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The Geography of Difference in *The Merchant of Venice*

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1. Europe: the meaning of Venice

There was the Venetian myth as the expression of the Elizabethan ambition for London. As Gillies mentioned, Shakespeare found the Renaissance imperial myth of Venice just as alluring as the classical imperial myth of Rome. The image of the maritime world in *The Merchant of Venice* goes far beyond the kind of map presupposed by Antonios obsession with 'ports and piers and roads.' Shakespeare insists that Antonio's network of maritime trade is world-wide in the full Renaissance sense (Gillies 66). Shylock mentions that Antonio "hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies· a third / at Mexico, a fourth for England, and other ventures he / hath squandered abroad"

(1.3.17-21). The same catalogue, with the addition of India, Lisbon and 'Barbary' is later rehearsed by Bassanio when lamenting the apparently wholesale miscarriage of Antonios ventures:

> What, not one hit?
> From Tripolis, from Mexico, and England,
> From Lisbon, Barbary, and India,
> And not one vessel scape the dreadful touch
> Of merchant-marring rocks? (3.2.265-9)

It is quite implausible that Venetian ships would sail to 'Mexico,' 'India,' and the 'Indies.' These routes were oceanic. They were never the preserve of Venice, not even of Venice in its maritime heyday (about 1460). The discovery (and development) of the oceanic routes by the Iberians was the prime cause of the maritime decline of Venice in the early sixteenth century. As Gillies observed, what is suggested by the intrusion of this geography into a play about 'merchants of Venice,' is not the Venetian reality but Elizabethan ambitions for London (Gillies 66).

Shakespeare projects such ambitions in a Venetian fantasy because Venice represented the idea of a world maritime capital which leading Elizabethan merchants had in mind for London. For example, the ambiguity of the Elizabethan response to Venice is nicely caught in Thomas Coryat's description of St Mark's Square (Gillies 124). The Elizabethan tourist is ravished by a Babelesque tumult of impressions: magnificence of architecture, frequency of people, and confusion of tongues. What is here a hint of unease becomes stronger in Coryats account of visiting the Jewish ghetto and the synagogue. Coryat wants to be assured that Venice will be able to profit from barbarous ethnickes without compromising its integrity as a civilized and Christian state.

Self-consciously imperial and a market place of the world, Shakespeare's Venice invites barbarous intrusion through the sheer exorbitance of its maritime trading empire. In *the Merchant of Venice*, the contradiction is expressed in the opposition between Antonio and Shylock.

2. The other

Gerard Mercator's Atlas (refer to figure 14 in Gillies' *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*) shows the contrast between civilized Europeans and barbarous savages. The costumes of these figures are in fact derived from the Renaissance ethnographic tradition. To the left of the stage is a group of some eight figures, all of whom are attired in recognizably European clothing. To the right is a group of some nine figures, all of whom are attired in a variety of barbarous or savage garments. Some are almost naked, and some seem distinctly Negroid. Three wear feather head-dresses; two of whom are almost certainly American, while the other is perhaps East Indian. The turbaned figure is Turkish, while the goateed spear-holder would appear to be Mongolian.

All are distinctly reminiscent of the repertoire of exotics in the pages of seventeenth-century voyage publications, such as the *Great Voyages*, effectively a serialized encyclopaedia of discovery published by the de Bry family between 1590 and 1634. In the picture, the exotic characters are represented as barbarians and innately transgressive. All the figures are grouped in a way that suggests an encounter between the civilized Europeans on the left and the barbarians (Turkish and Mongolian) and savages (African, East Indian and American) on the right. The logic is that of the ancient poetic geography, the geography of difference that distinguished civilized from barbarous. The scene

might almost be emblematic of the drama of the exotic in Shakespeare. Expressing this cultural fantasy, in the *Merchant of Venice*, the contradiction between civilized Europeans and the barbarians is expressed in the opposition between Antonio and Shylock.

