be detrimental to the construction of the director's work.

Just as intertextual castings can transform and re-mould the expectations of an audience, so too can the way in which the work is actually transformed across media. Jackson (2007: 15) argues that there are distinguishable styles of adaptation. Conservative Shakespeare adaptations, for example, essentially "adopt as many features of a given play's structure and language as possible, while adapting them to the accepted rules of mainstream cinema in continuity editing, clarity of character and story, and intelligibility of speech." Conversely, for Jackson (2007: 15-16), radical adaptations offer a polarisation of the former as:

[they] seek to achieve the play's ends by using as fully as possible the medium's ability to juxtapose images and narrative elements, to superimpose one element of the narrative upon another, shift one point of view and register, and disrupt the sense of coherent world seen clearly.

While the conservative approach attempts to salvage, the radical becomes a process of replacement and it is this in-between area that Michael Radford's work occupies, blurring the elements and characteristics of each approach in order to create a hybridised adaptation.

To focus firstly on what could be considered conservative Shakespeare, in his 2004 film Radford's recontextualisation of the play is one way in which the director adheres to the rules of popular cinema. The opening montage for the film, Daniel (2006: 52) suggests, "pre-empts the play with dramatisations of Jewish oppression. This preliminary sequence no doubt serves to contextualise the play for a contemporary film audience". A medium shot of a group of men in the first shot provides the spectator with context as "Venice 1596" appears centrally, before the image fades out to reveal the white text against a black screen (00.01.16-27). The white text subsequently scrolls downwards to reveal the anti-Semitic attitude of Europe, with Venice considered a particularly discriminative location (00.01.27), whilst the following scenes provide medium close-ups of various darkened shots, which again fade to reveal information such as "After sundown the gate was locked and guarded by Christians" (00.01.48). Superseding the previous shot, a scene revealing a close up of a bolt sliding into place and locking a gate in darkness (00.01.53), signifies the universal oppression of the Jewish population in the Venice Ghetto during the sixteenth century. Following this opening montage, Radford provides a shot-reverse-shot of Shylock calling out to Antonio from the crowd, whereby Antonio spits in the face of Shylock. Through a number of exchangeable close-up shots, Radford captures the action and reaction of the humiliating feat to foreshadow Shylock's later line: "Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last" (I.III.123), and it is through this shot that the director is able to construct Shylock-the-Jew as the subject of our sympathy.

After Auschwitz, Daniel (2006: 52) believes that, "one has an ethical duty to stage the play only if one does so precisely in order to exorcize these troubled spirits", but continues to question the ability to retain and stage the comedy written by Shakespeare in doing this. Arguably, this is what Radford is practising but in doing so he is inevitably disrupting the comical balance of *The Merchant of Venice* and so begins the genre transition from comedy to tragedy, or at least problem play. Bemis (2009: 137) also recognises this and avers that "all of the comedic elements of the story are gone - this is *The Tragedy of Shylock* with a vengeance". This assumption can be validated through the perceived alteration of Shylock's position as tragic protagonist combined with his treatment during the trial scene, in Act IV Scene I. Portia's concluding lines that undo Shylock's bond make Gratiano revel in saying: "A Daniel still say I, a second Daniel! / I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word." (IV.I.337-8).

In Shakespeare's play Gratiano's speech is imbued with a celebratory air in light of Antonio's salvation. Radford's cinematic portrayal of the same scene reduces the exultance of this result as Kris Marshall's line "A second Daniel" is met with laughter from the courtroom attendants (01.40.57). Consequently, a medium close up shot remains fixed upon a focused Shylock in favour of an out of focus audience, as he continues to stare unresponsively to the left of the shot. Radford's choice of focused subject intentionally captures the spectator's undivided attention, instigating an association and sympathetic understanding with a tragic individual as opposed to recognising the prejudice taunts

of a collective blur, essentially negating the comical element of the scene. Just what Radford's intentions are remains uncertain, but if the adaptation is to "exorcise the troubled spirits" of the Holocaust as Daniel suggests it should, Radford may be fulfilling this whilst paradoxically achieving the opposite effect. Kamilla Elliot, in *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (2003: 162), argues that:

[f]ilm adaptation may make words more 'real', on another continuum they are regarded as less real. If art draws from real life, then an art adapting another art is one step further away from real as a representation of a representation.

