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## Māori take on Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice* in Aotearoa/New Zealand

The first Shakespeare film to be made in Aotearoa/New Zealand,<sup>1</sup> *Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Weniti, the Māori Merchant of Venice*<sup>2</sup> directed by Don Selwyn<sup>3</sup> was released in 2002. The film provides a distinctively Māori view of Shakespeare's play through both "local accent(s)" and "local dimension(s)" (Neill 149). The "local accents" include the use of te reo Māori (the Māori language)<sup>4</sup> for the entire dialogue (with English relegated to the sub-titles), local actors and local culture. The "local dimension" is achieved also through the extra resonances of the use of te reo Māori and all that implies in a post-colonial country; through references to Parihaka<sup>5</sup> and to the Holocaust; and in Hairoka's search for utu (revenge) to address the loss of mana (prestige). The ending of the play is re-shaped to suggest that Hairoka (Shylock)<sup>6</sup> is likely to attempt to gain revenge on Anatanio (Antonio) in order to regain the mana he and his iwi (tribe) has lost through the breaking of the contract. The concepts of mercy and revenge are treated from a different cultural viewpoint, one in which forgiveness and mercy are foreign concepts, perhaps only learned when Christianity arrived with the colonists in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Connections between Māori and Jew are hinted at throughout the film, encapsulated perhaps in the moment where the camera focuses on the word Holocaust in the scene where Anatanio and Hairoka agree to the bond and the forfeit of the pound of flesh.

Although Shakespeare's works arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the luggage of the official artist, Sydney Parkinson, on James Cook's voyage in 1769, "his active presence here really dates from the 1840s when British settlers arrived in large numbers bringing the twin talismans of family Bibles and Collected Shakespeares" (Houlahan 280). The first staging of a Shakespeare play was probably in 1846 in Port Nicholson (Wellington). Since that time, despite

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<sup>1</sup> A composite term that utilises both the country's official name and the Māori term meaning "land of the long white cloud"—see Houlahan, 2009, 279.

<sup>2</sup> Following the usage on the film's website, I will refer to this film by its short title: *The Māori Merchant of Venice*.

<sup>3</sup> 1936-2007. Ngati Kuri and Te Aupori descent.

<sup>4</sup> P.M. Ryan. *Dictionary of Modern Māori*. Auckland: Heinemann 1994, 66. This dictionary is the source for all the definitions of Māori terms in this article.

<sup>5</sup> A famous "battle" in the Land Wars of the 1860s-1880s.

<sup>6</sup> Characters and places in *The Māori Merchant of Venice* will be referred to by their Māori names, whereas characters and places in *The Merchant of Venice* will be given their English names.

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the emergence of Māori, Pasifika<sup>7</sup> and Pākehā (European) local playwrights, Shakespeare has been centre-stage on the Aotearoa/New Zealand theatre scene, and is still the most often performed playwright.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst Shakespeare has been popular with Pākehā theatregoers, the interaction between Māori and Shakespeare appears to have been more limited.<sup>9</sup> In the mid 1940s, Dr Pei Te Hurunui Jones<sup>10</sup> translated three Shakespeare plays into te reo Māori, (*Othello*, *Julius Caesar* and *The Merchant of Venice*). In the 1950s Selwyn promised Jones that he would ensure that the translated plays would be performed at some stage. It was not, however, until 1988 that Don Selwyn finally read Jones' translation of *The Merchant of Venice* and, conscious of his promise, put the play onstage as part of a revival of Māori theatre. The landmark first staging of a Shakespeare play in te reo Māori, *The Māori Merchant of Venice - Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Weniti* was part of the Koanga (Spring) Festival in Auckland.<sup>11</sup>

Worldwide, *The Merchant of Venice* has had a chequered history, mostly due to its perceived anti-Semitism. Kennedy notes that

The external events of the Second World War have affected *Merchant* so thoroughly that it is fair to say that since 1945 we have been in possession of a new text of the play, one which bears relationships to the earlier text but is also significantly different from it. (200)

Any production since the end of the Second World War, including *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, is almost inevitably influenced in some way by the treatment of the Jews by the Nazis. A different “new text” was created by Dr Pei Te Hurunui Jones in his translation of the play into te reo Māori, and Selwyn has also produced “new texts”, both in his 1990 stage performance of the play and in the 2002 film version. The use of the word holocaust in the film (see below) underlines this context.