Antonio regards wealth as a means towards living virtuously, rather than an end in itself. Thus, he refuses to "lend nor borrow / upon advantage" (1.3. 68-9), and he is conspicuously generous, and redeems worthy debtors from the clutches of usury. Antonios detestation of usury expresses itself in an active persecution of Shylock. It is important to realize that more than mere race-hatred is involved here. Antonios exclusion of Shylock, both as usurer and as Jew, is as much a total social fact as his own idea of riches. Antonios position on usury and Jews is supported by the symbolism of the bond of flesh. This benighted contract is both a parody and a negation of the reciprocal bondedness presupposed by the ideal Venetian body-politic. It is a parody to the extent that it echoes the flesh and blood symbolism of other forms of kinship bonding in the play: bonds between parents and children, and bonds between husbands and wives. It is a negation to the extent that Venetian law is shown as allowing the most barbaric (cannibalism) over the civilized ideal notionally represented by the commonwealth itself.

An ancient Roman law on debt stipulated that debtors were to be "confined for sixty days," during which time they were to be produced before the Praetor on "three successive market-days" and "on the third day... capitally condemned or sent to be sold abroad" (Gillies 127). This barbaric statute on debt suggests the Aristotelian bias of Shakespeare's own conception of the Renaissance trading city. According to Gillies, that bias is underlined in the two legal caveats by which Portia denies Shylock's claim on Antonio. The first caveat ("Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less nor more / But a just pound of flesh";

4.1.322-3) symbolically denies the quasi-sacramental character of the flesh-bond as a rite of incorporation or kinship. Without blood, Shylock's pound of flesh cannot partake of the symbolism of the 'blood-covenant,' which is a sacramental assertion of kinship for the reason that "there can be no kinship except by blood and no bond except by kinship." Nor can it operate as 'flesh and blood' imagery operates elsewhere in the play, within a symbolic lexicon of kinship and marital incorporation. The second of Portia's caveats is also powerfully Aristotelian:

> It is enacted in the laws of Venice,
> If it be proved against an alien
> That by direct or indirect attempts
> He seek the life of any citizen,
> The party gainst which he doth contrive
> Shall seize one half his goods; the other half
> Comes to the privy coffer of the state,
> And the offenders life lies in the mercy
> Of the Duke only, gainst all other voice. (4.1.344-52)

The effect of this is to assert the absolute distinction between 'alien' and 'citizen,' which is blurred by the practice of granting 'commodity' to 'strangers'. Instead of the *debtor* suffering death, dismemberment or alienation, it is here the *creditor* (an intruding alien) who suffers a version of dismemberment or death. Shylocks ducats-as intrinsic to his flesh and blood as his daughter is-are here parceled out to Antonio and the Venetian state.

More than just a 'Jew,' Shylock is a 'stranger,' an 'alien' and an 'infidel'. His Jewish otherness has the pandemic quality and it is interesting to notice Shylock's mischievous facility with 'voices.' In the trial scene, Shylock is not merely embarrassing but also subversive:

> You have among you many a purchased slave
> Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,
> You use in abject and in slavish parts
> Because you bought them. Shall I say to you,
> 'Let them be free, marry them to your heirs.
> Why sweat they under burdens? Let their beds
> Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates
> Be seasoned with such viands.' You will answer,
> 'The slaves are ours.' So do I answer you. (4.1.89-96)

Shylock's facility with 'voices' allows him to conjure up an entire underclass of 'slaves' who are characteristically represented in the form of a hydra-headed rabble, the ultimate symbol of political confusion. Shylocks usury coincides with his barbarism. In Aristotles terms, the usurer shares the unnaturalness of the barbarian. Just as the barbarian is excluded from the natural body of the *Polis* and of the family, so is the usurer excluded from the 'economy' of the city-that household management by which the city is imagined as replicating the structure of household and family on a larger scale. In this sense, the confrontation between Antonio and Shylock amounts to a struggle over the political and economic heart of Venice. Like Christ chasing the money-changers from the temple, Antonio seeks to recover the sacred core of the city from the twin abominations of interest and intrusion, Shylocks notional unkindness is seriously complicated by Shakespeares decision to represent him as a householder, a family man and a man of impressive piety. In the midst of a lament for the loss of his ducats and his daughter, Shylock surprises us by the dignity of his outrage at Jessicas exchange of the betrothal ring that he "had ... of Leah when ... a bachelor"(3.1.111-13). In a play where rings function as master symbols of human bonding, the implication is clear. There is also a compelling suggestion

