Biblical Allusion and Allegory in
The Merchant of Venice

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Perhaps no other play in the Shakespeare canon has provoked greater controversy regarding its fundamental moral and religious attitudes than has The Merchant of Venice. As everyone knows, acrimonious critical debates have long been waged concerning whether Shakespeare's attitude in the play is humanitarian or antisemitic, whether Shylock is presented as the persecuted hero or as a crude monster and comic butt, whether Antonio and Bassanio are portrayed as worthy Christians or as crass hypocrites.

Recently, however, some critics have in part transcended the controversies arising out of the literal story by concentrating upon certain allegorical and symbolic aspects of the play, reflecting in this approach the modern critical emphasis upon Shakespeare's use of Christian themes and imagery and his debt to the medieval tradition. In a most illuminating essay, Nevill Coghill discusses several of Shakespeare's comedies, including MV, in terms of the medieval comic form described by Dante—a beginning in troubles and a resolution in joy, reflecting the fundamental pattern of human existence in this world. Moreover, he traces in MV the direct influence of the medieval allegorical theme of the "Parliament of Heaven", in which Mercy and Justice, two of the four "daughters of God", argue over the fate of mankind after his fall. In somewhat similar vein, Sir Israel Gollancz sees the play as Shakespeare's largely unconscious development of certain myths implicit in the original sources—the myth of the Parliament of Heaven, and the related Redemption myth in which Antonio represents Christ, Shylock, Evil, and Portia, Mercy and Grace. These suggestions shed considerable light upon the trial scene, but they hardly provide a comprehensive account of the entire play. The question of the extent and manner in which allegory may organize the total work has yet to be investigated, and constitutes the subject of the present inquiry.

The overingenuity and the religious special pleading that has marred some "Christian" criticism of Shakespeare make manifest the need for rigorous standards of evidence and argument in such investigations. The present study does not claim that all of Shakespeare's plays approach as closely as MV appears to

do to the themes and methods of the morality play. Nor does it imply anything
about Shakespeare's personal religious convictions, since the religious signifi-
cances dealt with in the play are basic to all the major Christian traditions and
were available to any Elizabethan through countless sermons, biblical comment-
taries, and scripture annotations. Nor, again, does it assume Shakespeare's direct
contact with medieval allegory, since the general Elizabethan assimilation and
perpetuation of this tradition is clearly evidenced in Spenser, Marlowe, and
many other poets. The study does, however, uncover in MV patterns of Biblical
allusion and imagery so precise and pervasive as to be patently deliberate; it
finds, moreover, that such language clearly reveals an important theological
dimension in the play and points toward consistent and unmistakeable allegori-
cal meanings.

The allegorical aspects of The Merchant of Venice can, I believe, be greatly
illuminated by the medieval allegorical method exemplified by Dante. Indeed,
though it omits MV, a recent study by Bernard Spivack has persuasively argued
the utility of the Dante comparison in comprehending the allegorical origins
and characteristics of many Shakespearian villains.\(^4\) In contrast to personifica-
tion allegory wherein a particular is created to embody an insensible, Dante's
symbolic method causes a particular real situation to suggest a meaning or mean-
ings beyond itself. In MV Shakespeare, like Dante, is ultimately concerned with
the nature of the Christian life, though as a dramatist he is fully as interested in
the way in which the allegorical dimensions enrich the particular instance as in
the use of the particular to point to higher levels of meaning. The various dimen-
sions of allegorical significance in MV, though not consistently maintained
throughout the play and not susceptible of analysis with schematic rigor, are
generally analogous to Dante's four levels of allegorical meaning: a literal or
story level; an allegorical significance concerned with truths relating to humanity
as a whole and to Christ as head of humanity; a moral or tropological level
dealing with factors in the moral development of the individual; and an anagogi-
cal significance treating the ultimate reality, the Heavenly City.\(^5\) Moreover, compre-
prehension of the play's allegorical meanings leads to a recognition of its funda-
mental unity, discrediting the common critical view that it is a hotchpotch which
developed contrary to Shakespeare's conscious intention.

The use of Biblical allusion to point to such allegorical meanings must now
be illustrated in relation to the various parts of the work.

Antonio and Shylock

At what would correspond in medieval terminology to the "moral" level,
the play is concerned to explore and define Christian love and its various
antitheses.\(^6\) As revealed in the action, Christian love involves both giving and

\(^4\) Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: the History of a Metaphor in Relation to his Major

Dante, "Letter to Can Grande della Scala", in Dante's Eleven Letters, ed. G. R. Carpenter (N. Y.,
1892).

