BLIND GODS: FORTUNE, JUSTICE, AND CUPID IN *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

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Almost obligatorily, critics of *The Merchant of Venice* split into warring camps. Generally the schism arises between those readers who, emphasizing allegory and Christian themes, treat the Christian characters of the play in largely positive and approving terms and those who, noticing that commerce, wealth, and financial speculation as thoroughly preoccupy the Venetians as they do Shylock, see the play ironically exposing the failure of the Christians to practice the beliefs which they profess. The issue of Christian commerce surfaces most conspicuously in the almost obsessive recurrence of a related set of words denoting financial speculation—*venture, hazard, thrift, usury, fortune, advantage.* Remarking upon this phenomenon, Ralph Berry concludes, "The formal principle of *The Merchant of Venice*, then, I take to be a series of mutations of 'venture.' "[1] And A. D. Moody voices his reservations about the appropriateness of such commerical venturing for Christians: "But to be committed to the pursuit of worldly fortune is to be subjected, in the medieval view of things, to the whims of the fickle goddess Fortune; at the most serious level it is to forfeit the redemptive influence of Providence for the chances and reverses of Fortune's wheel."[2]

There can be no question that the issues of risk, venture, hazard, and so commitment to fortune are crucial to the meaning of the play. But whether commitment to fortune means abdication of Christian values is another question, one that cannot be settled without respecting the play's distinctions between the business activities of Antonio (*venture* and *hazard*) and those of Shylock (*advantage, thrift, interest*) and trying to comprehend their implications. In short, whereas Berry believes that *venture* and *fortune* are "fluid" terms with "no really firm basis of meaning,"[3] I will argue that we can understand the play best by recourse to the traditions accruing to these terms, reading *in*

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Shakespeare's intellectual backgrounds and reading *out* our own.

Let us first review the commercial connotations of *venture* or *adventure*. E. M. Carus-Wilson comments, "The epithet 'merchant venturer' or 'merchant adventurer' came into use only toward the end of the fifteenth century. But the conception of a merchant venturer, or at least of a merchant venture, goes back far beyond this. A venture (*aventure*, *auenture*, or *auntre*, in Middle English) was a risk. To venture was to take a chance, to hazard one's life or one's goods in an enterprise that might bring a worthwhile reward."[4] By Shakespeare's time the term "Merchant Adventurer" had, of course, taken on a far more specific meaning; the aggressive and powerful Merchant Adventurers' Company maintained a virtual monopoly upon foreign trade.[5]

Despite the entrenched security of the Merchant Adventurers, the term retained its earlier well-defined connotations of high risk and high reward enterprise. Sir Walter Ralegh so explained the motive of his Guiana voyage in 1596: "If I had knowen other way to win, if I had imagined how greater adventures might have regained, . . . I would not doubt but for one yeare more to holde faste my soule in my teeth, til it were performed."[6] In Shakespeare's dramatic vocabulary the connotation of trade is always present (e.g., *2 H. IV* II.iv.63-65); yet the element of high risk gets strong emphasis. Baptista Minola, having second thoughts about the sudden marriage contract between Kate and Petruchio, remarks, "Faith, gentlemen, now I play a merchant's part, / And venture madly on a desperate mart" (*Shrew* II.i.326-27). And high risk inevitably shades into high—and romantic—reward. Romeo, rashly venturing into the garden of the Capulet house, assures Juliet, "I am no pilot, yet, wert thou as far / As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea, / I should adventure for such merchandise" (*Romeo* II.ii.82-84).

In *The Merchant of Venice* the idea of venturing and its consequences is initiated immediately as Antonio enters protesting, "In sooth I know not why I am so sad / . . . / And such a want-wit sadness makes of me, / That I have much ado to know myself" (I.i1, 6-7).[7] Salerio and Solanio assure him that his "mind is tossing on the ocean" with his argosies, the fear of "misfortune to [his] ventures" causing the sadness. Surely underlying

their vivid images of the dangers to his ships is the ancient *topos* of the sea of fortune.[8] Antonio, however, denies the major:

> Believe me no, I thank my fortune for it—
> My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,
> Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate
> Upon the fortune of this present year:
> Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad.
>
> (I.i.41-45)

If not fortune, then love, conjectures Solanio, which Antonio also denies. A neutral referee may record a palpable hit, nonetheless; with Bassanio's entrance we learn that the lady to whom Bassanio "swore a secret pilgrimage," and so the probability of separation from his loving friend, occupies Antonio's thoughts. In explaining how, by risking more of Antonio's money to recoup his previous debts, he proposes to court the fair heiress Portia, Bassanio provides the first definition of a venture:

> In my school-days, when I had lost one shaft,
> I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
> The self-same way, with more advised watch
> To find the other forth, and by adventuring both
> I oft found both: I urge this childhood proof
> Because what follows is pure innocence.
> I owe you much, and (like a wilful youth)
> That which I owe is lost, but if you please
> To shoot another arrow that selfway
> Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
> (As I will watch the aim) or to find both,
> Or bring your latter hazard back again,
> And thankfully rest debtor for the first.
>
> (I.i.140-52)

Although Bassanio's earlier reference to his "plots and purposes" may momentarily lend the impression that he is a calculating schemer, the "pure innocence" of the hazard rests on intuition: "I have a mind presages me such thrift / That I should questionless be fortunate" (I.i.175-76).[9]

Since "all [Antonio's] fortunes are at sea," the venture must be financed on credit by borrowing from Shylock, to whom Antonio's business practices are irrational: " . . . he hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies, I understand moreover upon the Rialto, he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for England, and other ventures he hath squand'red abroad,—but ships are but

boards, sailors but men" (I.ii.15-20). More than just rashness, however, Shylock's enmity sparks from Antonio's whole attitude toward money: ". . . in low simplicity/He lends out money gratis, and brings down / The rate of usance here with us in Venice. / . . . / He hates our sacred nation, and he rails / (Even there where merchants most do congregate) / On me, my bargins, and my well-won thrift, / Which he calls interest" (I.iii.37-40, 43-46).