of Shylock having compassion for the wretched Gobbo. Shylock refers to Gobbo as "that fool of Hagar's offspring"(2.5.43), meaning Ishmael (the mixed-race son of Abraham who was banished in favor of his pure-blooded brother, Isaac) yet he also allows that "the patch is kind enough" (45). The very idea of an Ishmael being kind enough for the 'tribe'-conscious Shylock, says much for his deeper humanity. The significance of Shylock's being shown in the context of family and household is heightened by the fact that both these dimensions are missing in the portrait of Antonio. In Shakespeare, Antonio is effectively a friend rather than a kinsman, in which capacity he actually poses a danger to kinship in the form of the fundamental bond between Bassanio and Portia.

At a glance, *the Merchant of Venice* seems to inscribe and affirm an ideological calculus that fused the interests of the state and the assertions of a providentialist Christianity with the prerogatives of an increasingly capitalist marketplace. At the same time, however, the considerable residue of qualification that attends even the most compelling efforts to schematize the play in this way has made it no easy matter to say what the *Merchant* is about, and in the degree to which the play leaves us, for example, feeling troubled over the treatment of Shylock, or appear to blur the distinctions on which the polarities above depend, leading us, in effect, to ask with Portia, "Which is the merchant here? And which the Jew?" (4.1.170). We may wonder whether the *Merchant* invokes the ideologically sanctioned mythologies of the time only to question and subvert them. Deepening the involvement of the Merchant in the economic discourse of its time is the triumph the play enacts over usury in the figure of the usurer Shylock. That usury was at once a widespread practice and significant concern in Shakespeare's society, and that the resources of usurers were sought, not only by profligate young gentlemen and capital-hungry merchants, but by Parliament and the Queen herself, are facts well-established

and oft remarked (Moisan 192). The purpose of underscoring them here is to recall the degree to which a work like the Merchant, "indebted" as it is to its Italian sources, could still integrate these sources with more localized and contemporary materials both to create a fulcrum for the expression of communal concerns and frustrations, and also, and more interestingly, to create the illusion that whatever the socially and economically diverse elements of Shakespeare's audience did not have in common, they at least shared a common enemy in the form of usury and its personification.

In Shakespeare's time, usurers are considered to be heretics, willful choosers of the wrong course and, therefore, most deserving of unqualified reproach. "One saith well," Henry Smith observes, "that our Vsurers are Hereticks, because after manie admonitions yet they maintaine their errours, & persist in it obstinately as Papists do in Poperie" (1591,2) (Moisan 194). This association of usury with heresy and with choosing the wrong course is of "interest" on several counts. On the one hand, the connection between usury and heresy might suggest that the rhetoric was in place by which the usurer could be singled out, not simply as an economic scoundrel and renegade, but as an enemy of God and, therefore, a threat to the state and our recognition of this possibility deepens our perception of the audiences perception of Shylock. On the other hand, the connection of usury with choosing enables us to see a link between Shylock and the unhappy choosers of the casket scenes and suggests a sense in which both elements of the rather exotic source tradition behind the *Merchant*, both the flesh-bond and the caskets stories, could be said to respond to the domestic experience and economic concerns of Shakespeares audience.

However, usury and trade existed in a relationship that was far more ambiguous than anti-usury tracts might imply, indeed, a relationship that might be said to have been more symbiotic than inimical. This embarrassing

interrelationship is a fact that not even avowedly anti-usury discourses can fully suppress. So it is that we hear the author of *The Death of Usury* labor to give the most moral, anti-usury, reading to the law enacted by Elizabeth which voided the ban imposed by Edward VI upon the practice of usury, and which formally reinstated 10 per cent as the maximum interest rate (Moisan 196). The law, the author maintains, could not be construed as condoning usury, but, instead, "leaves it after a sort to the curtesie and conscience of the borrower"-rather as if interest payments were to be regarded as something no more coercive than tipping! Why did Elizabeth enact this statute if it was not the intent of her government to encourage the practice of usury? The blame for whatever is wrong with the system, is left for the usurer to absorb, whose function is rather that of the scapegoat. He embodies the enemy within that must be exorcised by being externalized and, literally, alienated. What better figure to fill this role than the Jew, whose vices can be familiarized. Shakespeares Shylock is an appropriate focus for the domestic anxieties of Shakespeare's audience.