\(^6\) Many critics have suggested that the play is essentially concerned with the contrast and evalua-
tion of certain moral values—such as money, love, and friendship; appearance and reality; true love
and fancy; mercy and justice; generosity and possessiveness; the usury of commerce and the usury
of love. See Brown, Arden ed., pp. xxxvi-xxiii; M. C. Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan
Poetry (London, 1951), pp. 170-179; Cary B. Graham, "Standards of Value in the Merchant of
forgiving: it demands an attitude of carelessness regarding the things of this world founded upon a trust in God's providence; an attitude of self-forgetfulness and humility founded upon recognition of man's common sinfulness; a readiness to give and risk everything, possessions and person, for the sake of love; and a willingness to forgive injuries and to love enemies. In all but the last respect, Antonio is presented throughout the play as the very embodiment of Christian love, and Shylock functions as one (but not the only) antithesis to it.

Antonio's practice of Christian love is indicated throughout the play under the metaphor of "venturing", and the action begins with the use of this metaphor in a mock test of his attitude toward wealth and worldly goods. The key scripture text opposing love of this world to the Christian love of God and neighbor is Matt. vi. 19-21, 31-33:

Lay not up treasures for your selves upon the earth, where the moth and canker corrupt, & where theves dig through, and steale./ But lay up treasures for your selves in heaven. .../ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also/ .... Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eate? or what shall we drink? or wherewith shall we be clothed?/ ... But seeke ye first the kingdome of God, and his righteousnesse, & all these things shalbe ministred unto you. 

In language directly alluding to this passage, Salario suggests that Antonio's melancholy may result from worry about his "ventures" at sea: "Your mind is tossing on the ocean,/ There where your argosies [are]", and Solanio continues in this vein: "had I such venture forth,/ The better part of my affections would/ Be with my hopes abroad" (I. i. 8-9, 15-17). Gratiano repeats the charge—"You have too much respect upon the world:/ They lose it that do buy it with much care" (I. i. 74-75)—a speech also recalling Matt. xvi. 25-26, "Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it. ./ For what shall it profite a man, though he should winne the whole worlde, if he lose his owne soule?" Yet the validity of Antonio's disclaimer, "I hold the world but as the world Gratiano" (I. i. 77)—that is, as the world deserves to be held—is soon evident: his sadness is due not to worldly concern but to the imminent parting with his beloved friend Bassanio. After witnessing this parting Salerio testifies, "I think he only loves the world for him" (II. viii. 50).

Gratiano's second playful charge, that Antonio's melancholy may be a pose to feed his self-importance, to seem a "Sir Oracle" with a wise and grave demeanor (I. i. 88-102), recalls the passage in 1 Cor. xiii. 4-5 where Paul charac-

Unless otherwise indicated, scripture quotations are from the Geneva Bible (London, 1584; 1st ed., 1560). Richmond Noble, Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge (London, 1935), notes that all of Shakespeare's Biblical allusions are drawn from one or more of the following versions—Geneva, Geneva-Tomson (1st ed., 1576), and the Bishops Bible (1st ed., 1568), and that the first two, being quartos, had the widest circulation during the period. For this play, the Geneva renderings seem on the whole closest, though occasionally the phraseology suggests that of the Bishops Bible, which Shapeskeare may have recalled from the church services.

In these speeches they testify to their own failure to come up to the standard of Christian perfection achieved by Antonio. Shylock's later speech concerning Antonio's "sufficiency" also alludes to the imagery of this Biblical passage in describing the transiency of worldly goods: "Ships are but boards, sailors but men, there be land-rats, and water-thieves and lands-thieves" (I. iii. 19-21).
terizes Christian love in terms of humility and self-forgetfulness: “Love suffereth long: it is bountifull: love envieth not: love doth not boast it selfe: it is not puffed up: It disdaineth not: it seeketh not her owne things.” But this charge against Antonio is quickly dismissed by Bassanio as “an infinite deal of nothing” (I. i. 114-118).

The quality of Antonio’s love is then shown in the positive forms of charity and benevolence, according to the following requirements of scripture:

Give to every man that asketh of thee: and of him that taketh away thy goods, aske them not againe./ And if ye lende to them of whom yee hope to receive, what thanke shal ye have? for even the sinners lend to sinners, to receive the like./ Wherefore . . . doe good, & lend, looking for nothing againe, and your reward shall be great (Luke vi. 30, 34-35).

Greater love then this hath no man, then any man bestoweth his life for his friends (John xv. 13).

