

and hope that leaves one with an abiding sense of satisfaction.

ESTHER FIGUEROA
Juniroa Productions, Inc.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *See interview with The Whale Rider author Witi Ihimaera in this issue, 358–366.*

* * *

Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Weniti, The Māori Merchant of Venice, 158 minutes, 35 mm film, color, 2002. In Māori with English subtitles. Director: Don C Selwyn; producers: Ruth Kaupua-Panapa, Don C Selwyn, He Taonga Films. <<http://www.maorimerchantofvenice.com>> Distributed by He Taonga Films, Auckland, New Zealand. Available in VHS and Region 3 DVD formats. VHS NZ\$60; DVD NZ\$30.

There is a moment in *The Māori Merchant of Venice* when the oppression experienced by the Jewish and the Māori people is shown to overlap in a way that explains in part why this movie was made. It occurs in the scene where Shylock gets Antonio to pledge a pound of his own flesh as collateral against a loan from the Jewish moneylender. The setting for this scene is an art gallery, part of the Venetian marketplace as filmed in Auckland, and the paintings on the walls present images of “the sacking and burning of the Maori Parihaka community by the government in the 19th century” (film website media kit, 41). All the paintings are by the contemporary artist Selwyn Muru, and as the scene ends the camera reveals the

artist himself working on a large canvas across which is scrawled the word “holocaust.” The nineteenth-century decimation of the Māori people is likened in this moment to the Nazi slaughter of the Jews, and for New Zealand audiences that very comparison occasioned a recent controversy when a politician, Tariana Turia, applied the word “holocaust” to what happened to the Māori people (Rapata Wiri, pers comm, Oct and Nov 2002). This moment in the film reveals Shylock’s motivations in his bond with the Christian merchant. He wants justice, compensation, a restoration of mana for personal and collective suffering. In a 2001 editorial in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* (52, vi), Michael Neill says that this Māori translation of *The Merchant of Venice* differs from Shakespeare’s play “not just in its linguistic medium but in the fact that it presupposes an audience that will sympathize with the Jew as representative of an oppressed minority.” According to Rapata Wiri, by as early as 1868 the Māori people had already likened themselves to the Jews who were exiled in Egypt and trying to regain their promised land (pers comm, Nov 2002). While post-World War II productions of *The Merchant of Venice* have often elicited more sympathy for Shylock than ever before, this production is different: it is performed by Māori actors entirely in the Māori language (with subtitles in contemporary English); was shot in Aotearoa New Zealand; and incorporates elements of Māori culture into all of its scenes, especially those set in Portia’s home, Belmont, which becomes an imaginary Māori king-

dom with elements of a spirit world. Portia's four rejected suitors are the only Pākehā (Europeans) in the film.

This is the first full-length feature film ever made in the Māori language and the first Shakespeare film produced in New Zealand. After the New Zealand Film Commission rejected ten applications for funding over as many years, the film was made with the support of Te Mangai Paho, the state funding body for Māori language film and television projects. Don C Selwyn, its director, is described in the film's online media kit as having had a lifelong "commitment to the revitalization of the Maori language," and being "a leading proponent of Maori drama, performed in both Maori and English," as well as "a prime mover in encouraging respect for Maori viewpoints and culture in mainstream New Zealand film and television drama." Selwyn was one of the founding members of the New Zealand Maori Theatre Trust, which aimed to "extend opportunities for Maori performers in Maori opera and theatre." From 1984 to 1990 he ran "a film and television training course called He Taonga I Tawhiti (Gifts from Afar) for Maori and Pacific people to give them the technical skills to enable them to tell their own stories. 120 people went through the course" (film website media kit, 11, 8, 37, 38). Selwyn directed a stage production of *The Merchant of Venice* in Māori as part of the 1990 Koanga Festival in Auckland; afterwards he spent years seeking funding for the film as well as operating He Taonga Films, which provides training for Māori and Pacific filmmakers. The company

has now made over fifteen dramatic productions in English and Māori, with more in development. Selwyn is a New Zealand Māori of Ngāti Kuri and Te Aupouri descent who grew up on New Zealand's North Island. He has been a schoolteacher; a Shakespearean actor who played the roles of Oberon, Caesar, Antony, Othello, and Shylock; and a theater director as well as a film director and producer.