The opposition of *venture* and *interest* climaxes in the opposed interpretations of Jacob's scheme for obtaining the best lambs from Laban (Genesis XXXI: 37-43). Shylock offers the story as a justification of interest and thrift. Antonio retorts, "This was a venture sir that Jacob serv'd for, / A thing not in his power to bring to pass, / But sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven" (I.iii.86-88). Arnold Williams' study of the Renaissance commentaries on this episode indicates that Shakespeare has assigned Antonio the orthodox position on the matter: "The 'hand of Heaven' is clearly responsible for the outcome . . . and Jacob is merely following divine guidance in taking a way of recovering his own property of which Laban had defrauded him."[10]

Fortune or the "hand of heaven"? How can we determine which governs the ventures of this play? Howard R. Patch has documented the many similarities between the goddesses Ventura and Fortuna; however, Patch also traces the tradition—figuring importantly in Boethius, Dante, Chaucer—of a Christianized fortune.[11] Fortuna becomes servant to Divine Providence, following a pattern of order normally hidden from the eyes of man. Hamlet, for instance, who spends so much time inveighing against the "strumpet" Fortune is dispatched to his death in England, literally voyaging upon the sea of fortune, when the hand of Heaven intervenes. He discovers the commission for his murder, alters and reseals it ("even in that was heaven ordinant. / I had my father's signet in my purse"), just in time to be plucked away and returned to Elsinore by the pirate ship. Thus Hamlet learns "There's a divinity that shapes our ends" and a "special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (*Hamlet* V.ii.10, 48-49, 219-20).[12] The lesson which Hamlet received so dramatically was Renaissance Christian commonplace: "nothing is done at aduenture." As Calvin put it, " . . . nothyng commeth by chaunce, but what soeuer commeth to passe in the world, commeth by the secrete prouidence of God." If all

hazard is directed by Providence, the ultimate adventurer is Christ himself. In *Piers Plowman* William Langland wrote, "And after auntrede god hymself, and tok Adams kynde."[13]

It is not insignificant that the strongest statement for the pagan view of fortune—that is, fortune as random chance—comes from a character of pagan origin, the Prince of Morocco. Unlike the godless Aaron of *Titus Andronicus* or the convert Othello, Morocco's religious beliefs are not specified for us. Such ostensibly Christian vocabulary as he uses—"this shrine, this mortal breathing saint," "heaven," "angel," "damnation"—is entirely directed to Portia, explainable both as the conventional language of Petrarchan compliment and as recognition of her embodiment of Christian virtues. Morocco himself would seem to be just what he appears, an erring Barbarian and, as prince, a supporter of the Muslim faith. Portia's explanation that "the lott'ry of my destiny / Bars me the right of voluntary choosing" (II.i.15-16), provokes his disquisition on fortune:

> But alas the while!
> If Hercules and Lichas play at dice
> Which is the better man, the greater throw
> May turn by fortune from the weaker hand:
> So is Alcides beaten by his page,
> And so may I, blind Fortune leading me,
> Miss that which one unworthier may attain,
> And die with grieving.
>
> (II.i.31-38)

The assurance that only by making his "hazard" can he compete for Portia at all draws his supplication, "Good fortune then, / To make me blest or cursed'st among men!"

Immediately after this anticipatory scene of the hazard in Belmont, we shift to Launcelot Gobbo's case of conscience. Act II, scene ii—which presents the clown deciding to flee from Shylock's service, his deception of and reconciliation to his blind father, his transferral to Bassanio's service—offers itself as a comedic microcosm of the play's themes. Launcelot's conflict between natural inclination and restraint of conscience, for instance, picks up Portia's initial ambivalence (I.ii) about the inflexible method by which the identity of her husband will be decided; his determination to run from his "devil" master anticipates the succeeding action in which Shylock's daughter Jessica runs away from the "hell" of her father's house; Launcelot's

line "it is a wise father that knows his own child" certainly evokes the entire theme of father-child relationships in the play, both Shylock's blindness about Jessica and the far-sightedness of Portia's father; and one can accede to René Fortin's suggestion that the entire scene offers an "oblique commentary on tensions between Judaic and Christian traditions."[14]

This largess, however, has not prevented the scene from being misread. Fortin, for example, writes that "The encounter [between Launcelot and Old Gobbo] takes place immediately after Launcelot's decision to leave the service of his Jewish master and seek service with the Christian Bassanio."[15] In fact Launcelot says nothing about seeking Bassanio's service prior to old Gobbo's entrance. He simply concludes that he will bolt, in much the same aimless way that Jessica and Lorenzo elope. Old Gobbo enters and Launcelot's first impulse is to deceive the blind man by concealing his identity. In other words, he would deny the bond of filial relation just as he has decided to break the bond of relation to his master. At this point he has a change of heart, finding himself unable to sustain the deception:

> Launc. Do you not know me father?
> Gob. Alack sir I am sand-blind, I know you not.
> Launc. Nay, indeed if you had your eyes you might fail of the knowing me: it is a wise father that knows his own child. Well, old man, I will tell you news of your son,—[Kneels.] give me your blessing,—truth will come to light, murder cannot be hid long, a man's son may, but in the end truth will out.
>
> (II.ii.70-77)

We observe that the Jacob and Isaac prototype, discerned by several readers,[16] has become contrastive: rather than obtaining his father's blessing by false identity, Launcelot does it after revealing his true identity. Only after the parent-child bond is renewed does Launcelot articulate the scheme to change masters lawfully by having Old Gobbo petition Bassanio to obtain his release. "O rare fortune! here comes the man, to him father" (II.ii.106-07). They make their fumbling petition to find that it has already been granted: " . . . thou hast obtain'd thy suit,— / Shylock thy master spoke with me this day, / And hath preferr'd thee" (II.ii.137-39). Assured of new service and "guarded" livery, Launcelot exits complacently reading his palm—that is, tell-

ing his own fortune—and reflecting, "well, if Fortune be a woman she's a good wench for this gear" (II.ii.157-58).

The prevailing tendency is to read the scene ironically; Moody remarks "we don't judge [Launcelot] as a Christian soul, but simply as a sly rogue with an eye for the main chance."[17] And Fortin, the only reader to see a serious thematic function in Old Gobbo's blindness, turns it to an ironic interpretation: " . . . the scene insists upon the mutual blindness of father and son, the *involuntary* blindness of Gobbo—and by extension, of the Jewish tradition—and the *willed* blindness of Launcelot—and by extension of the Christian tradition, which chooses to ignore its indebtedness to the older tradition. . . ."[18] Much more simply, and perhaps more pertinently, I suggest that Old Gobbo is a comic embodiment of that Blind Fortune invoked by Morocco in the preceding scene. As Fluellen, that gifted explicator of the obvious, put it, "Fortune is painted blind, with a muffler afore his eyes, to signify to you that fortune is blind" (*Henry V* III.vi.30-32). There is, however, one important difference between Old Gobbo and the Blind Fortune of Fluellen and Morocco: this quasi-symbolic scene illustrates the difference between the Christian and pagan notions of fortune, why it is that Bassanio wins and Morocco loses. The lesson to be developed in both the casket and trial scenes is that we "hazard all" by remaining true to bonds, thereby obtaining release from them.[19] The hazarding, in this sense, is an individual act of blind faith or implicit trust in God, Hamlet's "the readiness is all." Launcelot, even in his shallow way, commits such an act of faith by refusing to bolt and acknowledging his bonds. He is rewarded on the spot with good fortune. To quote Fluellen once again, "Fotune is an excellent moral."

The three caskets, gold, silver, and lead, which control access to Portia contain their own morals. Morocco studies the inscription of the leaden casket—"Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath"—and finds it ominous:

> This casket threatens—men that hazard all
> Do it in hope of fair advantages:
> A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross,
> I'll then nor give nor hazard aught for lead.
>
> (II.vii.18-21)

Forgetting his own sensible appeal to Portia not to value him by his complexion, Morocco chooses the golden exterior and learns,

"All that glisters is not gold." The Prince of Arragon, too, regards the choice of caskets as action under the aegis of fortune (see II.ix.15, 19, 38, 52). He spurns the hazard of lead because it promises insufficient reward, then snobbishly chooses the silver and is exposed as a fool. In both instances choice is a revelation of character with nothing random about the result. Progressing from approval of the silver casket's appearance to scrutiny of its inscription, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves," Arragon had observed, "And well said too; for who shall go about / To cozen Fortune, and be honourable / Without the stamp of merit?" (II.ix.37-39). The idea of "cozening Fortune" epitomizes the difference in attitude toward the lottery exhibited by Morocco and Arragon, on the one hand, and Bassanio on the other. Neil Carson has remarked, "The contrast . . . is between the 'cozeners' who think that good fortune may be earned by merit or endeavour, and the 'hazarders' whose recklessness is a token of their faith in God's divine providence."[20]

Arragon's departure is saluted by Nerissa's "ancient saying" that "Hanging and wiving goes by destiny" (II.ix.83). Her proverb echoes Portia's earlier comment on "the lottr'y of my destiny" (II.i.15), albeit now with somewhat different connotations. In Shakespeare's private lexicon *destiny* seems closely linked to *providence*, suggesting a conception similar to the Boethian one wherein the aspect of Providence controlling the visible, mutable world is called destiny and fortune administers the decrees of destiny which affect men.[21] In *The Tempest*, for instance, the good characters directly attribute causation to "Providence divine" and Ariel describes himself as a "minister of Fate" (III.iii.61), directed by "Destiny, / That hath to instrument this lower world / And what is in't" (III.iii.53-55). Similarly here, attitudes toward hazard and fortune reveal the degree of a character's awareness of providential design. Man's will is free, but his character, his willingness to risk, determines choice in a way which God foresees and uses. In this respect Shakespeare's reworking of the casket mottoes from his probable source, the *Gesta Romanorum*, illuminates his intention. Whereas he merely switches the inscriptions of the gold and silver caskets, with the lead he alters the overtly providential "*Who so chooseth mee, shall finde that God hath disposed for him*" to "Who Chooseth me, must give and hazard all he

hath."[22] With the direct reference to God's will effaced, the emphasis shifts from the chooser as passive recipient to active seeker of God's will, his readiness to hazard all on faith in imitation of the first Christian adventurer.