If Shakespeare's source text managed to encapsulate the fellow feeling of the European majority with regards to anti-Semitism, then Radford's adaptation -- which arguably targets a recontextualisation of this matter -- is in fact stepping further and further away from the possibility of genuine and unequivocal diversity existing as a reality in the twenty-first century.

Radford does, however, consciously attack the issue of racism through his recontextualisation by adapting the dialogue of the play, which is re-written as the director's own screenplay. When questioned about his reasoning for the adaptation in an interview with Jan Lisa Huttner (2006), Radford disregards his mother's Jewish heritage as a determining factor and instead challenges: "Let's take it out of the Jewish-Christian thing. Let's talk about racial persecution of minorities in general". But Radford (2006) instigates the debate of racial persecution, as he chooses to alter the accepted social understandings of Shakespeare's characters to his own advantage, excluding lines of the play that would paint an unfavourable picture of an otherwise inoffensive female such as Portia. Her lines: "A gentle riddance. / Draw the curtains, go. / Let all his complexion choose me so" (II.VII.78-9) following the conclusion of the Prince of Morocco's failed casket choice in Shakespeare's source text, yet Radford cuts these lines due to their racist content. By altering the source text, Radford's adaptation challenges the prejudice of a sixteenth-century audience, inevitably disrupting the conservative approach to the adaptation, and thus instigating the potential creation of a contemporary Shakespearean hypertext. Hindle (2007: 64) reasserts the reasoning for Portia's line exclusion by suggesting that:

[h]owever liberal the world has become, it would still perhaps be too shocking to admit that the charming, wily, but (in this movie) ravishingly beautiful princess-like figure is also a racist, something deeply unpalatable to a modern film audience who like an attractive, strong and independent heroine to prevail.

He confirms the detrimental impact that such extremism would undoubtedly have on a female heroine such as Portia, especially considering that it is she, disguised as Balthazar, that liberates Antonio, thus condemning Shylock in the courtroom scene. Radford clearly recognises that in the eyes of a twenty-first century spectator to perceive a racist, anti-Semitic, cross-dressing female could be considered misogynistic directing that detracts from his primary concern and conscious concentration on racial persecution in his adaptation.

Alongside the racial implications of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Radford's most prominent recontextualisation of the play unsurprisingly lies in his construction of Shylock. It becomes apparent through the opening scenes of the play that in Elizabethan England Shylock was "a stylized and conventional comic villain" (Wertheim, 1972: 75) who was used as a figure of fun, an opinion Solanio and Salerio clearly hold and unashamedly share in Act III, Scene 1:

Solanio: How now, Shylock? What news among the merchants?  
 Shylock: You knew, none so well, none so well as you, of my daughter's flight.  
 Salerio: That's certain. I for my part knew the tailor that made the wings she flew  
 withal. (III.I.21-5).

As a result of this it could perhaps be argued that Shylock adopts both the physical form of a character within Shakespeare's play and the role of dramatic device employed for initiating the comical scenes of the play. This is polarised, however, throughout Radford's adaptation, and not through a stylistic change or implementation of cinematic technique but through the perception of Shylock by the audience of a different generation. Echoing the ethical integrity of Daniel's argument examined

above, Hindle (2007: 63) also considers the implications and transformation of Shylock's character post-Holocaust and even extends the argument further to consider the universality of the issue of anti-Semitic prejudices, racism and ethnic persecution when he argues that:

[i]n a post-holocaust world, Shylock is regarded more as a tragic figure whose persecution as a Jew can be read as a representative of the treatment of any ethnic group, alienated, viciously attacked or "ethnically cleansed" by others who claim racial, religious or ethnic superiority over them.

