Love and Money: Gaspar Aguilar's *El mercader amante* and William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*

Amor y dinero: *El mercader amante* de Gaspar Aguilar y *El mercader de Venecia* de William Shakespeare

Jesús López-Peláez Casellas
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3361-7253
Universidad de Jaén
ESPAÑA
jlopez@ujaen.es

[*Hipogrifo*, (issn: 2328-1308), 13.2, 2025, pp. 573-585]
Recibido: 11-12-2024 / Aceptado: 24-02-2025
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.13035/H.2025.13.02.36

Abstract. William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and Gaspar Aguilar's *El mercader amante* are two plays most likely composed between 1596 and 1600, a time of serious economic crisis in both England and Spain. Both plays share an interest in commerce and financial issues that is evident from the title, but the links between the two plays go beyond the attention paid to merchants and economic concerns. The two plays, through a comparable distribution of character roles that involves a close link between marriage and business, and friendship and wealth, similarly address a concern with the ways in which money may affect human affections, love and friendship. Thus, against the backdrop of an ongoing Early Modern preoccupation with nascent capitalistic practices, both plays anxiously negotiate the ways in which love and friendship might be translated into the language of the new economy.

Keywords. *Merchant of Venice*; *El mercader amante*; Economics; Merchants; Friendship; Love; Marriage.

Este trabajo es parte del Proyecto «Verbo y valor: economías de mercado y el discurso infinito del oro en la literatura inglesa del periodo premoderno» (Proyectos de Generación de Conocimiento 2023, Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades, PID2023-148501NB-I00).

Resumen. *El mercader de Venecia* (*The Merchant of Venice*) de William Shakespeare, y *El mercader amante* de Gaspar Aguilar son dos obras dramáticas muy probablemente compuestas entre 1596 y 1600, un lustro a lo largo del cual tanto Inglaterra como España se vieron afectadas por una grave crisis económica. Ambos textos comparten un mismo interés por el comercio y las cuestiones financieras, algo que resulta evidente desde el título, pero los vínculos entre estas dos obras van más allá de una atención nominal a los mercaderes y la economía. Los dos textos —a través de una distribución comparable de personajes que apunta al establecimiento de un estrecho vínculo entre matrimonio y negocios, y amistad y riqueza— abordan una preocupación similar por las formas en las que el dinero puede afectar a los afectos humanos, al amor y a la amistad. Así, en el contexto de la inquietud generada por las prácticas pre-capitalistas en la primera modernidad, ambas obras negocian con preocupación cómo los discursos del amor y la amistad pueden traducirse al lenguaje de la nueva economía.

Palabras clave. *El mercader de Venecia*; *El mercader amante*; economía; mercaderes; amistad; amor; matrimonio.

In recent decades, the serious examination of economic concerns (mostly trade and financial issues, the meaning and function of gold and currency, and money-lending and usury) in English Early Modern texts (and especially in drama) has undergone a significant development. Stemming from the groundbreaking work of the proponents of the so-called New Economic Criticism in the early 1980s, the increasingly evident links between language and economics as homologous sign-systems (especially focusing on words and money) has been applied to the literary production of the English Early Modern period (1485-1660). Similarly, the impact and function of gold as a means of exchange and a repository of wealth and value as well as a polysemous signifier has become the object of study of a growing number of critical works dealing with the drama of the period and, to a lesser extent, with emblem literature and poetry[1].

This approach has not as of yet been applied to Golden Age drama (or literature more generally). For one thing, there has not been a comparable perception of the relevance of these topics in the Spanish literature of the period. Admittedly, in Golden Age canon, especially as regards the theatre of Lope and his contemporaries, the presence of merchants, financiers or moneylenders (or the fictional description of such processes as inflation, debasement or usury) is not as preeminent and central as it was in that of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan or Jacobean playwrights. This ought not be taken to imply that we cannot identify a number of literary texts

1. See the seminal work by Marc Shell, 1982. See also Goux, 1990; Woodbridge, 2010; Hawkes, 2013, 2015; and López-Peláez, 2022.

dealing with such concerns (*Don Quijote* being a case in point)[2], but they tend to be the exception more than the rule, and they —very likely conditioned by the fear of Judaization— do not seem to address these notions with a comparable outlook[3].