Though his first loan to Bassanio has not been repaid, Antonio is willing to “venture” again for his friend “My purse, my person, my extremest means” (I. i. 138), even to the pledge of a pound of his flesh. And when this pledge (and with it his life) is forfeit, he can still release Bassanio from debt: “debts are clear’d between you and I” (III. ii. 317). Furthermore, Antonio lends money in the community at large without seeking interest, and often aids victims of Shylock’s usurious practices (I. iii. 39-40; III. iii. 22-23).

Shylock’s “thrift” poses the precise contrast to Antonio’s “ventures”. His is the worldliness of niggardly prudence, well-characterized by his avowed motto, “Fast bind, fast find,—/ A proverb never stale in thrifty mind” (II. v. 53-54). He locks up house and stores before departing, he begrudges food and maintenance to his servant Launcelot, he demands usurious “assurance” before lending money. This concern with the world poisons all his relations with others and even his love for Jessica: the confused cries, “My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!” after Jessica’s departure (II. viii. 15), reveal, not his lack of love for his daughter, but his laughable and pitiable inability to determine what he loves most. Shylock also manifests pride and self-righteousness. He scorns Antonio’s “low simplicity” in lending money gratis (III. iii. 38-39), despises the “prodigal” Bassanio for giving feasts (II. v. 15), and considers the “shallow fopp’ry” of the Christian maskers a defilement of his “sober house” (II. v. 35-36).

The moral contrast of Shylock and Antonio is more complex with reference to that most difficult injunction of the Sermon on the Mount—forgiveness of injuries and love of enemies. Recollection of this demand should go far to resolve the question as to whether an Elizabethan audience would regard Shylock’s grievances as genuine. Presumably an audience which could perceive the Biblical standard operating throughout the play would also see its relevance here. The text is Matt. v. 39, 44-47:

9 For the argument that Shylock could have been nothing but a monster and comic butt to an Elizabethan audience steeped in antisemitism, see E. E. Stoll, Shakespeare Studies (N. Y., 1927), pp. 255-336. This argument has been challenged on the ground that there was little ordinary antisemitism in England in Shakespeare’s time, because few Jews resided there, and also on the ground that Shylock is, for a part of the play at least, made human, complex, and somewhat sympathetic. See H. R. Walley, “Shakespeare’s Portrayal of Shylock”, The Parrott Presentation Volume (Princeton, N. J., 1935), pp. 211-242, and J. L. Cardozo, The Contemporary Jew in Elizabethan Drama (Amsterdam, 1926).
Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . Love your enemies: bless them that curse you: do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which hurt you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father that is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to arise on the evil, & the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and unjust. For if ye love them, which love you, what reward shall ye have? Do not the Publicanes even the same? And if ye be friendly to your brethren only, what singular thing doe ye? doe not even the Publicanes likewise?

Antonio at the outset of the play is rather in the position of the publican described as friendly to his brethren only—he loves and forgives Bassanio beyond all measure, but hates and reviles Shylock. For evidence of this we have not only Shylock’s indictment, “You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, And spit upon my Jewish gabardine, . . . And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur” (I. iii. 106-107, 113), but also Antonio’s angry reply promising continuation of such treatment: “I am as like to call thee so again, To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too” (I. iii. i25-i26). Indeed, the moral tension of the play is lost if we do not see that Shylock, having been the object of great wrongs, must make a difficult choice between forgiveness and revenge—and that Antonio later finds himself in precisely the same situation.

Ironically, Shylock poses at first as the more “Christian” of the two in that, after detailing his wrongs, he explicitly proposes to turn the other cheek—to “Forget the shames that you have stain’d me with, Supply your present wants, and take no doit/ Of usance for my moneys” (I. iii. i35-i37). Of course it is merely pretence: Shylock had declared for revenge at the first sight of Antonio (I. iii 41-42), and, according to Jessica’s later report, he eagerly planned for the forfeit of Antonio’s flesh long before the bond came due (III. ii. 283-287). And in this fixed commitment to revenge, this mockery of forgiveness, lies I believe the reason for the often-deplored change from the “human” Shylock of the earlier scenes to the “monster” of Act IV. At the level of the moral allegory Shylock undergoes (rather like Milton’s Satan) the progressive deterioration of evil; he turns by his own choice into the cur that he has been called—“Thou call’dst me dog before thou hadst a cause, But since I am a dog, beware my fangs” (III. iii. 6-7). Conversely, Antonio in the trial scene suffers hatred and injury but foregoes revenge and rancor, manifesting a genuine spirit of forgiveness—for Shylock’s forced conversion is not revenge, as will be seen. Thus, his chief deficiency surmounted, Antonio becomes finally a perfect embodiment of Christian love.