This Māori translation of Shakespeare's play was prepared in 1945 by Dr Pei Te Hurinui Jones, who also translated *Julius Caesar* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The language Jones used for this translation was a "formal, poetic, classical Maori. . . . Those competent to judge regard this version as of great beauty." Its "measured dignity" in the set speeches creates an "effect [that] is almost operatic at times" (MacDonald Jackson, "All Our Tribe," *Landfall* 204 [Nov 2002], 156). Waihoroi Shortland, whose performance of Shylock deserves all the acclaim it has received, says that the Māori in this film is "a language you don't hear that often. . . . The poetical element is back inside it, so I believe this film will really lift our language" (film website media kit, 17). Those involved in the production also worked on other films that have introduced the world to Māori culture. Selwyn and Ruth Kaupua-Panapa were involved in casting for *Once Were Warriors* (1995), and that movie was designed by this film's designer, Guy Moana, whose work also appeared in the carvings and designs of *Whale Rider* (2003). Shortland worked as cultural advisor and Māori dialogue writer on Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993).

The film has traveled all over Aotearoa and is being used for educational purposes, mobilizing the text of Shakespeare in the interests of Māori language and culture. An article entitled “Te Reo” on the Māori language website (*Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori*) indicates that, according to the latest figures, “it is estimated that some 10,000 New Zealanders, almost all of Māori descent, are in the very high, medium high, and high range of speakers of Māori, while perhaps a further 153,000–163,000 speak or understand the language to some extent.” But “the ability to converse in Māori was highest among those aged 60 years and over and lowest among those aged 25–29 years (21 percent)” <http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/issues_e/reo/index.shtml>. So the film is especially trying to revitalize language use among those in the younger age group. In a 2002 article called “Shakespeare in the Settlers’ House,” Mark Houlihan reports that “reactions from Maori teachers suggest it will be of great use to them, as the most extended exercise yet in filming performers speaking Maori. . . . And yet,” he continues, “it seems part of the scandal of Shakespeare in settler colonies like ours that it took Shakespeare to provide the occasion for the first full-length Maori film. And although the film deploys Shakespearean glamour to gain an audience, it seems transfixed by that glamour as well” (*Journal of New Zealand Literature* 20, 121).

The politics of Shakespeare’s play have also been questioned because of Shylock’s forced conversion, which is part of his punishment for what Por-

tia characterizes as his having sought the life of a citizen of Venice, and for what he characterizes as justice. Using Venetian law, Portia interprets Shylock’s “justice” in this story as a death threat, and it is through her judgment that Shylock loses not only his fortune and his means of making a living, but also his religious and cultural identity. The Christians *appear* to exercise mercy when the Duke spares Shylock’s life and distributes his wealth to Antonio and to the state. And Antonio *appears* to be merciful when he allows Shylock to retain half of his wealth and to hold the other half in trust for his daughter Jessica and her husband. But this is mercy with a vengeance, and it blurs the difference between the Jewish demand for justice and the Christian claims for mercy that the play sets up and then disrupts. It is also Antonio, the merchant of Venice, who requires that, for his supposed “mercy,” Shylock become a Christian and leave his wealth to his now Christian daughter and her husband. The Jew’s cultural heritage is effectively obliterated by these acts of Christian “charity.” In a 1970 production of this play at the National Theatre in London, Laurence Olivier’s Shylock responded in pain to this judgment with “a blood-curdling offstage howl” that has echoed through the years in subsequent productions (Jackson 2002, 8).

In *The Māori Merchant of Venice*, when Shylock shuffles off in defeat, the Jews and Christians—all Māori in this production—turn to watch him, while his earlier lines about retributive justice are taken up again in voice-over: “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!" And yet these are not the actual words in the voice-over, because it is in Māori: Shylock's question is asked in the language and context of Māori culture. Vilsoni Hereniko has observed that Portia's legal interpretations are "reminiscent of the court battles between Māori political activists and the New Zealand government over differing interpretations of key clauses about land ownership as expressed in the Treaty of Waitangi" ("Indigenizing the Camera: *Then There Were None* and *The Māori Merchant of Venice*." Paper delivered at the "Diversity Conference 2003" held at the East-West Center, Honolulu, 13–16 Feb 2003). The play's questions about what constitutes justice are reactivated by this film in the context of the contemporary Pacific.