A number of scenes from Radford's cinematic counterpart can be construed to reveal telling elements of this tragic portrayal. The cinematography of the adaptation plays a significant role in creating this effect as the extreme close up of Shylock whilst he is told: "Your daughter spent in Genoa, as I heard, one night / fourscore ducats" (III.I.98–9) is desaturated, with a blue tint creating a sense of hyperrealism that manages to encapsulate Shylock's melancholy.



Fig.1. Tubal brings Shylock news of his daughter's actions (0.54.52 screengrab).



Fig.2. Jessica spending her father's ducats (00.54.57 screengrab)

This is juxtaposed with a silent cross-cutting shot revealing Jessica laughing in which the visual contrast of the colour scheme of gold and browns with a sepia effect exposes the paternal frailties of the father—daughter relationship, before returning once more to a weeping yet expressionless Shylock. This scene is clearly utilised to amalgamate fellow feeling amongst the spectators, creating a sympathetic understanding of Shylock by the collective whole. In Shakespearean manner, Radford too exploits the character of Shylock, manipulating and adapting his tragic protagonist to embody the

social, racial and ethnic inequalities, which essentially permits the spectator to recognise the societal issues that unacceptably exist today. By recontextualising the play for his cinematic adaptation, I argue that Radford transforms and metaphorically converts Shylock from Jewish villain to Jewish victim in a way that emulates Antonio's request that he is converted religiously at the conclusion of the courtroom scene.

Yet, despite the perception of Shylock's alternative role within the film, Daniel moves to suggest that even Shakespeare himself had endowed Shylock with a multiplicity of conflicting strands to his character. Daniel (2006: 54) accuses Shakespeare of acting as a double agent "by providing a cartoon Jew for the anti-Semitic mob, while sneaking into his text a subversive thread of critique – an anti anti-Semitism for the educated viewer to decipher". Shakespeare's apparent reverse psychology is evident through Shylock's intransigence over the bond with Antonio which, Hindle (2007: 63) argues, "was a device to dramatically expose the hypocrisy of Christian commercial society's hostility to a usury it nonetheless required to function effectively". In doing so, Radford's adaptation draws directly on Shakespeare's own socio-historical data, occupying the optimism or anti anti-Semitism of the source text and discouraging the discriminative social ills of contemporary society.

It is not solely Shylock's character that achieves this desired outcome for Radford, but a combination of the performance from Al Pacino alongside a selective screenplay written by the director. These two factors work in concert to, as Daniel (2006: 54) posits, "transform the text's meaning and reassemble the play, wrenching Shylock away from the context of Jewish stage villain, and somewhat ironically, moving him closer to the position of Christ, enduring martyrdom at the hands of a mob". Shakespeare's play appears to convey the opposite, however, with Shylock justifying his bond through Christian law: "If you deny me – fie upon your law!" (IV.I.101), whilst insisting "The pound of flesh, which I demand of him, / Is dearly bought, 'tis mine, and I will have it" (IV.I.99–100). This is also included in Radford's screenplay and film, and more significantly the line "'tis mine" is repeated three times in ten seconds (01.26.20–30), accentuating the motif of possession in a consumerist Venice, which directly opposes the beliefs of mercy and forgiveness, all aspects that challenge Daniel's proposition. Whatever the intentions of this damning scene for Pacino's character – one in which the spectators begin to question their affinity and empathy with the victimised Shylock – Pittman (2007: 18–19) believes that Radford departs from the conservational approach to adapting Shakespeare in favour of the radical where, "the film makes no interpretive choice that would position the Jewish moneylender as a comic foil nor as the Jew of Medieval and Renaissance nightmares rapacious for Christian flesh".

Shylock's ambivalent role is also what Orgel (2004: 38) sees in Pacino's performance of Radford's character of the Jew; believes that Shylock is "not an outsider at all, just the insider we prefer not to know". If labelled as such, it becomes increasingly difficult for Shylock to retain the role of the villainous usurer that Shakespeare may have cast him in.

