Required Payment: Extracting a Pound of Flesh

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Go with me to a notary, seal me there
Your single bond, and, in a merry sport,
If you repay me not on such a day,
In such a place, such sum or sums as are
Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me.
— Shylock (*The Merchant of Venice*, Act 1, Scene 3, lines 144–151)

This article is about the ways that payment is extracted from newcomer academics in the academy. In other research work about marginalization and belonging in the academy, several powerful metaphors have been applied to newcomers' venturing into the unknown waters of admittance to universities. These metaphors have applied to both the university itself and to individuals in the academy who make life difficult and even unbearable for newcomers. For example, books such as *The Illusion of Inclusion* (Stalker & Prentice, 1998), *Tenure in the Sacred Grove* (Cooper & Stevens, 2002), or *Women in the Canadian Academic Tundra* (Hannah, Paul, & Vethamany-Globus, 2002) provide a picture of what often awaits newcomer academics joining an institution. While history and geography are expressed in these titles, in this article we focus on the human plight of those caught in such environments. We turn to Shakespeare's (1987 version) play, *The Merchant of Venice* where characters speak to the human dilemmas that surround payment for services rendered and penalties extracted if payment is not procured in a timely fashion.

The word "price" is defined in the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (2004) as "what is or must be given, done, sacrificed, etc., to obtain or achieve something," while "belong" (followed

by *in*) is "to be rightly placed or classified." In this article, characters from *The Merchant of Venice* appear as we illustrate ways that personal and professional payment is extracted from newcomer academics.

Issues and Images Surrounding Payment

In our study, it is clear that payment comes in a variety of forms depending on the price newcomers are willing to pay to gain status, security, and a sense of belonging in their workplace. As Shields (2004) noted, having been a newcomer at three universities herself and having heard the tales of newcomer academics in this study, it is easy to believe there is an understanding on the part of newcomers that some sacrifice is expected on the road to becoming a permanent member of a department. However, given the inexperience that, by definition, any novice brings to a job at a new institution, just what will be sacrificed and how much it will cost are often not even considerations or at least, are not well understood. Much like Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* who agreed to Shylock's price of a pound of flesh in lieu of monetary compensation if his debt was not paid in a three-month period, newcomer academics, pleased to be offered a position in the academy, often agree to contractual terms for which payment seems both a long way off and no more real than the pound of flesh seemed to be to Antonio.

In the court scene in *The Merchant of Venice* (Act 4, Scene 1, lines 167–399), Shylock and Portia (playing the role of a male lawyer) haggle about payment by flesh or funds in lieu of flesh: Portia reminds Shylock that as a Jew, in the eyes of the law he is not a citizen of Venice; rather, he is an alien and therefore could be sentenced to death for any attempt on a citizen's life, which removing a pound of Antonio's flesh would surely constitute. Shylock, who has spent his life in Venice and contributed to the business world in that city, awakens to the fact that in law, he is a marginalized person, useful for his money lending but set apart by his religious differences. In similar fashion, newcomer academics bring their wealth of knowledge and years of study to the academy not expecting to be marginalized by virtue of their gender, race, differing abilities, or pedagogical stance. Judging from the stories told in this research though, many discovered that while they were employed and were seemingly part of the community, they too, were often considered "alien" like Shylock, set apart by their own distinct and different backgrounds and experiences.

In addition to these similarities, many words and terms resonated for us as we considered the concepts of payment and belonging in this play in relation to participants' stories in our study. Clearly, one example that emerged is how vital it is to understand the currency being exchanged. Just as Shylock, thinking in terms of cash value, missed the currency of citizenship, newcomer academics, while being paid for their work, may miss the fact that their real currency lies in the knowledge they embody and therefore, it is the bodied self that pays for differing perspectives in institutional settings. Academics' emotional and physical well-being is bound to be affected by decisions made about their lives in the academy.

Other comparisons emerge as well, such as the issue of credit. While Shylock's work is rooted in monetary

credit, academics' credit lies in courses taught, committee contributions engaged, and most importantly, research completed and published. Like the pound of flesh, penalties or fines can be extracted when these benchmarks are not met in the agreed-upon time frame.