3. Female Body as Territory

For Morocco and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia is represented as the four-cornered classical world. To Morocco who recognizes his identity as a black man and mentions his skin color from the beginning of the first meeting (Mislike me not for my complexion, The shadowed livery of the burnished sun, To whom I am a neighbour and near bred), Portia is the essence of desirable partner and the focus of a universal pilgrimage.

..... All the world desires her.
From the four corners of the earth they come
To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing saint.
The Hyrcanian deserts and the vast wilds
Of wide Arabia are as throughfares now
For princes to come view fair Portia.
The watery kingdom, whose ambitious head
Spits in the face of heaven, is no bar
To stop the foreign spirits, but they come
As o'er a brook to see fair Portia. (2.7. 38-47)

Morocco is to be a perfect example of this ethnic migration of foreign spirits, which seems both medieval pilgrimage and barbarian invasion. Bassanio also imagines Portia as the centre of universal desire.

Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued
To Cato's daughter, Brutu's Portia;
Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
For the four winds blow in from every coast
Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece.
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchis strand,
And many Jasons come in quest of her. (1.1.165-72)

The Venetian Bassanio has a different perspective on the four-cornered world from the foreign Morocco. Here, the direction of the quest is reversed(Gillies 67). Bassanio is a second Jason, voyaging *outwards* from an imagined world-centre to an imagined world-rim. The poetic geography of Portia is governed by the classical theme of limits: limits of geography, of desire, of marriage-ability and of transgression. As I mentioned in section 2, the symbolic

contrast between Bassanio and Morocco as well as the contrast between Antonio and Shylock is sharply represented in Mercators first volume of the 1636 edition of the Atlas (figure 1). The picture suggests an encounter between the civilized Europeans on the left and the barbarians (Turkish and Mongolian) and savages (African, East Indian and American) on the right. The logic is just that of the ancient poetic geography, the geography of difference that distinguishes civilized from barbarous. Morocco in the *Merchant of Venice* is imagined in terms of polluting sexual contact with a European partner. He is posed in terms of a scenario of miscegenation. As in the ancient poetic geography, all Shakespearean moors combine a generic exoticism or exteriority with an inherent transgressiveness. Their transgressiveness is less a matter of immorality than of structure. Aaron in Titus Andronicus, Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*, Othello, Cleopatra, and the king of Tunis who got married to Claribel in *The Tempest,* all are represented in a scenario of miscegenation. The blackness or tawniness of the moor is intimately related to this scenario. Like their colour, the exteriority of moors also has ethical significance. All Shakespeares moors are associated with a generically outlandish geography; all are exotic in the comprehensive Elizabethan sense of being outlandish, barbarous, strange, uncouth. None has any real existence independent of their transgressiveness of those margins.

Next, I would like to examine the issue of equality or partnership within marriage. A number of clerics and moralists do stress the desirability of intelligent give-and-take between man and woman within marriage. Such give-and-take, however, is premised on what is universally regarded as a self-evident natural inferiority of the female of the species. The standard scientific account of this inferiority in the period is still that which is found in Aristotle (Maclean 42), the standard authority on natural scientific fact

throughout the seventeenth century:

> The female is less spirited than the male.. softer in disposition, more mischievous, less simple, more impulsive, and more attentive to the nurture of the young.... Woman is more compassionate than man, more easily moved to tears, at the same time more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and strike.