Whilst considering the implications that the performance of Shylock inevitably contributes to his reception, Radford's recruitment of Pacino to play the part becomes increasingly significant. By casting Pacino, Radford is able to employ intertextual references that assist him in constructing the character of Shylock with the interpretive status of an outsider – as defined in opposition to Orgel's argument. While the relevance of intertextuality relies heavily on the spectator having visualised or experienced his previous work, or in this case, Pacino in his alternate roles, nevertheless, through casting Pacino, Radford is able to develop a motif of sympathetic understanding before the actor has even performed his opening line. According to Pittman (2007: 19), such intertextual links are immediately available:

Pacino's performance in *Scarface* provides another intertext for his interpretation of Shylock as the immigrant outsider scrapping for power and touched by an element of paranoia produced by a lifetime of vigilant self-preservation an opposition to the enfranchised.

Shylock is clearly an outsider in both play and film, play text and hypertext. Radford cinematically marks this through Pacino's/Shylock's physical appearance and physical treatment by others. The transformation of the villain into victim is implemented almost instantaneously through the motion picture, and successfully too, as Shaughnessy (2011: 141) notes:

Al Pacino, starring in Michael Radford's cinematic rendering of the play set in Renaissance Venice, offered a tragically abused, sympathetic figure who was, sartorially at least, difficult to distinguish from the Christians that surrounded him.

Other than the ingenious use of mise-en-scene with the moving red cap, which signifies Pacino as the Jewish usurer, Radford manipulates the visual image on screen to create a sense of equality through Venetian attire. This is conducted through the editing of the adaptation, with the desaturation of the opening scenes (00.02.45-00.03.00) blurring the physical and social boundaries between Christians and Jews.

In a similar fashion he employs to alter Portia's lines, Radford eliminates parts of the source playtext in order to preserve the image of the contemporary Shylock he has moulded. Upon Antonio's arrival to sign the bond that Shylock has prepared, the spectator hears "How like a fawning publican he looks", yet never hears the line, which Radford cuts: "I hate him because he is a Christian" (I.III.39). According to Daniel (2006: 55), "Such a line would confirm Shylock as a threatening figure of intractable "Jewish" hard-heartedness who is being set up for his comeuppance in the play's climax."

The removal of this statement prevents the undermining of the spectator's sympathy for Shylock and allows the cinematic counterpart to continue with the intention of exposing Christian hypocrisy and anti-Semitism. Whilst specific lines are excluded, others are either "re-emphasised or downplayed in order to shore up a less offensive interpretation" of Pacino's Shylock (Daniel, 2006: 55), just as the dialogue in the film conveys "You knew, none so well, none so well as you, of / my daughter's flight" (III.I.22-3), with the echoed phrasing confirming his solitary stance as a Jew when set back against the Christian majority.

In light of Shylock's transformation in the process of adaptation, Daniel (2006: 56) accuses Radford's film of "levelling down" Shakespeare's Christian and Jewish characters, betraying the source text in favour of a 'smoothly digestible universality'. The argument that Radford sympathises equally with all characters, however, is one which can be challenged wholeheartedly. For instance, the inclusion of Shylock's heated conversation with both Salerio and Solanio in Act III, scene I within the screenplay signals Radford's intended focal point for sympathetic portrayals. Shylock's dialogue within the adaptation emulates Shakespeare's play without deviating, thus preserving the clear divide between the Christians and Jews:

Shylock: He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies - and what's his reason? I am a Jew... (00.50.51-51.09)

As Shakespeare's play demonstrates, *The Merchant of Venice* is quite clearly tarnished with the issue of anti-Semitism and its cinematic counterpart does little to relieve the plot of this prejudice. Through this inclusion, Radford is able to arm Pacino with a defensive justification of his bond against the Christian mob, which loses its violent intensity and turns into pathetic desperation. The portrayal of the Christian characters, however, maintains unfavourable aspects of Elizabethan prejudices, which are showcased in the opening scenes of Radford's work alongside the physical enactment of Shylock's line "Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last" (I.III.123). In an interview with Margaret Pomeranz (2009), Radford labels this action as diabolical but explains how "you have to see Antonio spit at Shylock...if you don't see it, you don't understand it". Joseph Fiennes, too, confirming the significance of the scene in the same interview, states that "cinema is about what is not said" (Pomeranz, 2009).