Payment can also be perceived as a series of taxes owed because of differing perspectives or personal difference from well-established department colleagues. Bankier (2002) described the "inequity taxes" paid by women new to the academy, which is a thread heard in stories told to us by women and others in our study. Tierney and Bensimon's (1996) chapter on community and culture in academe illustrates multiple forms of taxation. They present a story entitled "Bad News" in which Fred, who has been terminated from his untenured university position, and Jane, who after six difficult years has been appointed Associate Professor, attend a farewell party for Fred at a colleague's home. Driving away from the gloomy gathering, Jane tells her husband, "Fred was treated unfairly. But he never read the signals. He spent too much time worrying about students, and they gave him dopey committees to serve on. Bad move. You have to be political, and he's not" (p. 2). Jane meanwhile, went on to serve on a university committee headed by the Provost looking into improving the tenure and promotion practices at her university, only to be told by the Provost after much hard work that the final report was

> Questionable… could cause harm… [and] the interviews are impressionistic. They [newcomer academics who were interviewed] have an axe to grind. The survey is

too simplistic. It contains too much bad news. The President hates whining. . . . Faculty feel overworked. Women feel excluded. Minorities serve on too many committees. This is a can of worms that we can't deal with at this time. (p. 3)

Perhaps in the end, Fred's payment is preferable to Jane's as she got caught paying not only a personal tax, but also a power tax after much hard work for little or no result.

Bankier (2002) describes other notions of taxes required as payment for newcomers, including a credibility tax, a leading edge tax, a group status tax, and a retaliation tax. The credibility tax has to do with the new knowledge newcomers bring to the university, and also the newcomers themselves: are they themselves seen as credible, and is what they have to share considered credible? Leading edge taxes are imposed on individuals who come into a department setting providing new questions and perspectives for groups not previously represented, such as feminist or gay or lesbian academics; these are individuals who come to the academy to open new doors, or in Bankier's words, "blaze a new trail" (p. 19). Group status tax is a similar concept, in that by virtue of being part of a particular group, such as those groups noted above, newcomers' academic work can be dismissed by more senior members of a department as inconsequential purely based on group membership (e.g., "What can you expect? They are part of that group!"). Retaliation tax is the formal and informal attacking of individuals whose teaching and research sets them apart in some way. They may be popular with students, research grants may be won for work in groundbreaking areas, or they

may just not be willing to "play the game" to get where they want to go in the university. Merits may be denied these individuals, or they may face personal attacks or harassment, and other witnesses may be silenced for fear of similar treatment, and so these individuals find themselves very much alone. Images of all of these forms of payment or taxation for being newcomers are woven through the fabric of our interview transcripts in stories shared by participants. The strength of the metaphor of payment as tax, whatever the tax may be, is that there is no question of payment as a choice: it is required.

Payment Lies in the Subtext of Faculty Relations

As Portia performed her magic in the court scene (Act 4, Scene 1, lines 167–399), we were struck by the fact that while she was ostensibly working from the formal text of the law, she drew on what was not legally stated to turn the final judgment away from Shylock in favour of Antonio. Shylock, believing his desired payment was within the limits of the law, did not consider what was not written in his contract with Antonio, nor did he understand that interpretation on the part of powerful others could be so different from his own. That same scenario was apparent in some of the stories shared by our participants who, upon looking back, said that while they felt they had an understanding of the formal text of academic life, they had little or no understanding of the subtext that awaited them in department politics, professional relationships, or their place as newcomers in the minds of some long-time department members, including gate-keepers and saga-keepers. They did

not know the twists and turns that the subtext of academic life could take, nor who might wield the subtext as the powerful weapon it can be to remind them of their "alien" status. Because of this lack of knowledge, just as Shylock at first thinks he has the judge on his side, newcomers' initial perceptions of colleagues can lead them to believe they have been befriended by tenured colleagues only to discover, as Shylock did, that they have been deceived. When an expectation of a positive outcome clearly becomes the need for payment, especially when the formal rules are being followed, the shock for academic newcomers can be as great as it was for Shylock, whose last words in *The Merchant of Venice* are: "I pray you give me leave to go from hence, I am not well, send the deed after me, and I will sign it" (Act 4, Scene 1, lines 394–396). He is overruled and resigned to his loss.