A compassionate and thoughtful approach to womans place in marriage therefore incorporates some measured recognition of the woman's need to be guided by her husband, or in other words, a need for the willing submission of the wife to her husbands authority. Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice*, partake of the chaste goddess/fierce warrior quality which celebrates and contains female achievement, and which is ultimately found wanting alongside the richer qualities of fulfilled womanhood-wifehood and motherhood. As Lisa Jardine mentioned, in spite of the wider range of opportunities which became available to some women during the Renaissance and Reformation, attitudes towards women did not perceptibly change (Jardine 60). For example, Portia's abdication of her hereditary independence to Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice* projects women's traditional roles.

> You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
> Such as I am. Though for myself alone
> I would not be ambitious in my wish
> To wish myself much better, yet for you
> I would be trebled twenty times myself,
> A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich,
> That only to stand high in your account
> I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,

> Exceed account, But the full sum of me
> Is sum of something which, to term in gross,
> Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd
> Happy in this, she is not yet so old
> But she may learn; happier than this,
> She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
> Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit
> Commits itself to yours to be directed,
> As from her lord, her governor, her king.
> Myself and what is mine to you and yours
> Is now converted. But now I was the lord
> Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
> Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
> This house, these servants, and this same myself,
> Are yours—my lord's. (3.2. 149-72)

She supports the empty fiction that husbands are of their essence, economically superior to their wives, when she abdicates her rank and status in favour of Bassanio. The speech attempts actually to distort the perceived circumstance (the impoverished Bassanio fortune-hunting the hand of the wealthy lady by means of folkloristic solving of a riddle) into a 'dutiful' marital relationship. Here is a financial balance sheet, 'Too little payment for so great a debt.' Portia converts her hard financial currency into 'virtues, beauties, livings, friends.' Meanwhile the 'full sum of her' (her putative marital worth in the moral sphere) is fraught with disadvantages (unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd) all of which subsequently turn out to be fictions when Portia pleads as an accomplished advocate later in the play. However, she engineers these disadvantages into total capitulation: Bassanio can claim a legitimate 'taming' of the independent woman, despite lack of means or real claim, because Portia has rhetorically contrived it.

However, the legal knowledge she deploys to save Antonio modulates Portia's initial obedient conformity with the patriarchal demands on her, in her position as female heir, into something close to unruliness. Portia's saving intervention is followed by a piece of folk-tale misrule: in her disguise as the young lawyer Balthazar, she persuades Bassanio to give up to her the betrothal ring he promised never to part with, while her maid Nerissa, disguised as a clerk, similarly dupes her husband Gratiano into giving up his ring. As Jardine points out(Jardine, *Cultural Confusion* 58), returning to Belmont, the two men find themselves severely compromised by the loss of their ring pledges, and the sorting out of the circulating rings fails to dislodge the two women convincingly from their position 'on top'. Portia pledges with the gift of a ring; "I give them with this ring, Which when you part from, lose, or give away, Let it presage the ruin of your love, And be my vantage to exclaim on you." The formality of this pledge befits the fortune she brings to the marriage, which carries its own contractual obligations and undertakings. If Bassanio doesn't keep his promise, she will be entitled to exclaim, to renounce her claim, to break the betrothal, to renounce the contract drawn up. Portia's maid Nerissa's betrothal ring is a traditional love-token- a pledge of sexual fidelity, in another social class: "For all the world like cutler's poetry/Upon a knife, 'Love me, and leave me not'". The terms of that bond are called into question by a piece of sophistry, when the two betrothed men are prevailed upon to give up their rings to misrule-to the very women who gave them, but now in breeches, unruly, free of speech. Through the deliberate 'ring trick', Bassanio and Gratiano face the consequences of having parted with their betrothal rings. Portia and Nerissa solemnly announce themselves contracted as sexual partners to the doctor and his clerk; and when the rings are produced as renewed pledges by Nerissa and Portia themselves, the two women repeat their threat of sexual infidelity to their

husbands.