Just as Bassanio conceived of the courtship as a "venture" and a "hazard," so Portia describes the choice of caskets in the same words:

> I pray you tarry, pause a day or two
> Before you hazard . . .
> . . . . . .
> I would detain you here some month or two
> Before you venture for me. I could teach you
> How to choose right, but then I am forsworn,
> So will I never be,—so may you miss me,—
> (III.ii.1-2, 9-12)

She, too, will risk all by respecting the bond of obligation to her father. Beyond the common propensity to speak of courtship in terms of venturing, readers have remarked that the commercial language of Venice carries into Belmont with the image of the Golden Fleece. Bassanio thus described Portia to Antonio: ". . . her sunny locks, / Hang on her temples like a golden fleece" (I.i.169-70). John Russell Brown notes:

> The golden fleece was a symbol of the fortunes for which merchants ventured; . . . Sir Francis Drake returning from his voyage round the world was said to have brought back with him "his goulden fleece." That the phrase was used of merchants' ventures, gives point to Gratiano's boast:
>
> > what's the news from Venice?
> > How doeth that royal merchant good Antonio?
> > I know he will be glad of our success,
> > We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece.
> > (III.ii.237-40)[23]

Brown is entirely correct in reminding us that the Golden Fleece was a common descriptive image for the rewards of merchant adventuring; but the comparison of Drake to Jason bringing back the golden fleece, which occurs in Whitney's *A Choice of Emblems* (1586), is suggestive in another way. The motto of the emblem is *Auxilio diuino;* the picture shows "the hand of Heaven" guiding Drake's ship by a celestial bridle; and the verse enumerates circumnavigational hazards, concluding: "but, GOD was on his side, / And throughe them all, in spite of all,

his shaken shippe did guide. / And, to requite his paines: *By helpe of power deuine.*"[24] The associations in Whitney's emblem were enduring ones; the Jason and the Golden Fleece myth was used in Lord Mayor's Pageants designed by Anthony Munday in 1614, 1615, and 1623, and by Thomas Middleton in 1621 and 1626. In the last of these Middleton commemorated Drake as "England's true Jason."[25] For the assumption of Providential guidance we might consult the venturers themselves. Both Drake and Sir John Hawkins left verses spelling out their belief that venturing, undertaken in the proper spirit, partakes of divine guidance. As William Pelham argued, "For where the attempt, on vertue dooth depend: / No doubt but God, will blesse it in the ende."[26] Against this background we may see that the implication of the Jason and Golden Fleece analogy is not that Portia is commercial booty; rather it is that in romantic venturing, as in commercial venturing, one risks all to gain all, succeeding only "by helpe of power deuine."[27]

We need not go overboard on Jason's voyage, however. Shakespeare's use of myth in this comedy is iconic, not narrative. He will focus upon a single facet of a mythic character or episode of his career to inform an action or illuminate a motive; he does not sustain a continuous, mythic pattern. Those critics who, following out the Jason story, associate Portia with Medea make an association which Shakespeare refused.[28] The tragic overtones of Jason and Medea as lovers are so strong that they can be permitted to enter the play only in the catalogue of unfortunate lovers recited by Lorenzo and Jessica (V.i.1-22).

Indeed, Jason is not the primary mythological referent for the character and role of Bassanio; upon Bassanio's arrival in Belmont that assignment shifts to Jason's better-known shipmate from the Argo, Hercules himself. The idea of hazarding the choice of caskets as a Herculean action had been anticipated by Morocco's analogy of Hercules and Lichas playing at dice. It is reintroduced by Portia's description of Bassanio:

> Now he goes
> With no less presence, but with much more love
> Than young Alcides, when he did redeem
> The virgin tribute, paid by howling Troy
> To the sea-monster: I stand for sacrifice,
> The rest aloof are the Dardanian wives,
> With bleared visages come forth to view

> The issue of th' exploit: go Hercules!
> Live thou, I live—with much much more dismay,
> I view the fight, than thou that mak'st the fray.
>
> (III.ii.53-62)

Portia's exuberant "Go Hercules!" will echo in a later comedy, *As You Like It*. There Rosalind first tries to dissuade Orlando from challenging Charles, the Duke's "wrastler": "If you saw yourself with your eyes, or knew yourself with your judgment, the fear of your adventure would counsel you to a more equal enterprise" (I.ii.175-78). But, since Orlando persists in his adventure, she cheers him on. "Now Hercules be thy speed, young man!" (I.ii.210).

The Herculean label, in one sense, simply identifies the two young men as heroes, both of whom, of course, are successful in their ventures. Nevertheless, the prototypes for their Herculean actions differ. Whereas Orlando's triumph is modeled upon the conquest of Antaeus,[29] Bassanio's hazard goes outside the labors. The method here is "By indirections find directions out." Morocco's reference to Hercules and Lichas dicing reflects his mistaken notion of hazard as blind fortune; Portia's analogy of Hercules rescuing Hesione is a partial truth, reflecting her personal anxieties. By repeating the Hercules association and requiring us to discard inappropriate actions from his career, Shakespeare nudges us toward recognizing the correct one. The game is virtually given away in the linkage of act, *choice*, and actor, *Hercules:* Bassanio's hazard is a reenactment of the choice of Hercules, that pivotal event wherein the young hero, by choosing Virtus over Voluptas—the lifestyle represented by the sober maiden rather than the fleshy seductress or, alternatively, the high, hard path instead of the broad and easy one—conquered Fortune.[30]