Curry (2002) revealed a similar level of resignation as she described her personal experience with the subtext of academic life:

> Before coming to the academy, I believed it could be my refuge…. I believed the intelligentsia would embrace and welcome me. As it turns out, although I would rather be an insider than an outsider to the academic community, the very same human condition—the need to judge, order and rank people—persists inside its barracks. (p. 119)

Curry's experience mirrors that of many of our participants, who also believed they would be welcomed, embraced, and supported by department colleagues. As it turned out, the "naïve newcomers" (Shields, 2004) all too often

paid for this vision, both personally and professionally.

Stalker and Prentice (1998) identified the dominant source of subtext power in academe: "The proud academic tradition of objectivity, or what has been called the 'view from nowhere,' draws upon and tends to reproduce the privilege of the majority" (p. 23). While in recent years women and other newcomers have been hired in increasing numbers (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2011–2012), members of these groups are still far enough behind numerically that the milieu of the university and its associated subtext, still rests on a modern, male, objectivist viewpoint. Once hired, newcomers come face to face with an unexpected contradiction: being a graduate student in a university and being employed by one are two completely different things. All the openings created for promoting new thought during doctoral years that newcomers expected to continue as they moved into academic positions were reduced to scripts they did not anticipate. They fall prey to established colleagues—both male and female— who held fast to maintaining an epistemological past. It is a paradox that most in our study did not see coming.

Shock and Contempt

There are so many stories in our study that reflect the multitude of ways that newcomers have experienced the large and small removals of self that seem to be part and parcel of joining the academy. Like the drama of a Shakespearian play, many emotions and resulting actions and deeds emerged as individuals shared events and situations they encountered at their universities. After being denied tenure despite unanimous support from her department

committee for her research and teaching, Frances reported feeling "completely shocked… the wind just goes out of you… and it is so insulting." She also felt "such contempt for the people [all men] who had followed the conventional university trail and who made that decision" because they did not find value in her peer-reviewed research work, which was arts based. Her work was clearly not their work, and so was not respected.

Frances was one of several participants who raised the issue of the cycle of continuous overwork in terms of teaching and service for newcomer academics when ultimately, little or no credit was given for those aspects of the job at the time of appointment, tenure, or promotion. She noted that "in terms of academic work and research work, scholarship, I just felt frustrated by never being able to see something to completion before I was interrupted by the demands of teaching and service." She felt that in the "bunker mentality" of that particular department, countless hours were required for the endless committee work as it was a unit "in chaos" with four directors in the six years of her time there. In Faculties of Education, it appears to be common practice for newcomer academics to over teach, while long-established academics teach less. At the same time, expectations for peer-reviewed publications remain the same for all. Carmen explained that at one institution a [male] Director allowed her a one-course release for one term, which he characterized as a great favour in an attempt to support the completion of her doctoral dissertation. At the same time, several doctoral colleagues at other institutions had whole terms off to write. The hurt or contempt felt in such

scenarios appears to be centred on individuals with power, who are the human faces of the institutions. A sense of personal value is at the heart of the matter.

Several participants used metaphors of games to describe the payments they were expected to make. For example, Mike reported:

> You get dealt unpleasant cards. What do you do with the cards? Well, you have to play them. You don't get a choice—you've got these cards—that's all you've got. You can't say well I don't want this one, I'll take that one. You've got these cards. And when you come to a game of attack, that's what you've got.

Tania described bullying and tattletale games she witnessed in her department and her shock at finding herself victimized. She noted, "it wasn't professional and I think for me, that was a big shock. I was expecting academics to be professional. I don't know why. I had this naïve belief, there would be some level of integrity." We heard numerous stories about inappropriate behaviour from department members and the resulting decline in respect.