Productions of *The Merchant of Venice* in Aotearoa/New Zealand do not seem to have been affected by anxieties that may have influenced overseas theatre companies. This may partly be due to the absence of a significant Jewish population in Aotearoa/New Zealand and also to the multicultural nature of New Zealand society, which contains many immigrants and groups that could be classified as “Other”. In the 1970s, *The Merchant* and *Othello* were the third most often

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<sup>7</sup> Pasifika is the accepted umbrella term for Pacific Islanders who have settled in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

<sup>8</sup> Approximately 50 productions per decade (McDougall 11).

<sup>9</sup> Occasionally a Māori actor would be cast as “the Other”, e.g. Jim Moriarty as Othello (Court Theatre, Christchurch. Dir. Cathy Downes. 5 May – 9 June 2000).

<sup>10</sup> 1898-1976. Ngati Maniapoto and Tainui descent.

<sup>11</sup> Dir. Don Selwyn. Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Auckland, 17-29 September 1990.

performed Shakespeare plays,<sup>12</sup> and during the 1990s *The Merchant of Venice* shared fourth position (with *The Tempest*).<sup>13</sup> No controversy about perceived anti-Semitism in these productions was revealed by my research.

Of eleven productions of the play in Aotearoa/New Zealand since 1960 (McDougall 70), perhaps surprisingly, only one has been set in this country (Selwyn's 1990 production). Two productions avoided a specific localised setting such as Venice or Berlin and were set instead in a kind of fantasy Hollywood setting, which could be seen as timeless or "universal". Antony Taylor's "glittering and controversial" 1978 Downstage production<sup>14</sup> was located in a "world where power had long ago supplanted justice", with a Shylock who "whinged vainly for his rights" and was a "fit object for compassion" (*Art New Zealand* 30-31). Also set in Hollywood was the 1991 Michael Hurst production at the Mercury Theatre in Auckland<sup>15</sup> which was a fantasy "film extravaganza" (*Listener and TV Times* 57, photo caption).

In the same year as Selwyn's te reo Māori version, Elric Hooper<sup>16</sup> staged a production of the play in Christchurch. These two productions provide a good illustration of the debate about how Shakespeare should be performed in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Hooper's 1990 production could be viewed as at the opposite end of the spectrum to Don Selwyn's production of Jones' translation of the play into te reo Māori. Hooper's Court Theatre production<sup>17</sup> was a "high Renaissance, traditional production".<sup>18</sup> Rather than investigating local influences or resonances, this production featured an English actor, Richard Mayes, in the role of Shylock and was heavily influenced by a London production of the previous year.<sup>19</sup> The Court Theatre production was set in a huge tent of gauzes, with images of hot sunlight coming through the blinds. The trial scene was set on two levels, with the Court and Doges and symbols of Venice on the upper level and the trial happening below. At the end of the production the awnings ascended to reveal a formal Renaissance garden. In complete contrast to this production, Selwyn's emphatically New Zealand production of the play was staged barely a month later in Auckland.

<sup>12</sup> The 1970s saw 5 productions of *As You Like It*, 4 productions each of *Othello* and 3 of *The Merchant* (Court 1976, and Mercury and Downstage 1978).

<sup>13</sup> In the 1990s there were four major productions of each play (*The Merchant*: Auckland 1990 and 1991, Christchurch 1991 and Wellington 1998).

<sup>14</sup> 19 July – 2 September 1978. Dir. Tony Taylor and John Banas. John Callen (Shylock), Ginette MacDonald (Portia).

<sup>15</sup> Dir. Michael Hurst. Paul Gittens (Shylock), George Henare (Antonio), Sylvia Rands (Portia).

<sup>16</sup> Leading New Zealand theatre director.

<sup>17</sup> 7 July – 4 August, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> All information about this production, except where noted, is from Hooper in a telephone interview with the author, 24 June 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Dir. Peter Hall, with Dustin Hoffman as Shylock.

