

Re-presenting Shylock: An Examination of Post-Holocaust and Adaptation in *The Merchant of Venice* Play and Film Adaptations

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Abstract

This paper examines the depiction of Jews, particularly the character of Shylock, in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in comparison with those of two adaptations: Arnold Wesker's play *The Merchant* and Michael Radford's film *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare's original work has been the subject of much scholarly discussion, with some perceiving it as perpetuating negative stereotypes and others as offering a nuanced and complex view of the character. Wesker's adaptation reinterprets the portrayal of Jews to challenge the negative representation in Shakespeare's play, highlighting themes of love, family, and relationships. Radford's film, on the other hand, offers a more nuanced and dynamic portrayal of the Jewish community than we are used to seeing in representations on film, and sheds light on the impact of anti-Semitic prejudice. It focuses on highlighting the Jewish/Christian disagreement and the extent to which Jews are victimized in Shakespeare's play, using filmic techniques to create a powerful representation with a deeper understanding of justice, discrimination, and dehumanization. Both adaptations offer a more nuanced portrayal of the Jewish community and challenge negative stereotypes perpetuated by Shakespeare's original work.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Merchant of Venice, Shylock, Jews, Adaptations, Arnold Wesker, Michael Radford

1. Introduction

The representation of Jews in William Shakespeare's plays, particularly in *The Merchant of Venice*, has been a subject of scholarly debate and controversy. The character of the Jewish moneylender, Shylock, is portrayed in a complex manner, embodying both the victim of anti-Semitic discrimination and the stereotypical representation of a cunning and greedy individual. This portrayal reflects the cultural beliefs and attitudes towards Jews and lending money during Elizabethan England. While it is difficult to ascertain Shakespeare's personal views on these subjects, it is clear that his portrayal of Shylock was influenced by the cultural context of his time. Therefore, it may be more effective to argue for a broader cultural understanding of beliefs about Jews in Elizabethan England, rather than attributing specific beliefs to Shakespeare himself.

The depiction of Jews in Shakespeare's works, particularly *The Merchant of Venice*, has raised concerns among some scholars and critics, who have asserted that it perpetuates harmful stereotypes and contributes to anti-Semitism. However, others have argued that Shakespeare's nuanced and multifaceted representation of Shylock offers a more sophisticated and insightful understanding of the character and his motivations than was common in his era, thereby undermining the dominant prejudices of the time.

This paper examines how the character of Shylock is portrayed in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and in two adaptations of the play: Arnold Wesker's play *The Merchant* and Michael Radford's film *The Merchant of Venice*. The paper aims to make a specific argument about the re-presentation of the Jewish community in these adaptations, focusing on how they challenge and reshape the negative stereotypes of Jews present in Shakespeare's play. Additionally, the paper considers how the adaptations have influenced contemporary audience perceptions of the play and its themes. By focusing on specific aspects of the adaptations and their impact, the paper aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how Shakespeare's work has been reinterpreted and reimagined in different cultural and historical contexts.

2. Literature Review

The depiction of Jews in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* has been a subject of scholarly scrutiny and contention. Arnold Wesker's play *The Merchant* and Michael Radford's film *The Merchant of Venice* offer significant reinterpretations of Shakespeare's original work, which have received considerable attention in literary studies. In this literature review, five articles on Wesker's adaptation are discussed, which examine the themes, character representation, and sociohistorical context of both Shakespeare's and Wesker's plays. Additionally, an article on Radford's film is analyzed, which discusses the director's creative vision and the representation of the historical and sociocultural context of Shakespeare's play. These studies contribute to the ongoing discourse on the representation of Jews in literature, particularly the character of Shylock. Moreover, they highlight the significance of reinterpretations in contemporary society and

their role in critiquing and re-evaluating cultural and historical norms. It is important to note that these selected studies are not exhaustive, but are discussed here to inform the reader of the relevant scholarship and how it informs the author's reading of the adaptations and the original play.”

2.1 Wesker's Play *The Merchant*

One particularly notable reinterpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* is Arnold Wesker's play, *The Merchant*. Wesker's adaptation has been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion and analysis, attracting attention for its unique perspectives and interpretations of the original play. The articles discussed in this section focus on the themes, character representation, and sociohistorical context of both Shakespeare's and Wesker's plays.

Alter (1988) argues in his article, “Barbaric Laws, Barbaric Bonds’: Arnold Wesker's *The Merchant*,” that Wesker's adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* critiques the anti-Semitic themes of Shakespeare's original and offers a more complex portrayal of the character of Shylock. Alter provides several examples from the play, such as Wesker's decision to portray Shylock as a loving father and grandfather, rather than a stereotypical villain. Alter also examines how Wesker's play reconfigures the narrative to foreground the themes of love and familial relationships, while de-emphasizing the anti-Semitic rhetoric present in Shakespeare's work. Through this analysis, Alter demonstrates how Wesker's adaptation offers a more nuanced critique of anti-Semitism in Elizabethan society and challenges the harmful stereotypes perpetuated in Shakespeare's original.