Vengeance and Subsequent Suspicion
Individuals also spoke of vengeance they experienced from established colleagues as the following quotes illustrate:

> Opportunities for vengeance are there. I mean you can find yourself with a ridiculous teaching situation or who knows what to keep you in your place…. If your innovations in thinking… are seen as a threat to people, if they take them as a personal criticism, they can get back at you. (Frances)

I specifically looked for. . . an accomplished female role model… and that ended up being the person who used everything against me so now I'm afraid to look for role models—maybe you just have to forge your own model. (Tania)

These examples seem to fall into Bankier's (2002) description of a retaliation tax, which she describes as follows:

> Retaliation tax, which combines elements of all the sub-taxes into a vicious, intense, personalized form of trashing . . . may be applied in three ways: formally, through mechanisms such as discipline, withholding merit increments, denial of (re)appointment, tenure or promotion; informally, through ostracism, personal attacks (face-to-face or behind the target's back), and day-to-day harassment; and public attacks through the media. (p. 21)

Bankier further asserted that retaliation taxes can be particularly insidious for they serve as strong deterrents to future action from witnesses and other potential defenders because they too come to fear a similar backlash.

Looking back on experiences in the academy over years as a graduate student and assistant professor, Frances noted,

> I did not come into this as a naïve, dewy-eyed person…. I would say my feeling about academia is no more tarnished than it ever was, but I realize how dangerous it can be; in fact abusive…. I was taken advantage of…. You put out your best effort,

you make the commitment, you feel the obligation to students and your colleagues, to the institution…and there is absolutely no guarantee… no gratitude from the institution.

Her references to an absence of guarantees or gratitude were related to the decision to deny her tenure. Like Tania, the negative incident left her feeling untrusting and suspicious:

I have a lot of suspicion [about how decisions are made].… I mean my suspicion is that they really don't want too many strong-minded women around there. The ones who are promoted are ones that either know how to flatter certain egos or are seen to be very dutiful people who don't stick their noses out too much.

The underlying message seems to be that women (and other academic newcomers) who do leading edge work leave themselves open to the full force of academic mobbing (Westhues, 2004).

Several individuals spoke about department meetings as potential places for vengeance or spitefulness. Lillian discussed "eager meeting goers" who she described as "this core of people [present on every campus] who seem to love to go to meetings—they love to know what's going on or they're worried that somebody will screw them if they don't know what's going on." She also described "worried women" as another omnipresent group of academics, who constantly wondered, "What are they going to do to me next? Will I be volunteered? Like an expression in the United Way—you've been voluntold." Michelle expressed dissatisfaction with the informal meetings and "corridor conversations." She reported:

There are certain people who are part of that who see that as important…. Maybe it's their approach to belonging, being the one who has the information that they can share. [They] do all the chitter-chattering and the striking of allegiances and pulling those things together. It's a good thing to have my office in a different area. I don't see those little clusters.

In their discussion of gender socialization in the academy, Tierney and Bensimon (1996) described the ways some newcomers have tried to avoid the forces noted above in order to be accepted. They used the term "smile work" (p. 83) to describe the strategies women use to fit into male-dominated department cultures. They offered the following examples from their interviews with two academic women:

I smile. I am nice. I try to always feel like I am in a good humor and that I am not challenging anyone, but especially I smile. (p. 82)

As long as I remain here, I will never be able to establish my own identity. He [senior colleague] makes me feel like a glorified graduate student, and it is very hard on my self-esteem . . . but I cannot afford to have him as my enemy at tenure time. I have to live with this situation. (p. 84)

To us, these quotes provide insight into individuals always on edge, fearing payment if they step beyond acceptable bounds, but at the same time, paying a personal price at every turn. It seems clear that the fallout from trying

to belong costs a great deal in terms of personal well-being.