Overseas, concerns about anti-Semitism meant that despite *The Merchant of Venice* sharing “with *Hamlet* the distinction of having been more often performed than any other of Shakespeare’s plays” (Mahood 42), very few film versions had been made prior to *The Māori Merchant of Venice* and the 2004 Radford film.<sup>20</sup> One way of dealing with possible anti-Semitism seems to have been to involve Jews in significant roles and to focus on other, non-religious aspects of the play. Both BBC television versions of the play (1973 and 1980) included Jews in significant roles.<sup>21</sup> As Jews were unlikely to take part in an anti-Semitic production, this was one way of avoiding the issue and allowing more complexity to emerge from the play. However, the portrayal of Shylock by Mitchell in the 1980 BBC version, rather than being authentic as might be expected due to Mitchell’s Jewishness, apparently “bordered on caricature” making it “hard to take Shylock’s villainy seriously” (Bulman 103). In this production Portia was “for once, more interesting than Shylock” (Bulman 115).

Authenticity in *The Māori Merchant of Venice* was important for Selwyn.<sup>22</sup> The actors playing Shylock (Waihoroi Shortland) and Tubal (Andy Sarich) both have Jewish ancestry. Shortland comments:

Playing Shylock from a Māori perspective is the easiest role because you know something about what it is to hang onto your identity and to deal with prejudice, some of it overt, some of it not so overt, in the New Zealand sense anyway [...] and of course he’s acting not only for himself, but I see him as acting on behalf of his people”.<sup>23</sup>

This conflation of the actor and the role is interesting, perhaps mirroring the way an individual’s actions, such as Shylock’s, become the actions of the tribe/iwi. The focus on the individual in much of Western society contrasts with the holistic, whānau (family), and tribal aspects of both Jewish and Māori society.

Whilst *The Māori Merchant of Venice* is the only Shakespeare film adaptation produced in Aotearoa/New Zealand, many recent successful locally made films have been adaptations of works by New Zealand authors (such as Maurice Gee’s *In My Father’s Den*) as well as by overseas authors (such as J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*). Significant in the context of *The Māori Merchant of Venice* are the films *Whale Rider* and *Once Were Warriors*, which are not only based on books written by Māori writers (Witi Ihimaera and Alan Duff respectively), but also feature Māori actors and focus on Māori and Māori issues.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Radford, dir. *The Merchant of Venice*. Perf. Al Pacino, Joseph Fiennes, Jeremy Irons. UK: Arclight Films, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Directors Jonathan Miller (1973) and Jack Gold (1980) and actor Warren Mitchell (Shylock) (1980), Bulman, 102.

<sup>22</sup> “It’s important to give authenticity the truth”. Don Selwyn, personal interview, 5 November 2004.

<sup>23</sup> <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~hetaonga/merchant>.

Part of director Don Selwyn's motivation in filming *The Māori Merchant of Venice* was a reaction against the way that Māori as a group were represented in *Once Were Warriors*, wanting instead to portray the elevated, spiritual and dignified dimensions of Māori culture. Selwyn said that it is "Very important for Māori to understand there are other films than *Once Were Warriors*",<sup>24</sup> wanting Māori to be aware that there are many other aspects of Māori culture that can be highlighted and many other genres of film available for them to work on. Selwyn was also very aware of the way that both Pākehā and overseas audiences might view Māori and Māori performers through the lens of such films, saying that "After the heavy images of Māori presented to the world by films like *Once Were Warriors*" it was important to "help people to see Māori performers in another light".<sup>25</sup> Selwyn wanted a range of opportunities and genres open to Māori performers, including high literary and cultural works such as Shakespeare. The positive portrayal of Māori culture in *Whale Rider* reinforces part of what Selwyn worked towards in *The Māori Merchant of Venice*.

In the 1980s developments in Māori theatre were particularly focussed on marae theatre—theatre deriving from the traditions of the marae, the physical centre of tribal life—and bicultural theatre, and were often hard-hitting and uncomfortable for Pākehā audiences. Plays by Māori playwrights initially focussed on issues to do with colonisation such as the alienation of the language and the land. A change occurred in 1988 with Riwia Brown's play *Roimata*, "which destroyed the assumption that Māori plays were limited to the spiritual or political" (Kouka 15). "Māori practitioners now saw another way to woo—much softer and more subtle" (Kouka 16). It was in this same year, 1988, that Selwyn first read Jones' translation of *The Merchant of Venice*, leading to the play's world premiere in 1990.