In this article I will jointly examine William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (*ca.* 1596, henceforth *Merchant*) and Gaspar Aguilar's *El mercader amante* (*ca.* 1600, *Mercader*), two almost contemporaneous plays[4] written in the wake of (or more likely during) an almost unprecedented economic crisis that hit England and Spain (and most of Western Europe). I will argue that both plays are similarly concerned with the disturbing links that the period's preoccupation with money and various kinds of economic and financial processes exerted on the complex interrelations between love, friendship and wealth.

1. Aguilar, Shakespeare, and money in Spain and England

A contemporary of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), Gaspar Aguilar (1561-1623) shares with the playwright from Stratford a similar background and social upbringing as a member of the emergent middle classes in a provincial town. The son of a trimmings-maker and council member of Valencia one, of a glove maker and sometime alderman the other, both of their fathers (Miguel Ángel Aguilar and John Shakespeare) shared notoriously unfulfilled ambitions to enter the ranks of the minor nobility[5]. But, more interestingly, within this context of social aspiration, both

2. See for instance Gurgen, 2018, and Hampton, 2020 for a study of economic issues in *Don Quijote*. Apart from Aguilar's *El mercader amante*, we may indeed mention a few other plays offering a positive portrayal of merchants, namely: Lope's *La famosa comedia del genovés liberal* and, to a certain extent, *El amigo hasta la muerte*; *La nave del genovés* by Calderón; Góngora's *Las firmezas de Isabela*; Tirso's *La prudencia en la mujer*; or the anonymous *El mercader de Toledo*. It must be noted that there is not a similarly approving image of money-lenders or bankers.

3. See, for instance, Shakespeare's plays and poems more or less directly dealing with the so-called new economy: *Merchant of Venice* and *Timon of Athens* (a play that Karl Marx himself used in his *Capital* to exemplify his own insights on the function of money), the erotic-mythological poem *Venus & Adonis* or sonnets # 2, 4, 6 and 9, all allegorically dealing with usury and profit. Also, other Early Modern texts depicting conflicts that, in a more or less direct way, have to do with economics are, notably and to name just a few, Thomas More's *Utopia* (depicting an utopian society without money or gold), Ben Jonson's city comedies, Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, or sixteenth and seventeenth century revenge drama.

4. The dates of composition of both texts are uncertain but the two plays are, in all likelihood, contemporaneous. Shakespeare's *Merchant* was first printed in quarto form in 1600 (Q1), and then in the First Folio in 1623. Q1 is thought to derive directly from Shakespeare's foul papers. The play was entered in the Stationers' Register in July 1598, so it is agreed that it was composed between 1596 and the summer of 1598. Aguilar's *Mercader* was first published with other plays by the same author in *Norte de la poesía española* (Valencia, 1616). There is not much internal or external evidence about when it could have been written, but the best-informed and most recent guess, by Aurelio Valladares del Reguero, narrows it down between 1598 and 1605 (Drakakis, 2010b; Valladares del Reguero, 2015, pp. 174-184).

5. Other similarities include controversial marriages (upwards in the case of Shakespeare with Anne Hathaway, downwards for Aguilar with Luisa Peralta), and even some unclarified links with, or references to, obscure associations, Raleigh's the «School of Night», and the Valencian «Academia de los Nocturnos».

Aguilar and Shakespeare seem to share a common interest on such Early Modern preoccupations as trade and finance and the ways these notions, increasingly prominent within a proto-capitalist episteme, affect and potentially disrupt other human preoccupations such as love and friendship.