Shakespeare's handling of Bassanio's choice of caskets reflects this very popular tradition in several aspects. First, the number of options is effectively reduced from three to two. This is accomplished by framing the choice as opposition between essence and appearance. Silver thereby becomes merely a variant kind of deceptive appearance, an appendix to gold with the same objections obtaining, and can be dismissed in an additional one and a half lines. Second, the concentration upon the issue of false appearance—"outward shows," "fair ornament," "outward parts," "supposed fairness," "seeming truth," are Bassanio's

phrases—evokes the tradition of Voluptas as the seeming fair of sensual allurement or of the deceptive, downward path as the apparently easy and attractive one. Sigurd Burckhardt has observed that Arragon and Morocco fail the choice of caskets because " . . . they try to interpret the lines inscribed on the caskets rather than the substance. . . The noteworthy thing about Bassanio is that he disregards the inscriptions; he lets the metals themselves speak to him (quite literally: he apostrophizes them as speakers)."[31] Apostrophizing the metals as speakers would seem a heritage of the prototypic choice tradition in which the opposed values or lifestyles are personified as women.

The suggestion is more than latent here. Bassanio muses,

> Look on beauty,
> And you shall see 'tis purchased by the weight,
> Which therein works a miracle in nature,
> Making them lightest that wear most of it:
> So are those crisped snaky golden locks
> Which make such wanton gambols with the wind
> Upon supposed fairness, often known
> To be the dowry of a second head,
> The skull that bred them in the sepulchre.
> Thus ornament is but the guiled shore
> To a most dangerous sea: the beauteous scarf
> Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word,
> The seeming truth which cunning times put on
> To entrap the wisest.
>
> (III.ii.88-101)

His comparisons are complex. The "crisped snaky golden locks" are a demonic version of his own description of Portia's "sunny locks / Hang[ing] on her temples like a golden fleece." The "guiled shore / To a most dangerous sea" reminds us of the opening descriptions of Antonio's ships risked to the sea of fortune, while the veiled "Indian beauty" evokes a fusion of romantic and mercantile venturing. Bassanio has seen the risks in appearance, stakes his hazard that Portia's beauty is substantial, essential, and he deserves the implicit claim to Herculean courage when he observes that cowards " . . . wear yet upon their chins / The beards of Hercules and frowning Mars, / Who inward search'd, have livers white as milk" (III.ii.84-86). The significance of the Choice of Hercules is that the hero, by choosing correctly, reveals that he has conquered himself. Com-

ing to understand himself, he has properly ordered his own mind, passions, appetities; it is only then that he can conquer others.

With his usual efficiency Shakespeare had established this theme at the very outset; Janus-minded Antonio, divided in his love for Bassanio, has "much ado to know myself." That Bassanio knows himself the casket scene puts beyond dispute. He dismisses the gaudy of golden Voluptas, whether wigged in snaky curls or veiled as the Indian beauty: "but thou, thou meager lead / Which rather threaten'st than doest promise aught, / Thy paleness moves me more than eloquence, / And here choose I" (III.ii.104-07). Unlike Lear who opts for the golden speech of Goneril and Regan to reject the threatening plainness of Cordelia's bond, Bassanio remains unmoved by mere eloquence. It is the hazard of meager and threatening lead which, as Virtus moved Hercules, moves Bassanio to trust his blind intuition; and, by risking all, he wins all.

Hercules, as Book V of *The Faerie Queene* reminds us, was a "Champion of true Justice"; and in establishing the reign of justice over himself, in the sense of his own temperance, as a prerequisite to his public career as administrator of justice, Hercules only follows a paradigm going back at least to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[32] A similar progression is evident in the movement from the casket choice of Act III to the trial scene of Act IV. Portia matches Bassanio's successful hazard by giving all in her own way: "Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours / Is now converted" (III.ii.166-67). Converted to Bassanio, in Act IV she plays the role of judge, literally wearing a man's costume, that was his in Act III, while Antonio "stand[s] for sacrifice" as she did earlier.

Samuel Chew first observed in the trial scene the presence of the conventional iconographic attributes of Justice, the sword and scales.[33] Shylock whets his knife on the sole of his shoe as he anticipates the pleasure of cutting the pound of flesh from Antonio and weighing it upon the scales (see IV.i.120-26 and 255-56). The perversion of the sword of Justice to Shylock's knife shocks and revolts as deliberately as does the reduction of the scales, traditional symbol of equity, to a butcher's measure. But, if Shylock represents—in Chew's words—"a travesty of Justice," the goddess Justice herself appears to re-establish her honor. When Portia enters as "Balthazar," the young doctor of

law, she says something rather curious; the Duke inquires whether she is acquainted with the issue, and she replies:

> I am informed thoroughly of the cause,—
> Which is the merchant here? and which the jew?
> (IV.i.169-70)

Insofar as the line has been noticed, it has been used to support the modernist interpretation that Shylock and Antonio are interchangeable, faceless merchants in business suits with equally corrupt motives. This is to ignore the careful distinction of Shylock's costume, "my Jewish gaberdine" (I.iii.107), from the more splendid appearance of the gentile merchant prince. If Portia cannot distinguish between the two, it is her way of announcing that she will judge the case on its merits, impartially, without respect to the persons involved. She is acting as Blind Justice.[34]