Personal and Professional Manifestations of Loss of Innocence and Self-Esteem

Newcomers arrive at their institutions expecting that they have made good choices and will have rewarding careers. Being new academics does not negate the fact that newcomers usually have a history of doing well in academic pursuits prior to their entry into their university positions. Indeed, in itself, gaining admission to doctoral study is no easy feat. Much has already been accomplished by individuals who have reached that place and likely, praise for doing well has been offered by important others along the way. Some individuals in our study also had years of successful public or private school teaching experience behind them prior to engaging in graduate studies.

In addition, spending many years in the university offers ample time for future newcomers to witness the respect shown to professors by students and to offer it themselves to instructors and supervisors over their years of graduate study. Coupled with the gratification of doing well in three or four degrees, newcomers' expectation of being welcomed as academic colleagues seemed to be very reasonable. Such expectations would seem to follow logically from theories of social exchange:

> Expectations of social rewards, in turn, are based on the past social experience of individuals and on the reference standards they have acquired, partly as the result of the benefits they themselves have obtained in the past and partly as a result of learning what benefits others

in comparable situations obtain. (Blau, 2008, p. 143)

Consider, for example, the case of Tania. She explained, "the whole thing that got me through my doctoral work was that I had a lot of fun. I really loved my work. I enjoyed my social life with my colleagues. I enjoyed talking [about ideas]." It does not seem too great an assumption to imagine that the enjoyment of doctoral study will continue in a professional life in the university. Consistent with Blau's perspective, "As people become accustomed to a certain level of gratification, which they may have initially considered extraordinary, they come to take it for granted and to expect at least that much gratification from their associates in the future" (p. 144).

Taken from this perspective, it is not surprising that so many new appointees come to their academic appointments innocently, as "naïve newcomers" (Shields, 2004). Yet, as Blau warns, "the man who expects much from his associates is more easily disappointed in them than the man who expects little" (p. 143). The resulting mismatch between expectation and reality contribute to the resulting shock and suspicion.

Stories of emotional repercussions surrounding decisions made about directions taken due to academic judgments about performance and attitude echo throughout our study transcripts. Tania explained,

> There's a whole lot of self-esteem that's wrapped up in this career. . . . Your whole being is wrapped up in it. . . . It's just so all consuming. . . . You have so much wrapped up in it that I think what happens when you find

yourself on the periphery and without a way to navigate, to find a way of coping or making it through. . . . I think the main thing that happens is it eats away at your self-esteem.

All the old images of one who holds promise and exhibits excellence can be badly shaken by both formal and informal steps along the way to tenure, and the fallout hurtful and unclear because of processes in place that seem to block newcomers rather than support them in the department where they were hired. Mary had been hired with much aplomb many years prior, but was still working on a contractual basis:

I'm insecure…. I don't know what's going to happen next…. If you haven't been insecure financially or in terms of longevity [at an institution] you don't know what it's like…. I can get my knickers in a twist and all it does is get me in a kind of half-depressed place.

In general terms, many of our transcripts contain stories of experience that have left many individuals with a sense of self-doubt about their place in the academy. John said, "I don't actually think I belong here, but I have a history here." Participants variously moved from one institution to another looking for an academic home, or they chose to remain where they were and work to survive the ups and downs of academic life. Either way, once an understanding of the personal ramifications of university existence was understood, a sense of loss of innocence seemed to go hand in hand with their possible career choices.

Connections to The Chilly Climate and More on the Illusion of Inclusion

Sandler and Hall (1982) are credited with coining the term "chilly climate" to capture the conditions in academe that marginalize women and racialized minorities (see Stalker & Prentice, 1998). "Climate" referred to a number of practices that when taken cumulatively, communicate a lack of recognition and devaluation, and "chilly" speaks to a far less supportive environment for women and racialized minorities than for male colleagues. Chilly climate considerations that have been documented by Stalker and Prentice (1998) for women and those from racialized minority groups include, among other things, undervaluing women's and racialized minorities achievements; gender-biased language; different evaluations for men's than women's behaviour and experiences; sexist devaluation through jokes, anecdotes, and comments; exclusion or impaired access to information; denial of the status or authority of women and racialized minorities.