Did Selwyn see that by using Pākehā culture he could be "much softer and more subtle" in referring to Māori issues than previous Māori plays and films (such as *Once Were Warriors*) had been? Did Selwyn see something in the play's attitude to the Jews that may have reminded him of the Pākehā attitude to Māori? In particular, what resonances might Māori feel with Anatonio's failure to fulfil the contract and the subsequent court battle which seems so heavily weighted in favour of the Christians? Could parallels be drawn with the apparent lack of commitment from Pākehā to honouring the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, in which all Māori land came under the protection of the British Crown and could only be sold to the British Crown (who could, and often did, on-sell it for profit), and with the subsequent difficulty some Māori have found in arguing their case in a court where different concepts of justice hold sway?

Selwyn noted that some Māori see similarities between the oppression of Māori and the oppression of the Jews.<sup>26</sup> The idea of a connection between

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<sup>24</sup> Selwyn, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> media.newzealand.com. Accessed 1 March 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Selwyn, 2004.

Māori and Jews was noted by the missionary Thomas Kendall who “detected Old Testament ideas in Māori beliefs and carvings” and noted that

Many other missionaries in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands spread the notion that the peoples of Polynesia derived from one of the Lost Tribes of Israel. It was an argument that Māori sometimes turned to their own uses, claiming that they were among God’s chosen people. (Howe)

As already mentioned, a thought-provoking connection between Māori and Jews is hinted at in one of the film’s pivotal scenes, the “merry bond” scene (1.3). The treatment of the Jews by the Nazis in the Second World War<sup>27</sup> is brought sharply into focus for a brief moment. At the end of this scene, set in an art gallery,<sup>28</sup> the camera zooms in on a painting which has one word emblazoned on it. The word is not in te reo Māori, but in English (the only word in the film in the English language), and it is the word “Holocaust”. Audiences all over the world will recall the context in which that word is generally used, of the gas chambers in which the Jews were exterminated, in the search for the “master race”. Since the word “Holocaust” is set within a Māori painting, the implication may be that it is Māori who have been oppressed, as the Jews were, and their race almost wiped out. (In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century it seemed inevitable that the Māori race would disappear through assimilation with the settlers.) In 2002, at the time the film was released, a local layer of significance is likely to have been added for New Zealand audiences. In a well publicised speech towards the end of 2000, Māori MP Tariana Turia<sup>29</sup> used the term “holocaust” to refer to the attrition of the Māori population that occurred through colonisation.<sup>30</sup> The emotional response by some sections of the New Zealand community to this statement would have been recalled by a New Zealand audience when they saw the word “holocaust” on screen in a Māori dimension.

A further reference to the difficulties faced in honouring the Treaty of Waitangi occurs in the same scene, whose resonances are likely to be felt only by New Zealanders, both Pākehā and Māori. The art gallery where the “merry bond” is agreed is full of paintings from Selwyn Muri’s Parihaka series. Parihaka<sup>31</sup> has become a symbol of the roughshod way the colonials rode over the concerns of Māori about protecting their land. In the “battle” at Parihaka the pacifist and non-violent tribe were decimated by the English troops, whose avowed purpose was to

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<sup>27</sup> The War had only just finished when Dr Pei Te Hurunui Jones was completing his translation in 1946.

<sup>28</sup> That of Māori artist, Selwyn Muri.

<sup>29</sup> Founding co-leader of the Māori Party, a political party formed prior to the 2005 General Election.

<sup>30</sup> [www.converge.org.nz/pma/tspeech.htm](http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/tspeech.htm).

<sup>31</sup> The “battle” at Parihaka, Taranaki, took place on 5 November 1881.

enforce the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. This link to Parihaka perhaps points to how justice and the law can be manipulated to enforce the hegemony of the dominant group.

At the beginning of the film considerable footage is devoted to transporting the audience (perhaps re-enacting the long voyage that the European settlers had to endure) to Aotearoa/New Zealand. This is achieved by showing the journey of Te Piriniha (the Prince of Morocco) to Peremona (Belmont), passing through New Zealand bush, complete with Turehu (Māori fairies) flying through the trees, safeguarding his passage. This opening sequence helps to set the scene clearly and delineate its Aotearoa/New Zealand setting in terms of landscape, flora and fauna, and cultural rituals. As Te Piriniha and his entourage approach Pohia's (Portia's) palace, a conch sounds to announce Te Piriniha's arrival, a kuia (respected older woman) calls out the karanga, (welcoming call) and the wero (challenge) is made. The powhiri is a welcoming ceremony when visiting a marae (meeting house) and protocols must be observed to ensure that the manuhiri (visitors) come as friends not enemies.