Renaissance commentators generally divide justice into three topics: absolute justice, in which the letter of the law is rigidly maintained; equity, which considers the particular circumstance of the individual under the general law; and mercy or clemency.[35] These three topics structure the progression of the trial scene. Portia first seems to concede the claim of absolute justice as Antonio admits the obligation of the bond (IV.i.177-78) and she rebuts Bassanio's appeal to the duke to bend the law:

> It must not be, there is no power in Venice
> Can alter a decree established.
> 'Twill be recorded for a precedent,
> And many an error by the same example
> Will rush into the state. It cannot be.
> (IV.i.214-18)

Shylock may lawfully claim the penalty, so she can only entreat him to be merciful, as she does in the "quality of mercy" speech and, again, when she admits the legality of the forfeiture: "be merciful, / Take thrice thy money, bid me tear the bond" (IV.i.229-30). Portia presses the consideration of equity; the practical effect of administering the letter of the bond will be an unspecified personal consequence, the loss of Antonio's life. "Have by some surgeon Shylock on your charge, / To stop his wounds, lest he do bleed to death" (IV.i.253-54). Shylock, however, refuses to recognize the principle of equity: "'tis not in the bond."

Portia then reverses the procedure with Shylock, instead of Antonio, the focus of the examination. He is exposed to the rigors of letter-of-the-law, absolute justice: "This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood, / The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh': / . . . If thou dost shed / One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods / Are (by the laws of Venice) confiscate / Unto the state of Venice" (IV.i.302-03, 305-08). Next, the claim of equity is invoked negatively as Portia informs Shylock that the law authorizes confiscation of his estate and puts his own life in jeopardy for having conspired against the life of a Venetian citizen (IV.i.343-59). Justice having been satisfied, both the duke and Antonio are afforded the opportunity to extend Shylock the mercy which he could not find in the bond. He looked in the wrong place; it exists only in the heart's core.

The trial scene is a fine example of what Rosalie Colie has called "unmetaphoring."[36] Shakespeare has created a dramatic literalization of the Protestant Reformers' legalistic theory of the Atonement—surely for Christians the ultimate source of all Justice-Mercy considerations—with their characteristic law-court terminology, distinctions, and atmosphere.[37] In such a context, doubts about the efficacy of Shylock's forced conversion seem hardly relevant. Portia's lesson, "That in the course of justice, none of us / Should see salvation" (IV.i.195-96), makes the familiar point that we are all guilty under the Old Law. Indeed, Shylock's illness (IV.i.392) and Gratiano's shouted insistence that the Jew be given a halter to hang himself (IV.i.360-63, 375), are, perhaps, less "realistic" strokes than reminders that the sinner brought to a full consciousness of his guilt under the Law will be reduced to a state of suicidal despair. Gratiano proferring the halter, even in his choice of instruments, performs as conventional an action as do the giants named Despair in *The Faerie Queene* and *Pilgrim's Progress*.[38]

Shylock loses really because he loses faith; he cannot trust absolutely in his own bond, in the law he has insisted upon. As Burckhardt has suggested, Portia's decision to trust the absolute justice of the bond is a magnificant hazard. Enacting the inscription of the leaden casket, she had given all to Bassanio and now risks all, because of course Shylock has the option of saying, "Yes, I will take my pound of flesh whatever the consequences." Instead, there is a failure of nerve; in Burckhardt's phrase, he " . . . turns apostate to the faith he has so triumphantly

forced upon his enemies."[39] Shylock's function, then, is primarily contrastive. Where the gentle Portia hazards all, he hedges his bet, unwilling to move beyond the usurer's principles of "advantage" and "thrift." Where Shylock will grant no mercy to the gentile Antonio, the merchant can and does extend mercy to the usurer. Antonio's previous behavior had been characterized equally by his kindness toward Shylock's gentile victims and his brutal contempt for the moneylender himself, earning Shylock's sneering epithet, "fawning publican" (I.iii.36) an apparent allusion to Matthew V:46, "For if ye loue them, which loue you, what rewarde shal you haue? Do not the Publicanes euen the same?"[40] Christ's lesson from this passage in the Sermon on the Mount is central to the entire trial scene, not merely Portia's pleas for mercy:

> But I say vnto you, Loue your enemies: blesse them that curse you: do good to them that hate you, and praye for them which hurt you, and persecute you,
> The ye may be the children of your Father that is in heauen: for he maketh his sunne to arise on the euil, and the good, and sendeth raine on the iuste, & vniuste.
> (Matthew V:44-45)

That Antonio has absorbed the spirit of the lesson is evident in his conversion from a stoic resignation to death—"herein Fortune shows herself more kind / Than is her custom" (V.i.263-64)—to actively Christian behavior, a conversion effected by his providential salvation. Not Fortune, but the hand of Heaven.

Antonio's education to a state of fuller self-knowledge concludes with the ring trick of Act V, an action designed to expose and reduce the tensions between love and friendship. The ordeal of the trial had revealed both Antonio's jealousy of Bassanio's new wife and Bassanio's willingness to value Antonio's life even above that wife. When "Balthazar" demands as reward for his services the ring with which Portia had pledged her love, Bassanio at first demurs, but is persuaded by Antonio: "My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring, / Let his deservings and my love withal / Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandement" IV.i.445-47). With the ring trick, as Anne Barton has argued, Portia resorts to " . . . a test which forces Bassanio to weigh his obligations to his wife against those to his friend and to recognize the latent antagonism between them."[41] Portia plays the part of a comic Shylock, harping on the letter of the ring-bond,

until she achieves her purpose. Bassanio admits the wrong and renews his pledge: "Pardon this fault, and by my soul I swear / I never more will break an oath with thee" (V.i.247-48). Antonio recognizes that he has been the cause of dissension and removes the impediment by underwriting the venture anew: "I dare be bound again, / My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord / Will never more break faith advisedly" (V.i.251-53). The progression of the play is underscored by the movement from physical to spiritual bonds, a progression in which the idea of *faith* figures significantly. The point to all of the fifth-act bawdy jokes about marital infidelity is simply that marriage, as much as Providence or Justice, is a matter of unswerving, blind faith in the bond.