This interest, which, as previously mentioned is hardly uncommon in Shakespeare and English Early Modern playwrights in general, is relatively unusual in the case of Spanish Golden Age writers. In the drama of Lope, Calderón or Tirso, as many critics have noted, the figure of merchants and financiers is largely anecdotal, and moneylenders, when actually included (which seldom happens) are inevitably identified as Jews and hence consequently condemned. As Teresa Ferrer Valls has aptly argued: «[e]s difícil encontrar en el teatro del Siglo de Oro obras en las que la presencia del mercader no resulte anecdótica»[6]. It is in all likelihood fear of Judaization, of being accused of crypto-Judaism, that explains why Spanish drama included few merchants in its plots (and even fewer money-lenders), something apparently contradictory given the period's obsession with money. Indeed, according to José Antonio Maravall, Early Modern Spain was «abrumada por el peso del poder del dinero»[7].

On the other hand, in the case of Early Modern England (and of English literature of that period), merchants were held in higher esteem but a somewhat similar link was established between money-lenders/usurers and Jews[8]. Francis Bacon —to mention just one illustrious representative of said mentality— clearly implied such a link when, in the early seventeenth century, he claimed that «usurers should have Orange-tawny Bonnets, because they do Judaize»[9]. However, English drama, as Shakespeare's *Merchant* clearly shows, carefully distinguishes between money-lenders and merchants, a distinction we do not find in the Spanish *Mercader*.

This disparate approach to trade and finance in the two theatrical traditions (and in the structures of feeling of Early Modern England and of *Siglo de Oro* Spain) requires some preliminary (and necessarily brief) socio-historical background. Early Modern Spain witnessed, as the New World was progressively exploited and mercantilism became predominant, an unprecedented economic growth that logically had consequences: «[c]on el mercantilismo, el mercader se convirtió en la figura central de la Sociedad»[10]. However, several economic setbacks (chronic deficit, fiscal crises, Price Revolution) had a negative effect on the portrayal of figures related to money and finance. As a matter of fact, by the time Aguilar very likely composed his *Mercader* (second half of the 1590s) Philip II was about to declare (or had just declared) the third bankruptcy in his reign (1596). More to the point, the widespread inflationary processes hitting Western Europe —and especially Habsburg Spain— mostly during the second half of the sixteenth century (the so-called Spanish

6. Ferrer Valls, 2018, p. 181
7. Maravall, 1987, p. 116. See also Roncero, 2016.
8. On the concerns about money-lending practices, see the evolution of the Usury Laws under the Tudors (Hawkes, 2010, pp. 13-47).
9. Bacon, *The Essayes*, p. 239.
10. Strosetzki, 2018a, p. 7.

Price Revolution)[11] also contributed to a negative assessment of financiers and merchants. This presumably influenced audiences and, consequently, playwrights when choosing topics and characters appealing to the tastes of the public.

Following what began as a mystifying economic predicament, some authors in Spain (and only later in England) begun to grasp the nature of this problem. Tomás de Mercado in his *Suma de tratos y contratos* of 1569 and especially Martín de Azpilcueta in his earlier *Comentario resolutorio de cambios* of 1556 (both authors belonging to the School of Salamanca) produced sophisticated analyses of this process (later known as «inflation»), its causes and effects, which they linked to the shower of gold from the Indies. And through a more holistic approach, such authors attempted to make sense of disruptive events like «the fluctuations of the value of money, the escalation of prices, the credit revolution, and the dissolution of order»[12], processes that not only took place in Spain but also in Western Europe at large.

The image of merchants and even money-lenders was improving in Early Modern England inasmuch as the acceptability of certain forms of interest increased; as Glynn Davies puts it, «the definition of usury was shrinking [in Early Modern England] as that of acceptable interest was growing», a process that had already begun in the late 15th century[13]. Indeed, the payment of interest in England was legalized in 1545 —almost half a century before Shakespeare wrote *Merchant*— through an Act passed during the reign of King Henry VIII[14]. This incipient tolerance of money-lending for profit undoubtedly involved for some, a divorce of ethics from economics (in order to favor the expansion of trade and economic growth). Whilst initially not very popular, especially with land-based old aristocracy and the poorest communities, this legal change contributed to a tentative improvement in the standing and imagery of merchants and bankers.