So does this film mobilize Shakespeare in the interests of not only Māori language but also demands for cultural justice in Aotearoa? Can those two projects be separated? How does it read amid the different groups associated with the advancement of Māori politics and culture? Are they divided in ways analogous to the Jews advocating revenge and the Christians proposing, or pretending, forgiveness? These questions can only be answered by those with a much deeper knowledge of Māori culture than I have. However, I can say that I was more concerned about the "scandal" that the first feature film in Māori was based on a text by Shakespeare before I saw the film than after viewing it several times. There is every indication that great care has been taken in

this representation of an indigenous heritage: the film is infused with the beauty and dignity of Māori culture. Its slow pacing engenders a deep respect for the people it represents, allows time for one to take in the cultural artifacts and elaborate costumes featured here, and enables viewers to experience the sound as well as the sense of the language. In the context of other films that have been produced in New Zealand, such as *The Piano*, *Once Were Warriors*, and *Whale Rider*, this film's derivative narrative in a sense shields it from being taken as a direct representation of contemporary Māori experience. Hence the concerns expressed about those other films becoming means for disseminating negative constructions of Māori people apply much less to this one; on the contrary, the anachronistic setting and upper-class context of the Shakespearean play suit the elevated language and the heightened presentational style. The movie appropriates the play to present a formal, poetic, and dignified version of Māori culture. It takes a narrative that is complicit with the injustices of religious and cultural colonialism and retells it in ways that support decolonization by promoting the recovery of an indigenous cultural heritage.

The first showing of *Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Weniti* beyond Aotearoa occurred in Honolulu as part of the Hawai'i International Film Festival and in conjunction with the 2002 University of Hawai'i Center for Pacific Islands Studies conference on "Myths, Terrorism, and Justice: Themes in Asian and Pacific Literature and Film." By the end of the festival the film had received the

Blockbuster Video Audience Award for the Best Feature Film, based on votes from members of the Honolulu audience. The film's first screening at the Honolulu Academy of Arts on 6 November 2002 was preceded by an elaborate protocol that lasted more than thirty minutes, in which students from the Halau Ku Mana welcomed the Māori actors, producer, and director. Flowers, chants, songs, and speeches were exchanged on both sides, affirming the connections between the native Hawaiians and the Māori performers and filmmakers. The audience included Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, participants in the conference, and members of the general public. After we watched the film, its director, Don Selwyn, said in effect to those in the audience, "You can do this too. You can make your own movies, with native Hawaiian actors using your own language." The response from many in the audience suggested that this was an important and moving moment. As they have done with their immersion schools, the Māori people may be helping others in the Pacific find ways to represent their cultures and revision their futures. While I hope and believe that there will be many more stories and films arising directly from the experiences of peoples native to the Pacific, I cannot think of a better use of the work of that western bard of Avon than remaking his texts as a means to reclaim indigenous cultures.

VALERIE WAYNE

University of Hawai'i, Mānoa

* * *

Kainga Tahi Kainga Rua: New Work on Banaba, by Brett Graham. Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, 5 July–15 August 2003.

Brett Graham's installation at the Adam Art Gallery was one of the most powerful and affecting artistic statements on the nature of Pacific history and identity I have seen. The work may be cited as an example of what Andreas Huyssen has recently called "memory sculpture"—work that attempts, in an age of cyber-capitalism and media-induced amnesia, to evoke more cogent and embodied reflections on the present and the past ("Sculpture, Materiality, and Memory in an Age of Amnesia," in *Displacements*, Art Gallery of Ontario exhibition catalog, 1998). Such work also focuses on the locality and specificity of historical experience. Reversing modernism's investment in the universality of aesthetic experience, it seeks to embed aesthetic subjectivity in narratives of particular times and places. These are also, importantly, private works. They are not public monuments or national memorials; they have no official or representative status (however much they might recall such functions). As mnemonic prompts, they address the individual gallery-goer in a personal reverie about the relationship between the present and the past.

Kainga Tahi Kainga Rua (First Home, Second Home) is an installation about the modern history of Banaba, or "Ocean Island." It was produced as a collaboration between contemporary Māori artist Brett Graham and Banaban academic