An illuminating exchange between Erwin Panofsky and Edgar Wind has taught us that during the Renaissance the image of Blind Cupid could carry divergent connotations.[42] The more common tradition interprets the blindness as random, unreasoned, physical attraction; but, more particularly in the current of Renaissance platonism, the blindness could be employed as a symbol of supra-intellectual transcendence, a condition beyond reason perhaps analogous to the way in which Bassanio is "moved" by the lead casket. We know from *Midsummer Night's Dream* that both kinds of blindness in love interested Shakespeare at this stage of his career.[43] Cupid first insinuates his presence into this play when Bassanio describes his romantic venture in terms of Cupid's favorite activity: shooting an arrow to see what it hits. The god gains direct entrance, however, in Act II, scene vi, with Jessica's elopement. Pausing as she throws down to her lover a casket full of Shylock's money and jewels, Jessica is momentarily abashed, but for social rather than moral reasons. She finds it indecorous to appear publicly in boy's clothing:

> But love is blind, and lovers cannot see
> The pretty follies that themselves commit,
> For if they could, Cupid himself would blush
> To see me thus transformed to a boy.
>
> (II.vi.36-39)

The relationship of Jessica and Lorenzo to the primary lovers, Portia and Bassanio, consistently is contrastive and negative: they undergo no tests of character or faith; they are obedient to no bonds; they take all, rather than giving all; they hazard no-

thing.[44] It is right, therefore, that Jessica should here associate their love with the negative variety of blindness, just as later they will add their names to the catalogue of famous, unfortunate lovers. Reading by contraries, it is appropriate also to associate with the renewed bond of Portia and Bassanio the higher sort of blind love, a Christian relationship based on total trust and faith. Discussing the plot, the bond, and the ring as the controlling metaphors of the play, Sigurd Burckhardt concludes:

> *The Merchant* is a play about circularity and circulation; it asks how the vicious circle of the bond's law can be transformed into the ring of love. And it answers: through a literal and unreserved submission to the bond as absolutely binding.[45]

Within the circular pattern of this play, which the platonic musical overture to Act V reveals as a dance to the music of time, the three blind deities—Fortune, Justice, and Cupid—like three unexpected Graces, move us to the end of the measure.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Ralph Berry, *Shakespeare's Comedies: Exploration in Form* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 113-14. For the most influential allegorical reading, see Barbara K. Lewalski, "Biblical Allusion and Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*," *SQ*, 13 (1962), 327-43.

[2] A. D. Moody, from *Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice* (London, 1964), reprinted in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Merchant of Venice*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970), p. 102.

[3] Berry, pp. 114-15, 137.

[4] E. M. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers: Collected Studies* (1954; London, 1967), pp. xv-xvi.

[5] See Carus-Wilson; and G. D. Ramsay, *English Overseas Trade During the Centuries of Emergence* (London, 1957).

[6] *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana . . . by Sir Walter Raleigh*, ed. Sir Robert H. Schonburgh, Hakluyt Society, no. 3 (reprinted New York, 1970), "Epistle Dedicatory," p. iv.

[7] I quote from *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown, New Arden (Cambridge, Mass., 1955); for all other Shakespeare quotations I have used *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans *et al.* (Boston, 1974).

[8] For the sea of fortune, see Howard R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature* (1927; New York, 1967), pp. 101-07.

[9] Cf. Sylvan Barnet, "Prodigality and Time in *The Merchant of Venice*," *PMLA*, 87 (1972), 27-28.

[10] Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis, 1527-1633* (Chapel Hill, 1948), p. 171.

[11] Patch, pp. 39-40.

[12] For the sixteenth century revival of the Fortune-as-handmaiden-of-Providence theory, see Marie Tanner, "Chance and Coincidence in Titian's Diana and Actaeon," *Art Bulletin*, 56 (1974), 541-46. For the role of providence in *Hamlet*, see, e.g., Maynard Mack, "The World of Hamlet," *YR*, 41 (1952), 502-23; and Sidney Warhaft, "The Mystery of *Hamlet*," *ELH*, 30 (1963), 193-208.

[13] Pierre Viret, *A Christian Instruction*, tr. John Shute (1573), p. 7; John Calvin, *Commentaries . . . vpon the Prophet Daniell*, tr. Arthur Golding (1570), fol. 65 [Quoted by C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 53, 56]; and William Langland, *Piers the Plowman*, ed. Rev. W. W. Skeat (Oxford, 1886), I.585, C. Passus XXI.228-35.

[14] Fortin, "Launcelot and the Uses of Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*," *SEL*, 14 (1974), 262.

[15] Fortin, p. 265. For other misreadings, see, e.g., Berry, pp. 113-14; and John F. Hennedy, "Launcelot Gobbo and Shylock's Forced Conversion," *TSLL*, 15 (1973), 406.