The much more concerning processes that developed in 16th century Spain specifically addressed monetary turmoil and the notions of value and wealth (inflation, debasement, credit and debt). These processes were addressed by much of the proto-economic, and some of the fictional, literature of the period. This created, for Golden Age audiences, new ways of understanding how personal relations were adversely affected by the rising power of money, especially in the confrontation between newly minted classes and the old landed aristocracy. In this context, the explicit association of trade and Jews[15], to the detriment of all mercantile actors, rose to prominence.

11. For concise analyses of the Early Modern Price Revolution, see Hamilton, 1965, pp. 34-72; Finkelstein, 2006, pp. 15-29; Davies, 2010, pp. 212-218.
12. Vilches, 2010, p. 150.
13. Davies, 2002, p. 221.
14. Davies, 2002, pp. 190-203.
15. For reasons of space I will not address here the roles of Jews and Judaism in *Merchant* and *Mercader*.

2. Love, friendship, and wealth

The links between Aguilar's *Mercader* and Shakespeare's *Merchant* become clearly visible when examined in relation to a web of socio-economic significations that provide the works with a surprisingly similar economic subtext connecting friendship, love and money. This is dramatized mostly around a discourse of marriage as an economic transaction, something that Aguilar aptly calls in another play (and expresses with a probably intended pun) «la fuerza del interés»[16]. *The Merchant's* joint dramatization of the institutions of marriage and commerce (besides money-lending for profit, understood as a separate activity) is one of the cornerstones of Shakespeare's play[17]. Significantly, Aguilar's *Mercader* also puts on the stage the conflict between a conservative and aristocratic past of harmonious marriage arrangements among blood-equals vis-à-vis the emergent forms of new commercial classes that forcefully insinuate themselves into the residual pre-capitalist episteme. The presence of money is clearly perceived, in both texts, as a menacing dissolvent of traditional society.

Connections among the mutually-redefining notions of love, wealth and friendship (or how can money reconceptualize marriage and friendship) are best perceived in terms of a contrast of characters between both texts. By this —it must be said— I mean the dramatic comparison of the semiospheres, or the network(s) of meanings, built around the concomitant worlds or epistemes of the characters of both plays (rather than a pseudo-psychological examination of individuals).

Even a cursory look at the plays allows us to detect a set of similarities, both superficial and profound, between Shakespeare's Antonio and Aguilar's Belisario, the two titular merchants. Significantly, the two men ply their trade in Venice and Valencia, both commercial hubs in sixteenth century Europe. And, somewhat surprisingly, the two merchants share a number of unexpected traits for members of their trade. Belisario and Antonio seem to construct their lives around the guiding principles of, not profit or interest as might be expected, but of love (as friendship) and money, two apparently antithetical concepts that —we will soon learn— are clearly linked in both plays. Also, both are unequivocally depicted as virtuous, noble and loyal, claiming to value love and friendship more than material wealth. Thus, Antonio promises his best and only friend in need, Bassanio, that «my purse, my person, my extremest means, / Lie all unlocked to your occasions»[18]. Belisario's closest friend is not his social equal but rather a servant, Astolfo; and yet, Belisario explains how their bond transcends the one expected in a master-servant relation and is based on love and loyalty:

16. Gaspar Aguilar's *La fuerza del interés* first appeared together with *Mercader* in *Norte de la poesía española* (1616) and was probably composed later than *El mercader amante*, between 1608 and 1616 (Valladares del Reguero, 2015, pp. 174-184). The pun on *interés* —with emphasis on the economic sense— is widespread throughout many of Aguilar's plays, but appears prominently in these two.
17. Drakakis, 2010a, pp. 6-7.
18. Shakespeare, *Merchant*, p. 184.

Cierto que tiene ventura
el que tiene un buen criado.
Y más como el que yo tengo,
que es la basis del amor,
aunque en balde me detengo
en loalle, pues de amor
y de lealtad le mantengo[19].