Due to the disparity in these dispositions, it becomes increasingly difficult to concur with Daniel's (2006: 56) statement regarding the padding down of sharp corners of all characters until "the dramatic shape disappears". Daniel's assertion of a shared sympathetic understanding across the cast is perhaps something else. In the interview conducted by Pomeranz, Radford discusses the disgraceful act of Antonio's spitting as an introduction to Shylock which "makes you sympathise with Shylock immediately...and curiously it doesn't make you hate Antonio" (Pomeranz, 2009). Arguably, Daniel

has misinterpreted this lack of hatred toward the Christian Antonio within the cinematic version of Shakespeare's play as sympathy, yet the spectator finds his dishonourable treatment of Shylock difficult to forgive.

In place of the suggested collective concern distributed across the entire cast, Radford instead elevates Shylock socially, enabling the spectator to consider him a social equal to Antonio despite their difference in religious beliefs. Pittman (2007: 20) believes "the most extensive of Radford's alterations designed to create fellow-feeling with Shylock is found in the lengthy interpolation depicting his arrival to an empty home after Jessica's elopement". During this scene the camera follows Shylock closely from over the shoulder as he moves throughout the confined warren of his home, a point of view that forces the spectator to perceive the world through Shylock's eyes (00.42.36). The pathetic fallacy of the rain also contributes to the impact of Shylock's desolation, where the weather is exploited for its emblematic association with the emotive response from Shylock following the realisation of Jessica's departure. The director's editorial technique also uncovers another layer of thematic direction as Radford crosscuts Shylock's frantic search with Antonio's separation from Bassanio, who departs for Belmont in the hope of wedding Portia. By crosscutting the two men's losses, Pittman (2007: 20) argues, "the film suggests a Shakespearean wisdom unacknowledged by the characters – these great antagonists share the common pain of deep loss".

Once again, similar to the effect the sartorial appearance creates, the social divisions of Radford's modern Venice dissolve. As the spectator is provided with the opportunity to experience Shylock's perspective, the intended emotional response Radford strives for is achieved. However, it is possible that Radford could have adopted the parallel with Antonio as an alternative contributing factor to Shylock being perceived as the tragic figure, thus abusing Antonio's Christian's sexual ambiguity in order to transform his status from "melancholy outsider to passive-aggressive, self hating gay man" (Shaughnessy, 2011: 143).

An early example of Antonio's interpreted homoeroticism can be uncovered through his relationship with Bassanio, whom he provides the ducats required to woo Portia. A close up shot of Antonio as Bassanio discusses his affections for Portia reveals the disappointment of the former as he bows his head and admits "thou knowest my fortunes are at sea" (00.11.13). This line operates as a disguise of Antonio's disillusionment at Bassanio's pursuit of a woman, and the ducats he lends are parted with in the hope of instigating a reciprocated feeling, which never materializes to the extent that Antonio longs for. Patterson (1991: 17) notes how Antonio, who believes "his lending practises will generate love, professes to lend gratis even as he complains about a bewildering sense of loss" arguably explained by the unconscious realisation and foreshadowed loss of Bassanio to Portia. The ambiguity and complexity of Antonio's homoerotic relationship with Bassanio throughout the play is clearly a subject that Radford entertains within his adaptation and one which is transparently conveyed.

During the scenes in which Bassanio requests the ducats from Antonio, the spectator is subjected to an extreme interpretation of the relationship by Radford, which displays the affection and eroticism instilled by Shakespeare's play. A medium close up, over-the-shoulder shot of Bassanio intensifies as he places his hand on Antonio's face then proceeds to kissing him, with the recipient closing his eyes in a state of sensual elation (00.11.56–12.04). As well as recognising the homoerotic exchanges between Antonio and Bassanio, Hindle provides an interesting commentary on the male relationship by concentrating on the idea of a homoerotic bond. He states (2007: 65):

There is no attempt to disguise the eroticism of Antonio's and Bassanio's relationship; the kiss and the stroke of the cheek that Bassanio (Joseph Fiennes) gives to Antonio (Jeremy Irons) is the sign of a homoerotic bond that no heterosexual marriage is likely to alter.