The Shylock-Antonio opposition functions also at what the medieval theorists would call the “allegorical” level; in these terms it symbolizes the confrontation of Judaism and Christianity as theological systems—the Old Law and the New—and also as historic societies. In their first encounter, Shylock’s reference to Antonio as a “fawning publican” and to himself as a member of the “sacred nation” (I. iii. 36, 43) introduces an important aspect of this contrast. The reference is of course to the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke xviii. 9-13) which was spoken “unto certayne which trusted in themselves, that they were ryghteous, and despised other”. Shylock’s words are evidently intended to sug-

10 Hence Shylock’s reference to Antonio as a “Fawning publican” may allude to the passage cited above (Matt. v. 47) as well as, more obviously, to the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

11 Bishops Bible (London, 1572).
gest the Pharisee's prayer, "God I thank thee that I am not as other menne are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or as this Publicane:/ I fast twyce in the weeke, I gave tythe of al that I posesse", and his scornful reference to Antonio's "low simplicity" relates Antonio to the Publician who prayed with humble faith, "God be merciful to me a sinner". The contemporary interpretation of this parable is suggested in Tomson's note:12 "Two things especially make our prayers voyde and of none effect: confidence of our owne ryghteousnesse, and the contempts of other... we [are] despised of God, as proude & arrogant, if we put never so little trust in our owne workes before God." Through this allusion, then, the emphasis of the Old Law upon perfect legal righteousness is opposed to the tenet of the New Law that righteousness is impossible to fallen man and must be replaced by faith—an opposition which will be further discussed with reference to the trial scene.

Also in this first encounter between Antonio and Shylock, the argument about usury contrasts Old Law and New in terms resembling those frequently found in contemporary polemic addressed to the usury question. Appealing to the Old Testament, Shylock sets forth an analogy between Jacob's breeding of ewes and rams and the breeding of money to produce interest.13 Antonio, denying the analogy with the query, "is your gold and silver ewes and rams?" echoes the commonplace Christian argument (based upon Aristotle)14 that to take interest is to "breed" barren metal, which is unnatural. Antonio's remark, "If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not/ As to thy friends, for when did friendship take/ A breed for barren metal of his friend?/ But lend it rather to thine enemy" (i.iii.127-130), prescribes Shylock's course of action according to the dictum of the Old Law—"Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury, but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury" (Deut. xxiii. 20). However, according to most exegetes, the Gospel demanded a revision of this rule. Aquinas declares, "The Jews were forbidden to take usury from their brethren, i.e., from other Jews. By this we are given to understand that to take usury from any man is evil simply, because we ought to treat every man as our neighbor and brother, especially in the state of the Gospel, whereto all are called."15 Furthermore, the Sermon on the Mount was thought to forbid usury absolutely by the words, "Lend, looking for nothing againe", a text which is glossed as follows in the Geneva Bible—lend, "not only not hoping for profite, but to lose ye stocke, and principall, for as much as Christ bindeth him selfe to repaie the whole with a most liberall interest."

At this same encounter, Shylock's pretense of following the Christian pre-

13 Again they refer to their characteristic metaphors: Shylock argues that Jacob's trick to win the sheep from Laban (Gen. xxx. 31-43) was justifiable "thrift", whereas Antonio (citing a later verse, Gen. xxxi.9, referring the trick to God's inspiration) declares that it was rather a "venture.../ A thing not in his power to bring to pass,/ But sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven."
14 Politics, I.10. 1258b. 1-8. Cf. Francis Bacon, "Of Usury", Essays (1625), "They say... it is against Nature, for Money to beget Money."
15 Summa Theologica II-II, Ques. 76, Art. 1, in The Political Ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas, ed. Dino Bongiorgi (N. Y., 1953), p. 149. As R. H. Tawney points out in Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (N. Y., 1953), p. 135, the arguments of the schoolmen were in constant circulation during the sixteenth century, and the medieval view regarding usury was maintained by an overwhelming proportion of Elizabethan writers on the subject (pp. 128-149). See Sir Thomas Wilson, Discourse upon Usury (1572), Miles Mosse, The Arraignment and Conviction of Usurie (1595), H. Smith, Examination of Usury (1591).
scription regarding forgiveness of injuries again contrasts Old Law and New as theological systems, for it recalls the fact that Christ in the Sermon on the Mount twice opposed the Christian standard to the Old Law’s demand for strict justice: “Ye have heard that it hath bene saide, An eye for an eye, & a tooth for a tooth./16 But I say unto you, Resist not evill: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheeke, turne to him the other also / . . . . Ye have hearde that it hath bene saide, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, & hate thine enemie. / But I say unto you, Love your enemies” (Matt. v. 38-39, 43-44). Later, some of the language of the trial scene alludes again to the differing demands of the two dispensations with regard to forgiveness of enemies:

Bass: Do all men kill the things they do not love?
Shy: Hates any man the thing he would not kill?
Bass: Every offense is not a hate at first!
Shy: What! wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice?” (IV. i. 66-69)

And the Duke reiterates this opposition almost too pointedly when he tenders Shylock the mercy of the Christian court, observing that Shylock could recognize from this “the difference of our spirit” (IV. i. 364).