These similarities prove to be highly significant, as the two plays articulate their plots around these two protagonists, who find themselves, on account of love, in the worst conceivable predicament for a merchant: on the brink of losing all their wealth. So, despite confidence in their respective plans, they arrive at the conclusion at some point that all their money is gone: Antonio's ships have seemingly been lost at sea, and Belisario's fortune appears, incorrectly it later transpires, to have been stolen by his servant and friend Astolfo[20].

Furthermore, in the opening of the plays the two men similarly admit that their lives are in a certain state of confusion or disarray. Thus, Antonio famously suffers from an unspecified malady that seems to be the cause of his melancholy: «In sooth I know not why I am so sad»[21], which many critics have related to "lovesickness"[22]. Belisario on his part also manifests his confusion in the opening of the play, claiming he does not know which lady, Lidora or Labinia, he loves the most or who loves him best, a dilemma he finds, like Antonio, troubling and disturbing: «que de su misma igualdad / procede mi confusión»[23]. Surprisingly enough, the confusion that affects both Antonio and Belisario has nothing to do with what we might expect to be their major preoccupation (their commercial deals), and appears to allude to their romantic lives. More significantly, it even seems —in both cases— to extend to some kind of ambiguity concerning their sexuality. Whether Shakespeare's Antonio is a closeted gay man has been a controversial (but reasonable) discussion at least since W. H. Auden argued, in the 1940s, that *Merchant* makes best sense if we consider Antonio as being in love with Bassanio; since then, critics seem to be increasingly persuaded that some kind of homoerotic relation is dramatized between the two men[24]. Hints of homoeroticism in the Spanish *comedia* may be harder to find

19. Aguilar, *Mercader*, p. 18.
20. Shakespeare, *Merchant*, p. 312; Aguilar, *Mercader*, pp. 94-95.
21. Shakespeare, *Merchant*, p. 169.
22. Interestingly, the term *lovesickness* (and, to a certain extent, the specific condition it alluded to) entered the English language few years before *Merchant* was composed, in 1592 (*OED Online*, from Thomas Lodge's *Euphues*).
23. Aguilar, *Mercader*, p. 14.
24. Auden, 1963. See also Alan Sinfield's more recent seminal examination of this issue in his 1996 work «How to read *The Merchant of Venice* without being heterosexist», where he paved the way for the so-called queer studies in English Early Modern drama.

(although not altogether absent)[25] and we also have a suggestively erotic comment by Astolfo, who —praising his lord and friend Belisario's good looks— argues: «pues por ti a morir se ofrecen / no solamente mujeres, / mas hombres que lo parecen»[26].

The two friends of Belisario and Antonio, i.e. Astolfo and Bassanio, are similarly instrumental in showing the plays' concern with the status of friendship and money in relation to love. Revealingly, their love is proven through two financial transactions that signal the extent of their friendship (namely, Bassanio's request of the 3,000-ducat loan to Antonio, and Astolfo's acceptance of Belisario's pretended bequest of his fortune). Both actions involve the transfer of considerable sums of money in order to acquire, or purchase, love, and this reinforces the plays' telos of (nascent) capitalistic integration into the fabric of Early Modern culture. In the two cases both Bassanio and Belisario request from their best friends a manifestation of male affection and bonding. What is key here is that said expression of love is materialized financially; it highlights (and contrasts with) the plays' concern with the mercenary nature of heterosexual love and marriage: no money, no love[27]. In short, Bassanio wants to conquer Portia's heart and Belisario wishes to figure out who loves him best by means of a fictitious abundance —or through a pretended lack of— money respectively, since Bassanio's ostensible and ostentatious fortune and financial solvency is as fake as Belisario's poverty:

> Bassanio In Belmont there is a lady richly left [...]. O my Antonio had I but the means [...] I have a mind [...] that I should be fortunate[28].

> Belisario [S]i alguna puede haber
> que siendo pobre me quiera
> esa será mi mujer[29].