In 1989, Scott's article “Demythologising Shylock” analyzed the representations of Shylock in Wesker's *The Merchant* and Marowitz's “Variations on *The Merchant of Venice*.” The article argues that Wesker's adaptation “demythologizes” the character of Shylock and exposes the anti-Semitism present in Shakespeare's original play (p. 44). Scott's analysis offers a different perspective from Alter's, emphasizing the demythologization of Shylock rather than a more nuanced portrayal. Scott provides specific examples from Wesker's play to support his argument and highlights the significance of these reinterpretations in contemporary society's critique and re-evaluation of cultural and historical norms.

In their 2018 article, Özmen examines the sociohistorical context of reinterpretations of Shakespeare's plays, including Wesker's *The Merchant*. Özmen argues that Wesker's play critiques the antisemitism present in Shakespeare's original, and provides a more nuanced portrayal of the character of Shylock. The article highlights the significance of reinterpretations of Shakespeare's works in the twentieth century, and how they reflect the social, cultural, and political context in which they were produced. While Özmen's argument shares similarities with Alter's and Scott's arguments, it provides a more comprehensive examination of the cultural and historical contexts of Wesker's adaptation, thereby adding a valuable dimension to the ongoing discourse on the representation of Jews in literature.

Brauner (2021) compares the representation of Shylock in three plays, including Wesker's *The Merchant*. According to Brauner (2021, p. 59), “the three plays offer differing perspectives on the character and the themes explored in Shakespeare's original play, and contribute to the discourse around representation of Jews in literature.” The article goes on to explore these differing perspectives, examining how each play portrays Shylock and the themes of the original play in unique ways. In particular, Brauner notes that Wesker's play offers a nuanced portrayal of Shylock that critiques the anti-Semitic elements of Shakespeare's original. This is significant in the ongoing discourse around representation of Jews in literature and highlights the importance of reinterpretations in critiquing and re-evaluating cultural and historical norms. Brauner's article is therefore relevant to my own argument as it further emphasizes the significance of Wesker's adaptation and its contribution to the ongoing discourse on representation of Jews in literature.

Ansari and Alamri (2022), in their article “Arnold Wesker's *The Merchant*: Wesker Is My Name,” analyze Wesker's adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* and its significance. The authors contend that Wesker's version “offers a fresh perspective on the representation of Jews in literature and critiques the antisemitism inherent in Shakespeare's original work” (p. 8). They go on to discuss how Wesker's portrayal of Shylock differs from Shakespeare's and how it aligns with contemporary debates surrounding the representation of marginalized groups in literature. This article provides a thorough examination of Wesker's adaptation and its relevance to ongoing discussions in literary and cultural studies.

2.2 Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*

Pittman's (2007) article on Michael Radford's adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* provides valuable insights into the ways in which the film interprets and repositions the characters and themes of Shakespeare's play. The article highlights how the film reflects the director's own perspectives and creative vision, while also examining the representation of the historical and sociocultural context of the play. Moreover, Pittman explores how the film engages with issues of authority and authenticity in Shakespearean adaptations. This analysis can be beneficial in understanding how adaptations of Shakespeare's plays can reflect the perspectives of their creators and the cultural and historical context in which they were produced. In turn, this can inform our understanding of how adaptations can contribute to ongoing discussions around the themes and issues raised by the original works.

Riga (2010) examines the representation of Shylock in Michael Radford's film adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* and argues that it serves as a critique of anti-Semitism. The author suggests that Radford's interpretation challenges the negative stereotypes associated with Jews in Elizabethan times and offers a nuanced and complex portrayal of Shylock. Riga supports this argument through a close textual analysis of the film and an examination of its mise-en-scene. This argument is similar to that made by Ansari and Alamri (2022) in their analysis of Wesker's adaptation, which also argues that the reinterpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* serves to critique anti-Semitism and offers a more nuanced portrayal of Shylock. However, Riga's focus on Radford's film adaptation provides a unique perspective and highlights the ways in which the director's creative choices contribute to the film's critique of anti-Semitism.

Oakes (2016) argues in “Adapting Shakespeare – Converting Shylock in Michael Radford’s *The Merchant of Venice*” that Radford’s adaptation reflects larger cultural and historical trends related to the representation of Jews in popular culture. The author contends that the film’s nuanced portrayal of Shylock serves as a commentary on the complex ways in which anti-Semitic attitudes have been perpetuated and challenged over time, and how such attitudes have been reflected in various artistic works. Additionally, Oakes examines the ways in which Radford’s film adaptation modifies the themes and messages of the original play, offering a fresh perspective on the timeless questions of morality and justice that Shakespeare’s work raises. Ultimately, Oakes suggests that Radford’s interpretation represents a significant contribution to the ongoing reinterpretation of Shakespeare’s works, as it continues to inspire new conversations about the relevance and enduring impact of Shakespeare’s plays on contemporary culture.