Although the text is Shakespearean, the world we are watching in the film is entirely Māori. The location is recognisably Aotearoa/New Zealand but where are the Pākehā? The use of Māori language for Shakespeare's words underlines



*Figure 1:* Patanio/Bassanio (Te Rangihau Gilbert), Karatiano/Gratiano (Sonny Kirikiri), with Haranio/Salernio (Wharehoka Wano). The costuming of Māori actors in Renaissance costume is illustrated in this shot from the trial scene (4.1). (Image downloaded from <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~hetaonga/merchant>. Reproduced by kind permission of the late Don Selwyn.)

the sense of the invisibility of Pākehā culture. This is further reinforced by the actors wearing “lavish Renaissance costumes, the disjunction intended to remind audiences of the film’s location” (Houlahan 2002 120). (see *Figure 1*).

Even though it is an imaginary Aotearoa/New Zealand, the absence of Pākehā may give some Pākehā viewing the film a feeling of displacement and invisibility, which might be similar to the way Māori have felt that in the past—



*Figure 2:* Anatonio/Antonio (Scott Morrison), and Patanio/Bassanio (Te Rangihau Gilbert). This shot from the opening scene (1.1) shows the two Christians, Anatonio and Patanio arriving into port (Weniti) on a sailing ship, in a scene very reminiscent of the early settlers’ arrival in Aotearoa/New Zealand, underlining the film’s replacement of Pākehā by Māori. (Image downloaded from <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~hetaonga/merchant>. Reproduced by kind permission of the late Don Selwyn.)

invisible in their own land. This is especially noticeable at the beginning of the film which includes footage of a sailing vessel arriving at a port, reminiscent of the early settler period in New Zealand around 1840 (see *Figure 2*).

After the long sequence at the beginning of the film establishing the location as an imaginary Aotearoa/New Zealand, replacing the English/Shakespearean world with a Māori world, a different juxtaposition takes place. From a play originally centred on the Christian world, we are now located in a film centred on the Jewish world. From the very first words of the play we are located inside the head of a Jewish character. The first words we hear are in te reo



Māori, significantly from Hairoka (the Shylock figure), with a shot of his booted feet climbing stone steps and with a voice-over of him saying

Kaore koia, he ringaringa o te Hurai, he manawa, he tinana, he whakaaro, he aroha, he hiahia? (Jones 38)

in Jones' translation of

Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? (3.1.46)<sup>32</sup>

This voice-over ensures we see the Jewish perspective first with both the interior thoughts of a Jew, and the content of his words which expresses the basic humanity of Jews (and Māori?). Another director might have used a voice-over from Antonio or one of the other Christian characters about Antonio's "sadness" (1.1.6), but in this film it is distinctly a Jewish perspective. We never hear the interior thoughts of any of the Christian characters, only the Jewish characters.<sup>33</sup> Rather than leading up to them slowly, as the play does, the film jumps straight into one of the main issues of the play, religious prejudice, highlighting the humanity of the Jews and immediately identifying Māori and Jew through the casting<sup>34</sup> and language.

The two other voice-overs in the film are also both from the Jewish perspective: at the end of court scene when Hairoka is leaving the court (see below) and the film ends with Hairoka's daughter Tiehika giving her thoughts about the break up of their whānau (family). These framing devices, starting and ending the play with Jews rather than Christians, as Shakespeare does, work to normalise the Jews as the dominant voice. They also make it likely that the audience will view the film through the eyes of the Jews and by being able to see and sympathise with the Jews prevents the film being anti-Semitic.

As well as the voice-over and the opening lines regarding the humanity of the Jews, the film generally invites a sympathetic attitude to Hairoka by the way certain scenes and the text have been cut. Instead of focusing the audience's attention at the beginning of the play on an issue related to a Christian (Antonio's "sadness", 1.1.6), the audience's attention in this film is directed at a different, and perhaps a more serious issue, through the use of the voice-over concerning prejudice and the Jews.