[16] The parallels to Genesis XXVII were first noted by Dorothy C. Hockey, "The Patch is Kind Enough," *SQ*, 10 (1959), 448-50; see also Norman Holland, *The Shakespearean Imagination* (New York, 1964), p. 107.

[17] Moody, in *Twentieth Century Interpretations*, p. 104.

[18] Fortin, p. 267.

[19] See Sigurd Burckhardt, "The Merchant of Venice: The Gentle Bond," in his *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton, 1968), pp. 206-36.

[20] Carson, "Hazarding and Cozening in The Merchant of Venice," *ELN*, 9 (1972), 174-76.

[21] See *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, especially IV.vi—V.ii. The word *providence*, of course, does not occur in *The Merchant of Venice*; but cf. the traditional connotations of Portia's metaphor for mercy, "It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven / Upon the place beneath" (IV.i. 181-82), and Lorenzo's "Fair Ladies, you drop manna in the way / Of starved people" (V.i.294-95).

[22] See *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, 1 (New York, 1957), 460-61, 511-14.

[23] Brown, *Merchant*, p. iv. The verbal complex of "venturing" or "hazarding" for the "Golden Fleece" was familiar enough that Marlowe could subvert the romantic idealism wittily by attaching it to a man: "His dangling tresses that were never shorne, / Had they beene cut, and unto Colchos borne, / Would have allu'rd the vent'rous youth of Greece / To hazard more, than for the Golden Fleece" (*Hero and Leander* I.55-58).

[24] Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblems: 1586*, English Emblem Books No. 3 (Menston, 1969), p. 203. The providential thrust of the emblem is noticed by Henry Green, *Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers* (London, 1870), pp. 413-14; and by David M. Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry 1558-1642* (London, 1971), pp. 293-94.

[25] See Bergeron, pp. 152-53, 161, 191-92, 198-99.

[26] *The Voyages and Colonising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert*, ed. David Beers Quinn, Hakluyt Society, Second Series, 83 (1940; reprinted New York, 1967), II.438. See also Robert R. Cawley, *Unpathed Waters: Studies in the Influence of the Voyagers on Elizabethan Literature* (Princeton, 1940), p. 138, n. 75.

[27] See Sylvan Barnet, "Prodigality and Time," pp. 28-29; and Carson, p. 177.

[28] See D. J. Palmer, "The Merchant of Venice, or the Importance of Being Earnest," *Shakespearean Comedy*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 14 (London, 1972), pp. 101-03; and H. S. Donow, "Shakespeare's Caskets: Unity in The Merchant of Venice," *ShakS* 4 (1968), 87-88.

[29] See Richard Knowles, "Myth and Type in *As You Like It*," *ELH*, 33 (1966), 3-5.

[30] See, particularly, Jane Aptekar, *Icons of Justice: Iconography and Thematic Imagery in Book V of the Faerie Queene* (New York, 1969), pp. 180-86, 194-200; and Eugene M. Waith, *The Herculean Hero* (New York, 1962), pp. 47-48. For Herculean virtue dominating fortune, see R. Wittkower, "Chance, Time and Virtue," *JWI*, 1 (1937-38), 316-20; and Pierre Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire*, Études Augustiniennes 8 (Paris, 1967), pp. 233-35.

[31] Burckhardt, p. 217.

[32] See *Nicomachean Ethics* V.xi.9 and V.i.15-20; and, for the temperate Hercules, see Aptekar, p. 181, and Waith, pp. 40-43.

[33] Samuel C. Chew, *The Virtues Reconciled: An Iconographic Study* (Toronto, 1947), p. 48.

[34] As Erwin Panofsky has remarked, the figure of Blind Justice " . . . is a humanistic concoction of very recent origin," stemming from the vogue for Egyptian hieroglyphics, but one that quickly obtained wide circulation. See *Studies in Iconology* (1939; New York, 1962), p. 109 and n.

[35] See James E. Phillips, "Renaissance Concepts of Justice and the Structure of *The Faerie Queene*, Book V," *HLQ*, 33 (1970), 103-20; W. N. Knight, "The Narrative Unity of Book V of *The Faerie Queene*: 'That Part of Justice Which is Equity,'" *RES*, 21 (1970), 267-94; and R. B. Waddington, *The Mind's Empire: Myth and Form in George Chapman's Narrative Poems* (Baltimore, 1974), pp. 171-72.

[36] See Rosalie L. Colie, *Shakespeare's Living Art* (Princeton, 1974), p. 11 and *passim*.

[37] See C. A. Patrides, "Milton and the Protestant Theory of the Atonement," *PMLA*, 74 (1959), 10-13.

[38] See Susan Snyder, "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 12 (1965), especially 30-34, 50-57.

[39] Burckhardt, p. 234.

[40] Lewalski, pp. 330-31. I quote from *The Geneva Bible*, facsimile of the 1560 edition (Madison, 1969).

[41] Barton, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 253.

[42] See Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, pp. 95-128; Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (rev. ed., New York, 1968), pp. 53-80; and Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic* (New York, 1969), pp. 129-38. See also C. D. Gilbert, "Blind Cupid," *JWCI*, 33 (1970), 304-05.

[43] See, e.g., Frank Kermode, "The Mature Comedies," *Shakespeare, Spenser, Donne: Renaissance Essays* (New York, 1971), pp. 204-10.

[44] See, especially, Burckhardt, pp. 223-27, and Barton, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 253.

[45] Burckhardt, p. 210.