> Bassanio. By heaven[this ring] is the same Igave the doctor!
> Portia. I had it of him: pardon me Bassanio, For by this ring the doctor lay with me.
> Nerissa. And pardon me my gentle Gratiano, For that same scrubbed boy (the doctor's clerk) In lieu of this, last night did lie with me.
> Gratiano. Why this is like the mending of Highways. In summer where the ways are fair enough! What, are we cuckolds ere we have deserv'd it? (5.1.257-65)

As Jardine suggests, we have a reminder that Portia's learning is potentially translatable into knowingness into the sexual and as such has to be bridled by a vigilant husband, even if he depends upon her permanently for financial support (Jardine, *Cultural Confusion* 60). The poetic geography of Portia is governed by the classical theme of limits: limits of geography, of desire, of marriage-ability and of transgression. From the viewpoint of Bassanio, the female body is recognized as a land. Portia is represented as the four-cornered classical world. To Morocco who recognizes his identity as a black man and mentions his skin color from the beginning of the first meeting (Mislike me not for my complexion, The shadowed livery of the burnished sun, To whom I am a neighbour and near bred), Portia is the essence of desirable partner and the focus of a universal pilgrimage. To Morocco and Bassanio, the female body is represented as a desirable locus for the male expansionism and their financial fulfillment in the play.

However, Portia is not satisfied with her position as the passive woman to be wooed and as mere passive intermediary in the selection of an appropriate male perpetuator of the family line. Portia's 2 intercedings show her active role

and her social status as the Lady, the woman of independent means, the heiress. The first interceding is operated in the selection of her partner and the second one is when she saves her betrothed Bassanio's friend, Antonio. In the casket scene, as long as she primarily conceives of herself as a daughter, she never experiences herself as powerful, never owns her power, never seriously questions the necessity of submitting to her father's dictates. But the very fact that Portia's dialogue with Nerissa takes place at all, and the way she problematises her dilemma, establishes that her compliance is a matter of choice.

The second interceding is deployed when she saves Antonio and it is made in the strictly financial terms appropriate to her wealthpower. When Bassanio confesses that 'he was worse than nothing, for he has engaged himself to a dear friend, and engaged his friend to his mere enemy to feed his means'(3.2.251-62), she takes it upon herself to intercede legally and independently. Portia's expertise in the lawcourt scene comes from her cousin, the lawyer Bellario, although the greatness of learning is her own. Her power is her rank-power over Bassanio, (on his own admission, the penniless powerless suitor for her hand), Antonio and Lorenzo, all of whom are her social and financial inferiors, despite their gender superiority. As Jardine points out, for all of them her superior knowledge proves the instrument of good fortune; she announces the recovery of Antonio's lost ships, restoring his lost fortune; while Nerissa presents to Lorenzo, who has eloped with Shylock's daughter, Jessica, a deed of gift, entitling the couple to all Shylock's goods on his death (Jardine 61). In spite of her legitimate entitlement to rule, it is the sexual subordination of women that closes the play. The sexual theme is deployed by means of the Gratiano/Nerissa couple and a final lewd pun on the woman's 'ring': "But were the day come, I should wish it dark/ Till I were couching with the doctor's clerk. / Well, while I live, I'll fear no other thing/ So sore, as keeping safe Nerissa's

ring" (5.1.304-7). In the play, there are contradictory feelings about the value of education and the forwardness of female articulateness in the treatises and manuals of the period. The noble action of Portia, saving Antonio, also mobilizes a set of expectations of knowingness, of sexual unruliness and ungovernability. Portia acts with authority, and she retains full control of her financial affairs. Yet it is the husbands ownership and control of his wife's 'ring' that closes the play. In addition, the play defuses the tensions the rule of woman creates, in the witty verbal play on the theme of potential cuckoldry of the play's close. In this cultural confusion in the early modern attitudes towards the learned woman, it is interesting to note that the female body is categorized as a territory, which should be safely contained and subordinated to the male ownership.