Hairoka is also portrayed sympathetically by cutting out some of the lines and scenes that might contribute to a less sympathetic approach. These cuts also reduce the influence that the loss of his daughter has on Hairoka's motivation for revenge for the non-payment of the bond. This results in a greater emphasis on

<sup>32</sup> All references are to the 2003 New Cambridge edition.

<sup>33</sup> Hairoka (twice) and Tiehika (Jessica) (at the end of the film).

<sup>34</sup> Waihoroi Shortland, who plays Shylock, as already noted, has Jewish ancestry.

the reason for Hairoka's desire to enforce the bond, which is to gain revenge on the Christians, especially Anatonio, for the mistreatment he has received at their hands. This effect is achieved in part by cutting all of scene 2.8 in which Salarino and Solanio describe Shylock's reaction to the loss of his daughter. As a result of these cuts, the lines

I never heard a passion so confused,  
So strange, outrageous, and so variable,  
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets:  
"My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! (2.8.12-15)

are lost. Thus, the connection between the loss of his daughter and the ducats and his seeking revenge on Antonio, as representative of the Christians who stole Jessica, is not so clearly made. In addition, the first part of 3.1 is also cut, in which Salarino and Solanio bait Shylock about Antonio's forfeit, leading to Shylock's first mention of revenge, at 3.1.50 ("it will feed my revenge").

Shylock's horrifying admission "I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear" (3.1.83-84) is deleted, as is Tubal telling Shylock that Jessica spent fourscore ducats in one night. In Shakespeare's play all these factors lead up to Shylock deciding to torture Antonio. However, in the film, Hairoka appears to decide to go ahead with the forfeit when Tupara (Tubal) tells him that

There came divers of Antonio's creditors in my company to  
Venice, that swear he cannot choose but break. (3.1.107-9)

The build-up to Hairoka's revenge is reduced and rather than focussing on the loss of his daughter to the Christians, his anger is focussed on Anatonio for not repaying the bond, and thus reducing the mana of Hairoka and his iwi.

As well as the utilisation of te reo Māori, Māori actors and culture, *The Māori Merchant of Venice* also presents a Māori-centred approach to the themes of the play, with particular reference to the concepts of mercy and revenge.<sup>35</sup> The concept of mercy, so crucial in *The Merchant of Venice*, is noticeably absent from traditional Māori kaupapa (philosophy). Whilst the Christian/Pākehā world believes in concepts of justice, punishment and mercy, Māori believe in what might be called a balanced approach to life based on mana. The concepts of utu and mana are intertwined, for it is the loss of mana that triggers the need for utu, to redress the balance and retrieve the mana that has been lost. As Patterson explains, "utu is fundamentally connected with a Māori concept—mana—rather than the Pākehā concept of justice" (132). Utu is a concept that includes reward

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<sup>35</sup> See John Patterson, *Exploring Māori Values* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1992) and further discussion of this point below. Unfortunately I have not yet been able to source a similar book on Māori concepts written from a Māori perspective.

as well as punishment and is variously defined as “recompense”, “payment”, “reciprocity” and “restoring some sort of balance” (Patterson 117). For tribe and family members, utu is not voluntary but an obligation. When mana is lost, there is no possibility of mercy or forgiveness. Instead, utu must be sought to regain the mana. As Elsdon Best<sup>36</sup> puts it, “to avenge insults, wrongs, etc., was considered to be one of the most important duties of man” (qtd. in Patterson 120).

Once we understand the obligation for Māori to seek utu, it can be seen that one of the play’s themes, the concept of tempering justice with mercy, does not fit comfortably. Patterson notes that “Gudgeon<sup>37</sup> tells us that forbearance is a weakness of character, not a virtue: ‘in no possible way can mana be more easily lost’” (120). This may explain why “there seems to be no word for forgiveness in classical Māori” (Patterson 125). If we understand the lack of the concept of forgiveness in traditional Māori society, this adds a completely new dimension and understanding of Hairoka’s position in *The Māori Merchant of Venice*. If he is to be true to his tribe, it is not in his power to either accept the (late) payment or remove the forfeit that Anatonio has agreed to. Hairoka has no option about seeking utu for the loss of mana when Anatonio cannot repay the bond. It is not only Hairoka’s personal mana that has been diminished but that of his tribe, and he and/or his tribe must seek utu. Patterson notes that “one is obliged to seek utu ‘for the sake of one’s kin’”.