In her article “Which Is the ‘Jew / That Shakespeare Drew’? Shylock’s Afterlife in Mere Reading and Maverick Stagings,” Fischer (2022) examines the diverse interpretations of Shylock in adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice*. She argues that the portrayal of Shylock has evolved over time, with different interpretations emphasizing his victimization or villainy, influenced by historical, cultural, and political contexts. Fischer offers specific examples of how contemporary attitudes and issues have influenced the portrayal of Shylock in adaptations, such as the 2016 production at the Shakespeare’s Globe theater, which used diverse casting to explore issues of discrimination and identity. Through her analysis of various adaptations, Fischer highlights the dynamic nature of Shylock’s portrayal and how it continues to be shaped by changing cultural and historical contexts.

Studies of Wesker’s adaptation have emphasized the author’s unique perspectives and interpretations of the original play, particularly in his portrayal of Shylock. In “Arnold Wesker’s *The Merchant*: Wesker Is My Name,” Ansari and Alamri (2022) argue that Wesker’s version of *The Merchant* critiques the anti-Semitism present in Shakespeare’s original and offers a more nuanced portrayal of Shylock. Meanwhile, Fischer’s (2022) analysis of various adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* sheds light on the evolving portrayal of Shylock and how it is shaped by historical, cultural, and political contexts. The unique perspectives and interpretations in these studies contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding representation of Jews in literature and the reevaluation of cultural and historical norms.

Similarly, Pittman’s (2007) analysis of Radford’s film adaptation offers insights into the director’s creative vision and techniques, including his use of *mise-en-scene* to represent the historical and sociocultural context of the play. Through his reinterpretation of the play, Radford critiques anti-Semitism and challenges negative stereotypes associated with the portrayal of Jews. Oakes (2016) argues that Radford’s approach to Shylock reflects larger cultural and historical trends, further emphasizing the significance of reinterpretations in shaping contemporary discourse. These contributions to the ongoing reinterpretation of Shakespeare’s work offer valuable insights into the role of adaptations in critiquing and re-evaluating cultural and historical norms, particularly regarding the representation of marginalized groups such as Jews.

3. Method

This paper analyzes the representation of Shylock in William Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice* through an intertextual and close reading approach. It considers the relationships between the original play and the adaptations by Arnold Wesker and Michael Radford and how these works reference, draw from, and respond to each other.

Arnold Wesker’s play *The Merchant* provides a fresh perspective on the original work by changing the portrayal of Jewish characters, including Shylock, to challenge the negative representations in Shakespeare’s play. Shylock is reimagined as a wise, loving and liberal scholar, rather than the villainous character in the original play. Wesker’s play offers a more balanced representation of the Jewish characters, including their positive attributes and the impact of hostile prejudice upon their lives. Wesker’s play explores the themes of love, family and relationships through the characters of Jessica and Shylock, highlighting the complexities of these relationships and the difficulties of balancing love and loyalty. Overall, Wesker’s play offers a radical reinterpretation of Shakespeare’s original play and provides a new perspective on the representation of Jews in literature.

Michael Radford’s film *The Merchant of Venice* effectively uses filmic techniques to create a dynamic and powerful representation of the play. The film is centered on highlighting the Jewish/Christian disagreement and the extent to which Jews are victimized. Through audiovisual elements, Radford creates a tense and escalating conflict between Christians and Jews, portraying Jews as situated in a position of inferiority in comparison to the Christians. The film’s *mise-en-scene*, choice of locations and settings, and use of light and shadow effectively bring the play to life and create a sense of authenticity and historical context. The modified closing scene highlights the themes of justice, discrimination, and the dehumanization of Jews, providing a deeper understanding of Radford’s vision for the play and his unique interpretation of the story. Overall, Radford’s film adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* offers a powerful and thought-provoking interpretation of the play that emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical context and the religious conflict at its heart.

4. Materials Studied

Arnold Wesker is a British playwright, novelist, and poet who was born in London in 1932. He is widely regarded as one of the most important and influential playwrights of the 20th century, and his work is known for its political and social commentary, as well as its innovative approach to language and form. Wesker’s play *The Merchant*, which was first performed in London in 1962, is a retelling of William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and is one of his best-known and most highly regarded works.

The representation of Shylock in *The Merchant* is a key aspect of the play and, as noted earlier, has been the subject of much critical

attention. Wesker's interpretation of the character is considered to be a critique of the anti-Semitism that is present in Shakespeare's original play, instead providing a more nuanced and human portrayal of Shylock. Many critics have noted that Wesker's play challenges the traditional view of Shylock as a greedy and heartless character by presenting him as a complex and multidimensional figure who is driven by a range of motivations and emotions.