In the context of the financial dimension of love, both plays feature a patriarchal figure, a controlling father watching over the financial security of the two women, Portia and Labinia. In *Merchant of Venice* Portia's father tries to condition his daughter's choice of a future husband through the lottery of the caskets, extending his patriarchal tyranny beyond the grave. Portia complains: «so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father»[30]. And, in a more radical revolt against the authority of the father, Shylock's daughter Jessica leaves the Jew to marry a Christian, steals his father's money and justifies these acts by claiming that «our house is hell»[31]. However, in *El mercader amante* we find an arguably more explicit link between marriage and business. If Portia's father intends to control

25. Paredes Ocampo, 2023.
26. Aguilar, *Mercader*, p. 13.
27. In the case of *Merchant* this is even more clearly staged since Antonio borrows from the money-lender Shylock, who in turn has to borrow from Tubal. This way we are witnessing the financial (capitalistic) webs of credit at work in Venice.
28. Shakespeare, *Merchant*, p. 186.
29. Aguilar, *Mercader*, p. 15.
30. Shakespeare, *Merchant*, p. 191.
31. Shakespeare, *Merchant*, p. 244.

his daughter's marriage from the great beyond through metaphors of wealth (the golden, silver and lead caskets), Labinia's is similarly determined to impose his will over hers through a very precise and explicit financial simile in line with the economic subtext of the play. Thus, when Labinia refuses to marry both Astolfo (who is wrongly believed to be her suitor) and the nobleman Don García, her father insists that he will bring her round:

> PADRE DE LABINIA Y por ella no querer,
> no está el *negocio* acabado.
> Dejadme, señor, con ella,
> veréis con qué brevedad
> lo *negocio*.
> […]
> Seguro podéis estar,
> pues lo voy a *negociar*[32].

But among these parallel structures articulating how marriage in the two plays evolves around money and finance, the similarities linking Portia and Belisario's two aspiring wives —Lidora and Labinia— are the ones that may more clearly bring the two texts into dialogue. These links are most profitably perceived if we take into consideration how, on the one hand, the two ladies from *El mercader amante* seem to embody the two dimensions of *Merchant*'s Portia. For one thing, Portia is described, Petrarchan-style, by Bassanio in what is the main part of the play's romantic plot:

> BASSANIO What demigod
> Hath come so near creation?
> […]
> PORTIA [Bassanio is] worthy of […] praise […];
> […]
> I will love you dear[33].

El mercader amante similarly shows Labinia and Belisario truly in love with each other, especially once Belisario is convinced that his wealth is of no importance to her: she is «¡Columna hecha de amorosa piedra!», and he is, to her, «¡Mi alegría, pilar de mi fe»[34]. Both announce their marriage as the triumph of true love («amor verdadero»)[35] which for the two lovers is the greatest joy. Labinia and Antonio arguably are the only two characters in both plays for whom money is almost irrelevant, and both show how for them cold calculations are antithetical with true love: Antonio loves his spendthrift, bankrupt friend Bassanio, to the point of risking his wealth (and his life) for him. And Labinia, in her praise of poverty in Jornada III, declares:

32. Aguilar, *Mercader*, 83 (my emphasis). Interestingly, despite their relevance in both plays the two fathers, who clearly stand for the authority of the residual, old, episteme, remain unnamed.
33. Shakespeare, *Merchant*, pp. 301, 200, 315.
34. Aguilar, *Mercader*, pp. 70, 71.
35. Aguilar, *Mercader*, p. 106.