An understanding of how Hairoka and his iwi’s mana has been damaged provides some background to the significant change that Selwyn made to the play at the end of the trial scene (4.1). After Shylock’s words “I am not well” (4.1. 392), “the low background sound of plangent violins enlist our pity” (Jackson 162) and the camera follows Hairoka as he leaves the court by way of the upstairs gallery. We then see Hairoka outside the building while the film’s opening speech (“Hath not a Jew eyes”) is continued in a voice-over of Hairoka’s thoughts:

If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge.  
If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by  
Christian example? Why, revenge! (3.1.53-56).

Rather than working to incite his anger (as I believe the words do in the context of 3.1) the words seem to be utilised here as a way of Shylock coming to terms with his loss and deciding on a course of action. Hearing these particular words at this critical moment in the film, at the moment of defeat, gives them great impact, especially the final word “utu” which is a key part of Māori kaupapa in retaining tribal mana. Thus the final words we hear from Hairoka (in the voice-over) include repetitions of the words Jew, Christian, wrong and revenge, all in close proximity to one another. We are left in no doubt that a Jew has been wronged by a Christian and revenge will be sought.

<sup>36</sup> Elsdon Best (1856-1931), ethnographer and writer.

<sup>37</sup> Walter Edward Gudgeon (1841-1920), historian, land court judge and colonial administrator.

This is in contrast to Shakespeare's play which leaves us with no suggestion that Shylock may try to seek revenge on Antonio but, on the contrary, presents Shylock as completely beaten and humiliated. The "blood-curdling offstage howl" of despair emitted by Laurence Olivier's Shylock<sup>38</sup> conveys a more usual (Eurocentric?) interpretation. The language used in Hairoka's final voice-over illustrates one of the underlying themes of the film, the way that words and actions sometimes carry specific cultural meanings and connotations which may not be apparent to outsiders.

The end of the film recalls this opening sequence, ending with another Jew, Hairoka's daughter Tiehika, in the third voice-over of the film, repeating the lines that end scene 2.5:

Haere ra, - Ki te kore tooku waimarie e hautokia,  
Tera e meinga,  
Ki ahau - he papa ka mahue:  
Ki a koe - he tamahine kua riro (Jones 28).

This is Jones' translation of

Farewell, and if my fortune be not crossed,  
I have a father, you a daughter, lost. (2.5.54-5)

As there are only three voice-overs in the film, all showing the inner thoughts of Jews, at this point the audience is likely to recall Hairoka's voice-over at the beginning of the film, before Hairoka agreed to the bond and his thoughts after the court scene. The film seems to be saying that perhaps the future for Tiehika is no brighter than her father's. Ending the film in this way is a change from Shakespeare's play which seems to leave Jessica on a more positive note, married to her love Lorenzo and in possession of her father's wealth. Although she has lost her father, she has not lost her fortune, which seems to be a rather empty kind of secular resolution, befitting the world of Venice that she has chosen to join by marrying Lorenzo. My reading of this sad ending in the film is that Tiehika's loss of religion and loss of family is conflated with the Māori loss of language, loss of mana, and loss of Māori spirituality, engendered by colonialism and Christianity which arrived at about the same time.

Selwyn has used Shakespeare's play to explore cultural differences between Pākehā and Māori and also to suggest similarities between Māori and Jew. He has used te reo Māori, tikanga (customs) and kaupapa to point to a different take on Shakespeare's play. The importance of culture and background is paramount in our understanding of the play's themes of prejudice and mercy.

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<sup>38</sup> In the 1970 production at the National Theatre, London (captured on video in 1973), Jackson, M. (2002), 162.

The play's ending is reshaped to show that further revenge may be attempted by Shylock in order to regain the mana he has lost. The concepts of mercy and revenge are treated from a different cultural viewpoint, one in which forgiveness and mercy are foreign concepts, perhaps learned only when Christianity colonised Aotearoa/New Zealand. *The Māori Merchant of Venice* gives us an opportunity to view the play through a different cultural lens in which whānau and mana are of greater significance than either money or mercy.

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