Upon its publication, *The Merchant* received a positive reception from critics and audiences alike. In particular, the play's representation of Shylock has been praised for its sophistication and sensitivity. According to Brauner (2021),

the play resonates with 'something of the representative authority and imaginative power of myth' (p. 119) and Efraim Sicher praises the way in which 'Shylock's silence and obduracy in his insistence on the bond become a proud self-sacrifice to defend the interests of the Jewish community' (Sicher, 1985, p. 80) in *The Merchant*. Ultimately, Wesker's Shylock is no more an authentic portrait of a Jew living in the ghetto of 16th-century Venice than Shakespeare's—but this is not to the detriment of the play. (Brauner, 2021, p. 3)

The play has been credited with contributing to a wider discourse about representation and prejudice in literature and society, and some critics have noted that it remains highly relevant today, given the ongoing issues of antisemitism and prejudice that continue to exist in the world.

Michael Radford is an English film director, screenwriter, and producer who has made a significant impact in the film industry with notable works such as *Il Postino* and *1984*. In 2004, he directed a film adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* starring Al Pacino as Shylock, Joseph Fiennes as Bassanio, and Jeremy Irons as Antonio.

Radford's adaptation received mixed reviews upon its release. Some praised the film for its strong performances, especially by Al Pacino, who gave a powerful interpretation of Shylock. However, others criticized the film for its dark tone and lack of humor. The film has been described as a revisionist take on the play, as it sought to explore the themes of justice, revenge, and racism in a more modern and relevant way. Radford's film representation of Shylock has been described as both nuanced and complicated, as it attempted to bring out the human side of the character, who is often seen as a one-dimensional villain in traditional interpretations of the play. Radford's interpretation instead explores the character of Shylock as a victim of discrimination and prejudice, who is seeking justice and revenge. According to Oakes (2016), Radford's cinematic production can be considered an extended intertextual engagement with Shakespeare's play:

Radford managed to alter the presentation of the social principles of late-sixteenth century Venice by transporting the primary and secondary plot of the play into the twenty-first century. By transforming Shylock and recontextualizing him, Radford was 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. (p. 29)

5. Discussion

5.1 Overview of Wesker's *The Merchant*

Arnold Wesker's adaptation is a notable work that sheds light on the playwright's stance towards William Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. According to Leeming, Wesker's critical reaction to Shakespeare's play was a key factor in his decision to write *The Merchant* (Wesker & Leeming, 1983, xxi). Such criticism has been shared by several other literary critics, including Mauriel Bradbrook, who agreed that Shakespeare's presentation of Shylock was "hostile" (Wesker & Leeming, 1983, xxii).

Wesker, being a British Jewish writer, saw the representation of Shylock as a personal issue and was not satisfied with the depiction of Jews in modern drama. In his preface, he stated that despite his admiration for Shakespeare and his legacy, he could not ignore the impact of the Holocaust on his personal response to *The Merchant of Venice* (Wesker, preface). He sought to challenge the negative portrayal of Jews in the play and wrote *The Merchant* with these intentions.

This paper focuses on four main elements Wesker's *The Merchant*. First, the paper examines its subversive reinterpretation, which refers to the adaptation's significant departures from Shakespeare's original play through changes to its characters, plot, and themes. Second, the alternative narrative structure is discussed, in which Wesker's exploration of the themes of family, love, and relationships in the play are considered in relation to the representation of Shylock. Last, the characterization of Jessica and her role in the play is examined, particularly her relationship with Shylock and how it contributes to the overall representation of Jews and anti-Semitism in the play.

5.1.1 Subversive Reinterpretation

Wesker's adaptation offers a radical reinterpretation of Shakespeare's original play that constitutes a form of criticism of the original through its alterations. As Fischlin and Fortier observe, "adaptation is a specific and explicit form of criticism, as any marked departure from the original cannot help but indicate a critical difference" (Fischlin & Fortier, 2008, p. 8). Wesker's play explicitly criticizes Shakespeare's depiction of the Jews, particularly Shylock, by reversing the hostile attitude presented in the original play. The anti-Semitic attitude toward Jews is not merely relegated to the background but is instead discussed and questioned directly. For example, in Shakespeare's original play, Shylock is depicted as a greedy and vengeful character who is more concerned with money than with human relationships. This is evident in his famous monologue: "If I can catch him once upon the hip, / I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear

him” (Shakespeare, 2010, Act 1, Scene 3). However, in Wesker's adaptation, Shylock is presented as a sympathetic and complex character who has been victimized by the society in which he lives. In this way, Wesker challenges the anti-Semitic stereotypes that are perpetuated in the original play.