The idea of a homoerotic bond that Hindle identifies is one that falls neatly into the seventeenth century understanding, and example, of amity. Both Radford's screenplay and Shakespeare's play entertain Antonio's lines: "My purse, my person, my extremist means / Lie all unlocked to your occasions" (I.I.138–9), which inevitably elucidate the matter of homoeroticism. Yet, according to Patterson (1999: 20), "to give all, including one's body, was a commonplace in tales of amity". According to these guidelines, Antonio's sacrifice of both wealth and flesh can be placed well within



the conventional understanding of amity, negating his labelled actions of homoerotic desire. Patterson (1999: 21) continues to clarify the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio by explaining that, “[i]n tales of amity, friends inevitably reunite with embraces, kisses and simultaneous protests of their passion”, which essentially justifies Bassanio’s actions in what could be considered the most expressive and revealing scene, regarding sexuality, within Radford’s adaptation. Pequigney (2004: 127) also moves towards an explanation of a homosocial relationship as opposed to homoerotic, by stating “the shared love between Antonio and Sebastian (*Twelfth Night*) is amorous, is eros, in contrast to that between Antonio and Bassanio, which is amicable, non-sexual friendship.”

If the male relationship between Antonio and Bassanio is to be considered an amorous friendship, Antonio’s status as the self-hating homosexual male would be undermined and, consequently, his position as the outsider would be reinstated, significantly reducing the standing of Shylock as the sole embodiment of isolated sympathy. And so Radford aims to retain the majority of Shakespearean language for Antonio, preserving his ambiguous sexuality, where the language “creates an illusion of deep regard and heartfelt devotion – a common device in persuading an audience of the authenticity of a love” (Patterson, 1999: 20). This assumption is most evident through what Antonio believes to be his final words during the courtroom scene. When speaking to Bassanio, he implores:

Antonio: Commend me to your honourable wife,  
 Tell her the process of Antonio’s end,  
 Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death,  
 And when the tale is told, bid her judge,  
 Whether Bassanio had not once a love.  
 (4.1.270–4)

In what can perhaps be adjudged as Antonio’s most reverent and transparent expression through both the play and the screenplay, the appropriation and implications surrounding the terminologies of “love” and “loved” expose the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio, whilst simultaneously disregarding the feelings addressed simply as platonic love. Instead, Antonio’s gestures “help to account for the sense of competition between amorous friends and romantic lovers” (Patterson, 1999: 20), fundamentally solidifying his position as the unwanted homoerotic suitor for Bassanio rather than the appropriate substitute for Portia.

Both Shakespeare’s play and Radford’s adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* shift back and forth across a number of thematic concerns, addressing sensitive issues within their respective contemporary society. The world of commerce, which in this play involves elements of potential homoeroticism, is closely intertwined with desire, which serves as an ambiguous term considering its multiplicity through heterosexual and homosexual relationships, as well as Shylock’s desire for Antonio’s flesh and justice in an anti-Semitic society. In order to re-create the play and its context, Radford harnesses the ambivalence surrounding the terminology of desire and exploits all of its meanings as a method of intensifying the sympathetic standing of Al Pacino’s Shylock.

This adaptation provides Michael Radford with an opportunity to achieve a number of things. Firstly, an opportunity to channel his creative reinterpretation of a classic play, whilst adhering to the proposition that Crane & Cutchins (2010: 19) believe is common practice, namely that “[a]ll film adaptations are intertextual by definition, multivocal by necessity, and adaptive by their nature”. Cinematic interpretation also enables Radford to remould and recontextualise the universality of the play in order to deliver a film that comments critically, whilst concurrently praising the social evolution of a modern society. By reinventing indispensable characters from *The Merchant of Venice*, Radford’s work becomes intertwined with the fabric of Shakespeare’s play, retaining elements of its traditional portrayal whilst manipulating the dramatis personae to construct a hybridised intertext that will undoubtedly be adapted time and time again.

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