

## SBReview\_14:

*The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Drakakis. The Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series (London: Methuen Drama, 2010). pp. xx + 460. \$100; \$17 pb.

Reviewed by Jay L. Halio, Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Delaware.

John Drakakis has labored long and hard to deliver another compendious edition for the new, i.e., third series of the Arden Shakespeare. Like the other Arden 3s, it has a long introduction; a heavily annotated, modernized text; a selected collation (now produced below, not above, the commentary); several appendices preceded by ten pages of "longer notes"; a list of references and abbreviations (which does double duty as a bibliography), and a detailed index. It competes with somewhat comparable editions in the New Cambridge Shakespeare and the Oxford Shakespeare. (In the interests of full disclosure, let me state here that I am the editor of the latter.)

One is sometimes asked, why do we need so many Shakespeare editions? The simplest and shortest answer is that no two editions are entirely alike. Each editor brings something new or at least different to the work. The reader pays his money and takes his choice, as the saying goes. But on what basis should the buyer or the reader make a choice? A question to be asked.

Much depends on the use to which the edition will be put. I shall address myself here only to those who may be interested in a full scholarly edition, one suitable for other scholars or for advanced undergraduates, as opposed to a more selective edition, however scholarly (like the Folger and Bantam editions), suitable for schools and some undergraduate courses. All three of the editions mentioned—Cambridge, Oxford, and Arden 3—fall into the first named class. All are heavily freighted with the best scholarship available at the time of publication, though none can claim to be complete. Only the New Variorum Shakespeare editions come anywhere close to making that claim, and then only in a relative sense. Given the amount of Shakespeare scholarship produced in any given year, "complete" will always be a relative term.

In his Introduction, Drakakis begins by citing Harold Bloom's contention that *The Merchant of Venice* is "a profoundly anti-Semitic work," a criticism to which I take strong exception, although Drakakis does not. In fact, elsewhere he refers to the play as "racist" (p. 30) and does little to extenuate that criticism. Granted, the play does contain anti-Semitism, but is it itself anti-Semitic? Here I agree with John Barton and others who have directed *The Merchant of Venice* that despite its

anti-Semitic characters who, like Graziano, spew virulent racist comments, the action of the play as it unfolds does not promote anti-Semitism.

The issue centers directly upon the character of Shylock. If he is made to appear as a typical Jew, a stereotype of the villainous Hebrew, such as Marlowe's Barabbas is in *The Jew of Malta*, then clearly the play promotes anti-Semitic attitudes and reactions. But the play does not, I believe, support this contention. Without question, Shylock is a bad man and a bad Jew. Whatever compels him to revenge himself upon Antonio, nothing justifies his murderous intent. Shakespeare makes this quite clear, not only in Portia's eloquent speeches on mercy. But even before that, Shylock's entrance in act 4, scene 1, speaks volumes about how he is regarded by his fellow Jews. If Tubal is typical, note that neither he nor any other Jew appears with Shylock as he enters the Duke's court. Shakespeare's stage direction is simply "*Enter Shylock.*"

But Drakakis exercises the editor's privilege to alter that significant stage direction. His edition reads: "*Enter Shylock [the Jew].*" In fact, throughout his edition, Drakakis alters the speech ascription for Shylock—traditional in all modern editions since Nicholas Rowe's in 1709—to simply "*Jew.*" None of the early editions of the play—Quarto 1 (1600), Quarto 2 (1619, falsely dated 1600), the First Folio (1623)—use this speech heading throughout the text, although occasionally it does appear. But a quick reference to the chart in the appendix to my edition of the speech headings in all three editions shows that while none of the editions is altogether consistent either with itself or with each other, the preponderance of speech headings, and therefore the preferred one, is "*Shylock*" or some abbreviation of the name. (See my discussion on p. 89, which Drakakis overlooks, like almost everything else in my edition and the Textual Companion to the Oxford *Complete Works* edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor.)

Unfortunately, "Jew" generally is not a neutral term, though Drakakis may justify its use on the basis of its functionality (see his essay published elsewhere) and hope its pejorative connotations do not predominate. To use this term throughout his edition for not only speech headings but also stage directions where Shylock appears, however, must make his edition appear more racist than I can believe the editor intends. But there it is.

That is not the only innovation Drakakis makes in speech headings. I note that he alters Lancelot's traditional family name, "Gobbo," to Giobbe, used also for his father. He derives this innovation from the spelling in Q1, "Iobbe" and "Jobbe" (2.2.3-5), and the Folio's consistent use of

it. In his long note following the list of dramatis personae, he explains that it comes from the Italian name for Job, and he cites the parallels from the Old Testament, such as Job's blindness, which John Dover Wilson long ago identified. While I see no advantage to using Giobbe over the traditional (and more humorous sounding) Gobbo, I cannot say that the change does any great harm—unlike Drakakis's preference for "Jew" over "Shylock."

Regarding the name "Shylock," I am grateful to Drakakis for pointing me to Stephen Orgel's essay, "Imagining Shylock," which argues that the name is not of biblical derivation, but an English name. Orgel traces the name "Shylok" to Englishmen in Hoo, Sussex, as early as the fifteenth century. (This essay came out well after my edition, or I certainly would have noted it, as Drakakis does.) Nevertheless, given many of the other biblical references from the Old Testament, including the names Tubal, Leah, and Chus (or Cush), Shakespeare could have been reminded of Shelah, or Shelach, Shem's grandson, and then Anglicized it. All the names derive from descendants of Noah, including Jessica, or Iscah, although Orgel disputes that derivation as well.

Drakakis is at his best in the Introduction in the section he calls "The Historie of the Merchant of Venice" (pp. 51-63). There he tackles another vexed issue among critics and stage directors: the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio. Is it a homosexual one, latent or otherwise? In some recent productions, it is made to seem so, though there is scant evidence in Shakespeare's text to warrant it. As Drakakis says, "The love that Antonio and Bassanio share is mutual, but the power of wealth to subjugate also accompanies, but cannot simply be reduced to, the libidinous drive for sexual satisfaction" (p. 55). He goes on to explain how the tensions that afflict Antonio account for his unease as expressed in the first line of the play. Later on he astutely observes what might be regarded as a "symbolic revision" of the New Testament crucifixion narrative, wherein the Christ-like Antonio is released and his role as sacrificial victim is transferred to "the felon" Shylock (p. 58). On the whole, Drakakis's analysis of the structural and thematic development of *The Merchant of Venice* is excellent, if somewhat encumbered with current critical jargon. He rightly emphasizes that the play is a comedy, "even though we may be uncomfortable with some of the laughter the comic action generates" (p. 49).

Drakakis offers a very full stage history of the play in his Introduction (pp. 112-59), depending heavily upon the work of Charles Edelman (whose book unaccountably does not appear in the bibliographical list of works cited), John Gross, and others. I have only spot-checked the

commentary notes, and they seem quite ample as well as informative. The first two of the three appendices have charts relating to the casting of the play and type shortages in the production of Q1, while Appendix 3 concerns the "instabilities" of Q1 (including discussion of the copy for Q2 and F), and editorial practice.