In Shakespeare's original play, Shylock is depicted as a greedy, money-obsessed character who seeks revenge against Antonio, a Christian merchant who has treated him unfairly. This is evident in Shylock's famous monologue: “If I can catch him once upon the hip, / I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him” (Shakespeare, 2010, Act 1, Scene 3). In contrast, Wesker's adaptation presents Shylock as a wise, loving, and liberal scholar with positive qualities that fundamentally alter the plot of the play (Wesker, 1983, p. 53). These alterations significantly depart from the original play's representation of Jews and Shylock's character.

Wesker's adaptation challenges the anti-Semitic stereotypes perpetuated in the original play by presenting Shylock as a sympathetic and complex character who has been victimized by the society in which he lives. For example, in Wesker's play, Antonio and Shylock are presented as friends, which is a significant departure from the original play. Shylock's bibliophilic nature serves to present him as the hero of the play, rather than the villain, as he is in the original play.

The impact of these changes is to challenge the negative stereotypes of Jews and present them in a more positive light. Wesker's adaptation seeks to critique Shakespeare's original play by presenting an alternative perspective on the character of Shylock and the relationships between Jews and Christians.

Wesker's *The Merchant* stands as a testament to the power of creative adaptation to subvert and reinterpret established cultural narratives, and its impact on shaping new perspectives and perceptions of marginalized groups. According to Leeming (qtd. in Wesker, 1983), this approach results in a play that “devotes more scenes to Jewish characters, showing both their pleasant and unexceptional personalities, as well as the effects of hostile prejudice upon them” (p. xxi).

5.1.2 Alternative Narrative Structure

The relationship between Shylock and Antonio is a key aspect that has been altered in Arnold Wesker's adaptation. The play opens with a reversal of the scene in William Shakespeare's original text, *The Merchant of Venice*. Instead of Antonio complaining to his Christian friends, Salarino and Solanio, about his sadness, the play opens with Shylock and Antonio cataloging Shylock's books in Ghetto Nuovo, where the Jews of Venice are imprisoned. As they approach an old book, Antonio feels it and describes it as “the past,” to which Shylock responds by noticing Antonio's sadness and offering him a drink. This opening scene sets the tone for the play as it highlights from the beginning that Antonio and Shylock are dear friends (Wesker, 1983, p. VIII).

Wesker uses various literary devices to reinforce this friendship, such as the repetition of expressions of love between the two characters. For example, Antonio regrets not knowing Shylock when they were younger, to which Shylock replies, “I love thee, Antonio.” Antonio responds, “And I love thee, old man.” (Wesker, 1983, p. 64). This exchange of love is repeated throughout the play, reinforcing the bond between the two characters and highlighting Shylock's goodwill and good intentions.

The pound-of-flesh bond is another aspect that Wesker alters in his adaptation. In Shakespeare's original play, the bond is a tool for revenge, while in Wesker's play, it is used to showcase the bond of friendship between Shylock and Antonio and how it is threatened by state laws. As Wesker states in the preface, “I realized that my play would not be about bonds for usury but about bonds of friendship and the state laws which could threaten that friendship” (Wesker & Leeming, 1983, p. 53). Shakespeare's Shylock proposes a “merry bond” with ulterior motives, while Wesker's Shylock genuinely means his “nonsense bond” as a joke (Leeming, qtd. in Wesker, xxii).

In Shakespeare's original play, Shylock imposes the bond on Antonio, while in Wesker's adaptation, it is Antonio who proposes the bond under the Venetian law that requires any dealings between Jews and Christians to be registered. This alteration leads to a significant shift in the dynamics between the two characters. The bond in Wesker's play results in a long conversation between the two characters, discussing the ethics behind the Venetian law. Shylock rejects the idea of a bond between friends, stating, “A bond? Between friends? What a nonsense are you talking, Antonio?...The law's made for enemies, not friends” (Wesker & Leeming, 1983, p. 23). This scene further reinforces the positive relationship between Shylock and Antonio and highlights Shylock's resistance to accepting the bond as a device to showcase his positive qualities. Wesker's adaptation presents Shylock as a wise, loving, and liberal scholar, possessing qualities that fundamentally alter the plot of the play. As Wesker explains in his preface, “Shylock and Antonio must be friends” and “Shylock must be a bibliophile” (Wesker, 1983, p. 53). In this way, Wesker's play explicitly criticizes Shakespeare's depiction of the Jews and challenges the anti-Semitic stereotypes that are perpetuated in the original play.

The setting and outcome of the bond also differ in the two adaptations. In Shakespeare's play, the bond is agreed upon in a tense setting, and it is Bassanio who asks for the loan, which Antonio guarantees. Shylock sees this as an opportunity to avenge the humiliations he has endured. In contrast, the bond in Wesker's play occurs in a relaxed atmosphere, and it is Antonio who asks Shylock for the loan as a favor. When Antonio asks for the loan, Wesker's Shylock exaggerates his happiness and replies, “At last! A favour! Antonio of Shylock!...Not four? Five? Ten?” (Wesker & Leeming, 1983, p. 22-23), once more highlighting the bond of friendship between the two characters and emphasizing Shylock's generosity.