In another text where stories were gathered from 48 Canadian contributors about their experiences in academe (Hannah, Paul, & Vethamany-Globus, 2002), reports of personal and professional repercussions in faculty life combine in an overall narrative that clearly leaves readers understanding that inclusion of women and racialized minorities continues to be an illusion (Stalker & Prentice, 1998). In her chapter, entitled "McTeaching," Parsons (2002) reported that part-time professors in academe are so devalued, marginalized, and expendable that she equated them to employees in fast-food establishments (pp. 189–192).

Throughout their book, themes of isolation, excessive travel to sessional positions (the "new roads scholars;" Stephens, 2002), and a sense of homelessness in academe resound. Three decades have past since the term "chilly climate" was first coined and yet many of the same themes indicating a lack of personal connection to a department or department colleagues and the lack of welcome offered by established colleagues were still of prime importance to our participants. The climate is still very chilly and inclusion is far from guaranteed.

Lillian's description of her experiences with fellow department members illustrate the destructive cycle familiar to many newcomer academics:

> It's like we are all in our individual little salt lines chipping away and we have nice little chats when we get together or in faculty meetings, before the business arises. Then we get into wrangles because people have their pet injustice that was done to them. So when those issues arise they pitch in and get, you know, borderline irrational, right? And then other people don't understand what happened and they take personal offense because they think it was something they did [when] it has nothing to do with what people are talking about. NOTHING! . . . and terrible things come out of it all. One thing I liked about [one department] was that it didn't matter how vicious we were, at least we could have a good party together. Whereas [where I work now] everybody is incredibly pleasant to one another but you never, you're not actually friends outside of work. Like [when I was on medical leave], nobody even called me.

Tania also reported on the ways that department colleagues were kept at odds with one another:

> I came from a department where most of your time and energy was spent on departmental issues and politics . . . because the amount of committee work you were expected to do was extremely high so you were in the thick of it every day—you couldn't ignore what was going on because one committee or another was dealing with [issues], every committee was contentious, every day had a little piece of this [in it].

The chilly climate experienced in one institution could carry over to subsequent institutions as academics became more vigilant and suspicious, and less naïve over the course of their careers.

Spillover From the Chilly Climate

Returning again to comparisons made between our participants' stories and characters in *The Merchant of Venice*, a final observation can be considered. While Shylock was in the midst of his public drama with Antonio, the main plot in the play, a sub-plot was unfolding in his own house. Unknown to Shylock, his daughter, Jessica, was readying herself to elope with a Christian, Lorenzo. This sub-plot extends through relationships with the other major characters in the play who are friends and would-be husbands and wives, all of whom are also deceiving one another for their own reasons. While issues in the play are worked out to various levels of satisfaction in the end, it is easy to see that the intricacies at work among and between players have lasting effects. For example, the foibles of a strict and

certain father clash with a daughter who is willing to go to great lengths to live as she sees fit. Tests of surety among friends and lovers leave doubts behind as the realities of individuals are exposed and exchanged for visions not understood before. Sub-plots involve deceit, survival, faithlessness, and passion.

Thinking about our participants' tales of payment and the effects of that payment on others in the same way, it seems safe to say that multiple sub-plots, not visible in our transcripts, have affected family members, friends, and colleagues of those we interviewed in much the same way as in *The Merchant of Venice*. The long-term consequences of living out plots of friction and distress spoken about in our interviews have the same ripple effect and payment with a pound of flesh becomes many pounds of flesh when considered in this manner.

Like Tierney and Bensimon (1996), "we interviewed individuals in different institutions and from multiple standpoints, not to search for consensus, but rather to come to understand how they interpret their respective worlds" (p. 16). Their results led them to call for the creation of "communities of difference" in academe, where suppression of one's identity is not demanded as payment for entry. Perhaps ultimately, the question is if chill surrounds us as academics, what can we do to ward off the cold so that our flesh and blood remain intact and are not offered up as payment for employment in the academy?

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