¿Yo he de querer el tesoro,
padre, que nunca he querido?
¿Yo que a los ricos olvido?
¿Yo que la pobreza adoro?[36]

However, both texts betray an anxiety with money and economics that pervades the romantic plots and consequently provide the plays with another, totally different, meaning, one that seems to be represented by the cold calculation of Portia's engagement (more later), and the greedy mentality of Lidora, who upon realizing that Astolfo is not really rich tellingly claims «Maldigo la suerte mía»[37]. This concern with money and business (and with 'interest/*interés*') insinuates itself into the heart of the texts to the extent that both love affairs and marriages are not only reduced to business transactions, but also translated into the language of finance, and henceforth become suspect. At one point Belisario fears that hope («esperanza») has turned into base ownership («posesión»), and love becomes mere interest («interés»)[38]. Eventually for him, marrying Labinia necessarily entails not simply sharing his fortune with her («tanta parte de mi hacienda te daré»)[39] but also paying Astolfo his fair reward[40]. Also, for most characters in the play, namely, Astolfo, Labinia's father, Loaysa, and of course Lidora, love affairs, marriage and engagements are inevitably and ultimately considered no more and no less than *negocios*.

This mercantile verging on the mercenary approach to human love is replicated in *Merchant*, where Portia and Bassanio famously declare their reciprocal love in somewhat disturbing and uncomfortable terms. Metaphors of computation, legal terms and economic calculations translate their love affair into a language proper of the new economy. For Bassanio, Portia is a «thrice-fair lady» with whom he will not be united for life until their marriage contract is «confirmed, signed, ratified»[41]. Just like in *El mercader amante*, someone has to pay and make a bond, and if this is the fair price so much the better. What the constant repetition of «negocio» achieves in Aguilar's play in terms of wrapping the text around a discourse of money, in *Merchant* is achieved by metaphors of computation, through the ever presence of the polysemous term «account»:

PORTIA For you
I would be trebled twenty times myself,
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich,

36. Aguilar, *Mercader*, p. 82.
37. Aguilar, *Mercader*, p. 105.
38. Aguilar, *Mercader*, p. 97.
39. Aguilar, *Mercader*, p. 106.
40. Aguilar is here following the Aristotelian notion of the *pretium iustum* (fair price), a central notion in proto-economic thought that articulated ethical trade in Golden Age Spain and that Mercado called *precio moderado* and Azpilcueta *precio justo*. See Strosetzki, 2018b, pp. 174-179.
41. Shakespeare, *Merchant*, pp. 303-304.

That only to stand high in your *account*
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends
Exceed *account*[42].

3. Conclusion

It may be argued that Shakespeare's play accommodates this new way of looking at love through the lens of financial discourses with relative ease. In other words, the confrontation between nobility and mercantile interest that *El mercader amante* articulates seems to be not such a pressing concern in *Merchant of Venice*, where the idealized Belmont apparently provides a certain protection against the strains of the market. But the metaphors of computation elaborated by Portia and Bassanio in their proclamations of love (that exceeds «account») prove otherwise, and are very similar to the blunt description of marriage as a «negocio» in *El mercader amante*. The major difference being that if love may be (and actually is) formulated in economic terms in Aguilar's play, love can *only* be presented in such a way in Shakespeare's.

And yet, this does not undermine the fact that both plays address and articulate the human values of love and friendship in ultimately economic terms. *Merchant* carefully dramatizes "good" (trade) and "bad" (usury) forms of the new economy, and how they invade all realms (familial relations, love, friendship, even sexuality), cynically showing the almost absolute power of the new financial and mercantile system. In this, there is no room for representatives of the old episteme of blood over money. In Aguilar's play the defeat of the nobleman at the hands of the wealthy and good, virtuous, merchant seems to point in a similar direction, although at the end of the day money is (perhaps somewhat hypocritically) said to be still not as important as honesty, truthfulness and love. At the end of the day, a merchant and a lover.

Bibliographic references

Aguilar, Gaspar, *El mercader amante*, Alicante, Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2011. https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/nd/ark:/59851/bmc474x1

Auden, Wystan H., «Brothers and Others», in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays*, ed. Alan Sinfield, London, Faber & Faber, 1963, pp. 218-237.

Azpilcueta, Martín de, *Comentario resolutorio de cambios*, ed. Alberto Ullastres, Madrid, CSIC, 1965.

Bacon, Francis, *The Essayes*, London, Printed by John Haviland, 1625.

Davies, Glyn, *A History of Money. From Ancient Times to the Present Day*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2002.