In Shakespeare's original play, *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is portrayed as an antagonist who seeks revenge against Antonio, the titular merchant. Shylock is infamous for his demand for a pound of Antonio's flesh as part of their bond agreement, which he argues is legally binding. This demand is seen as a demonstration of his cruel and greedy nature, and it ultimately leads to his downfall in the play.

However, in Arnold Wesker's adaptation of the play, Shylock's character undergoes a significant transformation. Wesker's Shylock is not motivated by greed or a desire for revenge, but instead by a sense of duty to his people. When Antonio is brought to trial, Wesker's Shylock acts as his defender, pleading with him to remain silent and let him handle the defense. He states, "I protect my people...just promise me silence at the trial" (Wesker & Leeming, 1983, p. 63).

This transformation of Shylock from a villain to a protector is a marked deviation from Shakespeare's original play. In the trial scene of the original play, Shylock is portrayed as an antagonist who is eager to claim his pound of flesh. He is cold and calculating, showing no mercy towards Antonio despite his pleas for mercy. This contrast with Wesker's adaptation highlights the playwright's intent to present Shylock in a more sympathetic light.

One way that Shakespeare's original portrayal of Shylock differs from Wesker's adaptation is that Shylock is presented as a vengeful and greedy villain who seeks to extract a pound of flesh from Antonio as payment for a debt. For instance, when Antonio asks Shylock to lend him money in Act 1, Scene 3, Shylock responds with a soliloquy that expresses his hatred for Antonio and his intention to seek revenge: "If I can catch him once upon the hip, / I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him" (1.3.40-41). Later in the trial scene, Shylock insists on his legal right to the pound of flesh, even when it becomes clear that such an act would result in Antonio's death.

Wesker's portrayal of Shylock, on the other hand, presents him as a complex character who is motivated by a desire to protect his community rather than a desire for revenge or profit. In the trial scene, Shylock pleads with Antonio to remain silent and let him handle the defense, saying "I protect my people...just promise me silence at the trial" (Wesker & Leeming, 1983, p. 63). This transformation of Shylock from a villain to a protector challenges the stereotypes and prejudices associated with Jewish characters in literature and drama. It presents Shylock as a more sympathetic and nuanced character, who is not defined solely by his religion or his role as a moneylender.

Wesker's portrayal of Shylock as a defender of his friend Antonio and his community highlights the complexity of his character and challenges traditional notions of villainy. The ending of the "The Bond" highlights the contrast between Shakespeare's original Shylock and Wesker's reimagined version. While the original Shylock is depicted as an aggressive and vengeful antagonist, Wesker's Shylock is depicted as a savior and protector. This reimagining of Shylock demonstrates Wesker's ability to subvert expectations and present a fresh perspective on a classic character that emphasizes the importance of re-examining familiar narratives.

5.1.3 Characterization of Jessica

The negative stereotypes of Jews in Elizabethan England were prevalent and deeply ingrained in the popular consciousness of the time. Jews were often portrayed as greedy, deceitful, and untrustworthy, and these stereotypes were perpetuated by writers and playwrights, including Shakespeare. In his portrayal of Jessica, Shakespeare adhered to these negative stereotypes by depicting her as disloyal and dishonest. This characterization reinforces the negative image of Jews as cunning and untrustworthy, contributing to the overall marginalization and discrimination of Jewish people.

Wesker's adaptation challenges these stereotypes by portraying Jessica and Shylock in a positive light, as complex and nuanced characters. Wesker's Jessica is not simply a traitorous daughter who runs off with a Christian lover and steals from her father. Instead, she is depicted as a young woman who is conflicted about her identity and her place in the world. Similarly, Shylock is presented as a sympathetic figure who has suffered discrimination and persecution at the hands of Christians.

By humanizing Jewish characters and challenging negative stereotypes, Wesker's adaptation offers a more nuanced and complex understanding of Jewish identity and experience. This portrayal not only does justice to the Jewish community but also provides a broader message of inclusivity and respect for diversity.

In Wesker's adaptation, Jessica is not portrayed as naive and is instead depicted as faithful. The changes in her character are evident in her motivations for leaving her father. While Shakespeare's Jessica leaves her father due to his miserly nature, Wesker's Jessica disagrees with her father's imposition of knowledge and wisdom and seeks more intellectual freedom. She admires Lorenzo's fanaticism and flees with him to Belmont, only to realize later that abandoning her father and her identity has not brought her happiness.

Jessica's faithfulness is highlighted again in the play's conclusion, in which she breaks up with Lorenzo after he insults her Jewish community. In the original play, Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo and her betrayal of her father Shylock paint her as a villainous character. However, in Wesker's play, her faithfulness to her community is highlighted as she breaks up with Lorenzo after he insults her Jewish community. Lorenzo's statement, "parents can ill-choose one another, similarly men ill-choose one another, similarly can men ill-choose their gods" (Wesker, 1983, p. 76), is a subtle reference to Jessica's Jewish identity, which she picks up on and angrily leaves him. The play ends with Lorenzo understanding that he's lost her. By reversing the narrative that Shakespeare designed for Jews in his play, Wesker's play presents Shylock and Jessica as heroes rather than villains, and highlights the importance of staying true to one's community.