4. Conclusion

In the first part, it is examined that Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* shows Venetian myth as the expression of the Elizabethan ambition for London. Shakespeare found the Renaissance imperial myth of Venice just as alluring as the classical imperial myth of Rome. The image of the maritime world in *The Merchant of Venice* goes far beyond the kind of map presupposed by Antonios obsession with 'ports and piers and roads.' Antonio's network of maritime trade is world-wide in the full Renaissance sense. What is suggested here is not the Venetian reality but Elizabethan ambitions for London. Shakespeare projects such ambitions in a Venetian fantasy because Venice represented the idea of a world maritime capital which leading Elizabethan merchants had in mind for London.

In the second part, the focus of the analysis is on the representation of the exotic characters as barbarians and innately transgressive. Venice will be able

to profit from barbarous people without compromising its integrity as a civilized and Christian state. Self-consciously imperial and a market place of the world, Shakespeare's Venice invites barbarous intrusion through the sheer exorbitance of its maritime trading empire. In *the Merchant of Venice*, the contradiction is expressed in the opposition between Antonio and Shylock. At a glance, *the Merchant of Venice* seems to inscribe and affirm an ideological calculus that fused the interests of the state and the assertions of a providentialist Christianity with the prerogatives of an increasingly capitalist marketplace. At the same time, however, the considerable residue of qualification that attends even the most compelling efforts to schematize the play in this way has made it no easy matter to say what the *Merchant* is about, and in the degree to which the play leaves us, for example, feeling troubled over the treatment of Shylock, or appear to blur the distinctions on which the polarities above depend.

Finally, it is problematized that the female body is categorized as a territory, which should be safely contained and subordinated to the male ownership. For Morocco and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia is represented as the four-cornered classical world. Moreover, in spite of Portia's legitimate entitlement to rule, it is the sexual subordination of women that closes the play. The sexual theme is deployed by means of the Gratiano/Nerissa couple and a final lewd pun on the woman's 'ring': In the play, there are contradictory feelings about the value of education and the forwardness of female articulateness. The noble action of Portia, saving Antonio, also mobilizes a set of expectations of knowingness, of sexual unruliness and ungovernability. Portia acts with authority, and she retains full control of her financial affairs. Yet it is the husband's ownership and control of his wifes 'ring' that closes the play. In addition, the play defuses the tensions the rule of woman creates, in the witty verbal play on the theme of potential cuckoldry of the play's close. In this

cultural confusion in the early modern attitudes towards the learned woman, it is interesting to note that the female body is categorized as a territory, which should be safely contained and subordinated to the male ownership.

주제어: 윌리엄 셰익스피어, 베니스의 상인, 해상무역과 런던신화, 타자로서의 샤일록, 영역으로서의 여성의 몸

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The Geography of Difference in *The Merchant of Venice*

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Abstract

The location of Shakespeares *The Merchant of Venice* is based on the Venetian myth which expressed the Elizabethan ambition for London. The Renaissance imperial myth of Venice seems just as alluring as the classical imperial myth of Rome. The image of the maritime world in *The Merchant of Venice* is not the Venetian reality but Elizabethan ambitions for London. Shakespeare projects such ambitions in a Venetian fantasy because Venice represented the idea of a world maritime capital which leading Elizabethan merchants had in mind for London. In this context, *The Merchant of Venice* seems to inscribe and affirm an ideological calculus that fused the interests of the state and the assertions of a providentialist Christianity with the prerogatives of an increasingly capitalist marketplace. Interestingly, London like Venice is expected to profit from barbarous people without compromising its integrity as a civilized and Christian state. However, the representation of Shylock and his usury in the play reveals to us the contradictory state and the treatment of Shylock appear to blur the distinctions on which the polarities depend, leading us, in effect, to ask with Portia, “Which is the merchant here? And which the Jew?”

In addition, the efforts to categorize the female body as a territory by Bassanio and Morocco are examined in this cultural context. In the play, there are contradictory feelings about the value of education and the forwardness of female articulateness. Portia acts with authority, and she retains full control of her financial affairs. Yet it is the husbands ownership and control of his wife’s ‘ring’ that closes the play. This consummation foregrounds the cultural context

of the period which inscribes the ideology that the female body is territory which should be safely contained and subordinated to the male ownership.

Key Words

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. Maritime Capital and London Myth, Shylock as the Other, Female body as territory