

WHERE IS THE MERCHANT GOOD, AND WHERE THE GRASPING JEW?:
A PRAGMATIC LITERARY STYLISTIC ANALYSIS
OF *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

ABSTRACT (要約)

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Introduction

This thesis presents an interpretation of William Shakespeare's disturbing comedy *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-1598?), emphasizing the thrilling exchanges between the characters and humorous aspects of the play. The primary questions raised are "whether Shylock is effectively depicted as grasping and Antonio as good" and "why Antonio is left alone at the very end of the play," which are crucial for an overall interpretation of this play. In order to analyze this early modern dramatic text, a pragmatic literary stylistic approach is widely employed. By applying linguistic techniques to the text, this thesis attempts to clarify the intended meanings of the utterances and their effects on the hearers, and demonstrate that familiar scenes can be viewed from diverse angles.

Especially after World War II, difficulties of interpretation of this play, in which a persecuted Jew is overwhelmed by shrewd Christians and forcibly converted to Christianity, have been often discussed. This thesis offers another perspective to the discussion by elucidating the equilibrium between the two crafty adversaries, the Christian merchant and the Jewish usurer, as well as hitherto unobserved factors and scenes which can be interpreted to be entertaining. Detailed analyses shed a fresh light on the fact that Antonio plays

a key role as counterpart of Shylock, being as egocentric as the Jewish usurer. Indeed, the shifting power balance between Shylock and Antonio is one of the highly entertaining factors of this play. In addition, it is argued that the equilibrium between the two main characters is depicted symbolically and decisively at their outcomes: both Antonio and Shylock lose what is dearest to their hearts after failing their objectives, and then are left all alone, away from the festive atmosphere. The interpretation offered by this thesis does not require any alteration of the text for a performance in order to moderate the sense of unfairness regarding the destinies prepared for the characters.

Chapter 1 Antonio, a Sullen Hero

Chapter 1 focuses on the titular hero Antonio, elucidating his extreme love and viciousness, and his drastic changes of attitudes in contrast to Shylock's quick and shrewd changes of attitudes, in his response to his interlocutors. In Section 1, the title pages of the play-text are examined, in order to discuss how the role of the merchant Antonio could have been as important as that of the Jew Shylock. The name "Antonio" is also reviewed, together with a comparison of the character in the play with characters who bear the same name in Shakespeare's other plays. In Section 2, discourse from the earlier part of the play is analyzed from a pragmatic point of view, by paying close attention to the way Antonio communicates with his Christian friends and the Jewish usurer. Antonio's egotism and ridiculous behavior are spotlighted, which contradicts the complimentary remarks on him by other Christian characters. Antonio's insolent words and their inferable effects on Shylock also underline the fact that Antonio is not simply a victim of a malicious plot of Shylock, but an inveterate persecutor who turns the Jewish man into an avenger. In Section 3, an analysis of their second encounter, in which Shylock rejects Antonio's plea, highlights

how dramatically Antonio's default on a loan reverses the positions of the merchant and the moneylender.

Chapter 2 "Dog Jew" vs. "Good Antonio"

Chapter 2 focuses on the Jewish usurer Shylock. It also elucidates Solanio and Salarino's strategic discourse as well as Tubal's last-ditch measure of self-protection. In Section 1, the possible causes of prejudiced views against Shylock are explored from the text itself as well as from other sources. It is argued that, from a biblical point of view, Christian characters cannot justify persecuting Shylock; conversely, Shylock has reasons to hate them. In addition, the distinctive words and phrases Shylock uses are discussed, pointing to the fact that he is an atypical figure as a Jewish usurer of the time. In Section 2, introducing the Discourse Structure of Drama advocated by Mick Short, this thesis argues that there are deliberate manipulators in the play. An analysis attempts to explain how Shakespeare biases his audience through the mouths of Antonio's Christian friends Solanio and Salarino by employing rhetorical devices for dramatic effect. Also, by analyzing Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech and his conversation with his friend Tubal, this thesis highlights Shylock's emotions concerning his family and nation. Furthermore, Tubal's unusual way of communicating with Shylock and a probable cause of his efforts to direct the conversation are explained by applying the notion of Indirect Speech Act.

Chapter 3 Antonio's Solitude in the Denouement

In Chapter 3, the last two acts are analyzed to arrive at a comprehensive interpretation of the play. The masterly measures of Portia to silence Antonio

are foregrounded. Section 1 compares the expressions used in the climax of the court scene with those used in a crucial scene in *The Jew of Malta* written by Christopher Marlowe when the Governor Ferneze oppresses the Jews, and discusses an echo-like effect which was probably deliberately exploited by Shakespeare in order to imply the vicious intent behind Antonio's courteous speech and the tragic consequence of Shylock. In Section 2, the court scene is reexamined in context. Analyzing the process of the defeat of Shylock, Portia's thoughts behind her words, and the acquisitiveness and mercilessness of the Duke and the Christian society in Venice which respond favorably to Antonio's requests, this thesis concludes that Antonio's "mercy speech" is indeed his revenge on Shylock. In Section 3, exchanges between Antonio and Portia in Belmont are examined, aiming to explore the factors which affect Antonio's position in Belmont, and to explain the important meaning of the isolation of Antonio at the end. A pragmatic analysis reveals how Antonio seeks a way to achieve his wish, how kindly but firmly Portia precludes his standing between herself and her husband Bassanio, and how Bassanio and others respond to them.

Conclusion

Through specific analyses, the following becomes evident: Shylock is not a stereotypical Jewish character, and both Antonio and Shylock are complex and changeable. The role of Antonio is as important as that of Shylock, who is his counterpart. Antonio is isolated at the end neither without any particular reason nor because of his sexual inclinations: rather, he is expelled from the society to which he wishes to belong as a result of being too willful, similarly to Shylock who is excluded from the Jewish society.

This thesis argues that *The Merchant of Venice* is a highly entertaining play in which we can take delight in the dynamics of the art of conversation,

attitude, and position of the characters. It is revealed that the equilibrium of the two protagonists, Antonio and Shylock, is maintained by the author, suggesting that *The Merchant of Venice* is a suitable play for a modern production, whose audience typically consists of people with different cultural backgrounds. Lastly, by providing examples of exploration for fresh interpretations, this thesis demonstrates how useful a pragmatic literary stylistic analysis can be as an approach to a Shakespearean drama text.