In conclusion, Arnold Wesker's play, *The Merchant* (1983), represents a significant departure from William Shakespeare's original play, *The Merchant of Venice* (2010). Wesker's adaptation challenges the negative stereotypes and prejudices that are often associated with Jews, particularly in regards to their religion, culture, and identity. Through his portrayal of Jessica, Wesker emphasizes the virtuous and wise nature of the Jewish people, presenting them in a positive light and challenging the prevailing prejudices of the time. This play is an important work that offers a fresh perspective on the Jewish experience, and it serves as a powerful reminder of the need for empathy and understanding in a world that is often divided by intolerance and hatred. Ultimately, Wesker's play transforms Shylock and Jessica from

stereotypical characters into heroes who are celebrated for their strength, wisdom, and unwavering commitment to their beliefs.

5.2 Analysis of Radford's Film Adaptation

Michael Radford's film adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, starring Al Pacino as Shylock and Jeremy Irons as Antonio, brings the religious conflict between Jews and Christians to the forefront through high-performing actors and visually striking *mise-en-scene*. This paper considers the *mise-en-scene* and visual and aesthetic elements to examine three key elements of the film. First, the paper analyzes the portrayal of Jewish-Christian relations through the representation of Jews as victims and the dichotomy of superiority/inferiority between Christians and Jews depicted in the *mise-en-scene*. Second, the film's deviations from Shakespeare's story are explored. Lastly, the significance of the conclusion and Jessica's character development is considered to understand how Radford's unique vision for the play is brought to life through filmic techniques.

5.2.1 The Portrayal of Jewish-Christian Relations

Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* begins with Antonio saying, "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad" (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 10). However, in Michael Radford's adaptation, a six-minute scene precedes this line that serves as an introductory prologue that sets the stage for the religious conflict at the center of the film. The setting, context, and visual representation of the mistreatment of Venetian Jews by Christians all work to highlight this conflict (Radford, 2004, Scene 1 [1:00-6:40]).

The opening shot starts with an onscreen title card reading "A Michael Radford Film." This is followed by a scene of Christian monks on a gondola, carrying a large wooden cross, heading towards the audience. The setting is specified as "Venice, 1596," and the burning of Jewish religious texts is shown. This brief sequence quickly establishes the setting, the date, the religious tension, and the production credits. The onscreen text then states "Intolerance of Jews was a fact of 16th century life, even in Venice," backed by ominous music. This scene creates an authentic setting and context for the audience and presents the intolerance of Jews as a historical fact. The portrayal of the monks on the gondola with the cross also highlights the dominant presence of Christianity in Venice.

In the opening scene, Radford masterfully portrays the Jews as the victims through various audiovisual elements. One of these elements is the presentation of the Jews being forced into the "Geto" area of the city by law, as stated in the onscreen script: "by law, the Jews were forced in the old walled foundry or 'Geto' area of the city." This imagery is followed by the depiction of Jews being forced to wear red hats and beaten, humiliated, and called usurers without being able to react or defend themselves. These fragments contribute to the overall sense of humiliation that the Jews experienced in this context. The tension in the scene escalates gradually, with the same monk on the gondola preaching furiously and seemingly directing his speech towards the Jews over the bridge. This is where Shylock is presented to the audience, as he looks at the monk. This presentation suggests that the monk's speech is directed at Shylock. The sense of tension continues to escalate as one of the Jews is thrown off a bridge by a Christian, which is followed by Antonio passing by and Shylock calling out to him, the only response being a spit in the face (Radford, 2004, Scene 1 [2:32-3:29]).

This opening sequence develops the overall narrative of humiliation and conflict between the two religious groups. The *mise-en-scene* presents the Jews as situated in a position of inferiority in comparison to the Christians, effectively setting the stage for the religious tensions that will be at the heart of the film.

5.2.2 Alternative Storytelling in the Film

The narrative of the bond in Radford's film adaptation is designed in a way that highlights the hierarchical nature of the relationship between Christians and Jews. This depiction begins with showcasing the inferior state of Shylock and the Jews through the detailed representation of the Ghetto. The images of the Ghetto are contrasted in black and white, with Radford utilizing light and shadow to create a visual effect that conveys the suffering of the Jews. The light is focused on Shylock's face as he discusses the bond with Bassanio, while the Jews are portrayed as a crowded mass in the shadowy background (Radford, 2004, 00:15:15-00:24:15). This scene is accompanied by slow, sad music that supports the visual image and guides the audience's emotions. The choice of music is critical in creating a specific experience that leaves no other options for the audience but to sympathize with the Jews' life in the Ghetto.