42. Shakespeare, *Merchant*, p. 304, my emphasis.

Drakakis, John, «Introduction», in William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, London, Methuen (Arden Shakespeare), 2010a, pp. 1-159.

Drakakis, John, «Appendix III», in William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, London, Methuen (Arden Shakespeare), 2010b, pp. 417-431.

Ferrer Valls, Teresa, «Entre mercaderes anda el juego: *El mercader amante* de Gaspar Aguilar, *Las firmezas de Isabela* de Góngora y la anónima *El mercader de Toledo*», in *El dinero y la comedia española*, ed. Felipe Pedraza *et al.*, Cuenca, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2016, pp. 181-198.

Finkelstein, Andrea, *The Grammar of Profit: The Price Revolution in Intellectual Context*, Boston, Brill, 2006.

Goux, Jean-Joseph, *Symbolic Economies. After Marx and Freud*, Ithaca (NY), Cornell University Press, 1990.

Gurgen, Emre, «How Capitalism Creates Peace in *Don Quixote* While Non-Capitalism Induces Violence», *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 8.4, 2018, pp. 509-523.

Hamilton, Earl J., *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501-1650*, New York, Octagon, 1965.

Hampton, Timothy, «Sancho's Fortune: Money and Narrative Truth in *Don Quixote*», *MLN*, 135.5, 2020 (Comparative Literature Issue), pp. 1214-1226.

Hawkes, David, *The Culture of Usury in Renaissance England*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Hawkes, David, «Recent Studies in the English Renaissance», *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 53.1, 2013, pp. 197-243.

Hawkes, David, *Shakespeare and Economic Theory*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015.

López-Peláez, Jesús, «"A thing so unprofitable": Economic Concerns and Signs in Thomas More's *Utopia*», *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 53.3, 2022, pp. 671-696.

Maravall, José Antonio, *La literatura picaresca desde la historia social (siglos xvi y xvii)*, Madrid, Taurus, 1987.

Mercado, Tomás de, *Suma de tratos y contratos*, ed. Nicolás Sánchez-Albornoz, Madrid, Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 1977.

Paredes Ocampo, Eduardo, «Reconstructing Relationships of Desire: Homosexuality in Spanish Golden Age Theater», in *La comedia entre mundos: intersecciones críticas en el teatro de la Temprana Modernidad / The Comedia between Worlds: Critical Intersections in Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Erin Cowling *et al.*, Santander, Sociedad Menéndez Pelayo, 2023, pp. 125-152.

Roncero, Victoriano «Función del dinero en la estructura social en las comedias de Lope de Vega», in *El dinero y la comedia española*, ed. Felipe Pedraza *et al.*, Cuenca, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2016, pp. 37-58.

Shell, Marc, *Money, Language, and Thought. Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era*, Berkeley (CA) / Los Angeles (CA), University of California Press, 1982.

Shakespeare, William, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Drakakis, London, Methuen (Arden Shakespeare), 2010.

Sinfield, Alan, «How to Read *The Merchant of Venice* without being Heterosexist», in *Alternative Shakespeares 2*, ed. Terry Hawkes, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 123-140.

Strosetzki, Christoph, «Prólogo. El poder de la economía: la imagen de los mercaderes y el comercio en el mundo hispánico de la Edad Moderna», in *El poder de la economía. La imagen de los mercaderes y el comercio en el mundo hispánico de la Edad Moderna*, ed. Christoph Strosetzki, Madrid / Frankfurt am Main, Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2018a, pp. 7-12.

Strosetzki, Christoph, «Sobre el mercader en Aristóteles, Tomás de Mercado y Martín de Azpilcueta», in *El poder de la economía. La imagen de los mercaderes y el comercio en el mundo hispánico de la Edad Moderna*, ed. Christoph Strosetzki, Madrid / Frankfurt am Main, Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2018, pp. 169-181.

Valladares del Reguero, Aurelio, *Vida y obra de Gaspar Aguilar*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2015.

Woodbridge, Linda, *English Revenge Drama. Money, Resistance, Equality*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.