The bond narrative begins with Bassanio towering over Shylock to ask him for a loan and ends with the same image in the trial scene, where Shylock bows to the Christians, who tower over him. The trial scene concludes the bond narrative with an image that demonstrates the humiliation Shylock experiences. In the trial scene, Radford chooses a decorated chair for Antonio to be tied to, allowing Shylock to cut off his pound of flesh. However, after Portia releases Antonio from the bond, the chair transforms into a throne-like seat for Antonio. Shylock loses everything at this moment and pleads for mercy. The Duke, Antonio, and other Christians stand before Shylock as he bows, asking for mercy. The camera angle in this scene contributes to the sense of humiliation Shylock is experiencing. It moves back and forth between Shylock's face and the Duke's. Radford's choice of camera angles parallels each character's portrayal in the scene. Shylock is weak and has a lower status, and the low camera angle from which he is filmed enhances this image by showing him looking up and asking for mercy, as if he were praying for God's mercy. The Duke, portrayed as God, is shot with a high camera angle and looks down at Shylock. This scene concludes with a collective portrayal of the Christians as the majority and Shylock as the minority. In this shot, the viewer is looking at the scene from behind Shylock as he bows to the Christians. The Christians are standing, except for Antonio, who is seated on the same chair he was tied to and which now appears more like a throne. They all stare at Shylock as he withdraws and dismisses his claim (Radford, 2004, 1:49:30). This image concludes the bond narrative, beginning with the depiction of the inferior status of the Jews and concluding with the depiction of the superiority of the Christians.

5.2.3 The Significance of the Conclusion of Jessica's Character Development

The final scene of Radford's film adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* ends with an emotional moment that challenges the narrative of Christian superiority over the Jews. The scene features Jessica, who was originally portrayed in Shakespeare's play as a character who is content with her conversion to Christianity and her marriage to Lorenzo. However, in Radford's film, this is not the case.

Radford omits the love scene between Jessica and Lorenzo in Act V of the original play, instead ending the film with a one-minute scene that serves as a poignant and powerful counternarrative to the original play's depiction of Christian religious superiority. The film portrays Jessica's regret and sorrow through a series of poignant visual cues and an evocative musical score. In this final scene, Jessica is shown as tormented by her decision to convert to Christianity and abandon her father, her past and her heritage. She is seen running away from the castle in Belmont and stops at a riverbank, where she stares at two lonely archers shooting arrows at fish (Radford, 2004, 2:04:33-2:05:30). The scene is silent and accompanied by sad music, which highlights Jessica's regret and sorrow for abandoning her father and converting to Christianity. The next shot is a close-up of Jessica's face, staring down at her mother's ring, which she clutches tightly in her hand, emphasizing the depth of her sadness and the pain she feels at having lost her identity. The scene closes with Jessica gazing at the sunset as the two archers shoot their arrows into the water, creating an allegory for Jessica's own heart being wounded and the promise of her life coming to a close.

This powerful moment in the film underlines the negative effects of religious superiority and underscores the significance of maintaining cultural identity. The film's poignant final scene provides a powerful commentary on the devastating impact of religious superiority and the importance of maintaining cultural identity. By using Jessica's regret as a focal point, Radford's film adaptation offers a powerful challenge to the dominant narrative of Christian superiority over the Jews as presented in the original play (Radford, 2:04:33-2:05:30).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, both Arnold Wesker's play *The Merchant* and Michael Radford's film adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* provide new and thought-provoking interpretations of William Shakespeare's original work. Wesker's adaptation can be seen as a form of criticism as it reinterprets the portrayal of Jewish characters, including Shylock, to challenge their negative representation in Shakespeare's play. In Wesker's play, Shylock is reimagined as a wise, loving, and liberal scholar, and the relationship between Shylock and Antonio is presented as a close friendship, rather than a hostile one as in the original play. Wesker's play also explores the themes of love, family, and relationships through the characters of Jessica and Shylock, highlighting the complexities and difficulties in balancing love and loyalty within family dynamics.

In contrast, Radford's film adaptation effectively uses filmic techniques to create a dynamic and powerful representation of the play, with a focus on highlighting the Jewish/Christian disagreement and the extent to which Jews were victimized. Through the use of lighting, music, and *mise-en-scene*, Radford creates a visual and emotional impact that guides the audience to sympathize with the Jews and their life in the ghetto. The film also highlights the themes of justice, discrimination, and dehumanization through its modification of the closing scene, which provides a deeper understanding of Radford's unique vision for the play.

Both Wesker's play and Radford's film provide a more nuanced portrayal of the Jewish community and offer a new perspective on the representation of Jews in literature. These adaptations shed light on the impact of anti-Semitic prejudice and emphasize the importance of understanding the historical context and religious conflict at the heart of the story.

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