This allegorical dimension encompasses also the historical experience of the two societies, Jewish and Christian. After Jessica’s departure, Shylock explicitly assumes unto himself the sufferings of his race: “The curse never fell upon our nation till now, I never felt it till now (III. i. 76-78). This curse is that pronounced upon Jerusalem itself—“Behold, your habitation shalbe left unto you desolate” (Matt. xxiii.38). First Shylock’s servant Launcelot leaves the “rich Jew” to serve the poor Bassanio; then his daughter Jessica17 “gilds” herself with her Father’s ducats and flees with her “unthrift” Christian lover; and finally, all of Shylock’s goods and his very life are forfeit to the state. Shylock’s passionate outcries against Antonio (III. i. 48 ff.) also take on larger than personal significance: they record the sufferings of his entire race in an alien Christian society—“he hath disgrac’d me . . . laugh’d at my losses, mock’d at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies—and what’s his reason? I am a Jew!” This is followed by the eloquent plea for recognition of the common humanity Jew shares with Christian, “Hath not a Jew eyes? . . .”, and it concludes with the telling observation that despite the Christian’s professions about “humility” and turning the other cheek, in practice

16 Christ refers to Exod. xxi.24; Levit. xxiv.20; Deut. xix.21.
17 It has been plausibly argued that Jessica’s name derives from the Hebrew Jesca, a form of Iscah, daughter of Haran (Gen. xi.29), glossed by Elizabethan commentators as “she that looketh out” (Gollancz, p. 42, G. L. Kittredge ed., Merchant of Venice, Ginn, 1945, p. ix). A direct play upon this name seems to occur in II. v. 31-32, where Shylock directs Jessica, “Clamber not you up to the casements then / Nor thrust your head into the public street”, and Launcelot prompts her to “look out at window for all this (II. v. 40) to see Lorenzo. Her departure thus signifies a breaking out of the ghetto, a voluntary abandonment of Old Law for New. This significance is continued in III. v. 1-5, when Launcelot quips that Jessica will be damned since (according to Mosaic Law, Exod. xx.5) the “sins of the father are to be laid upon the children,” and she replies (II. 17-18), “I shall be sav’d by my husband”—recting Paul’s promise in the New Law, 1 Cor. xiv.14, “the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband”. Shylock’s name is probably taken from Shalach, translated by “cormorant” (Levit. xi.17, Deut. xiv.17)—an epithet often applied to usurers in Elizabethan English. The name “Tubal”, taken from Tubal Cain (Gen. x.2, 6) is glossed in Elizabethan Bibles as meaning “worldly possessions, a bird’s nest of the world” (Gollancz, pp. 40-41; Kittredge, p. ix).
he is quick to revenge himself upon the Jew. The taunts of Salario, Solanio, and Gratiano throughout the play give some substantiation to these charges. Yet overlaying this animosity are several allusions to Shylock's future conversion, suggesting the Christian expectation of the final, pre-millennial conversion of the Jews. The first such reference occurs, most appropriately, just after Shylock's feigned offer to forego usury and forgive injury. Antonio salutes Shylock's departure with the words, "Hie thee gentle Jew"—probably carrying a pun on gentle-gentile—and then prophesies, "The Hebrew will turn Christian, he grows kind" (I. iii. 173-174). "Kind" in this context implies both "natural" (in foregoing unnatural interest) and "charitable"; thus Antonio suggests that voluntary adoption of these fundamental Christian principles would lead to the conversion of the Jew. The second prediction occurs in Lorenzo's declaration, "If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven, / It will be for his gentle daughter's sake" (II. iv. 33-34)—again with the pun on gentle-gentile. As Shylock's daughter and as a voluntary convert to Christianity, Jessica may figure forth the filial relationship of the New Dispensation to the Old, and Lorenzo's prediction may carry an allusion to Paul's prophecy that the Jews will ultimately be saved through the agency of the Gentiles. At any rate, the final conversion of the Jews is symbolized in just such terms in the trial scene: because Antonio is able to rise at last to the demands of Christian love, Shylock is not destroyed, but, albeit rather harshly, converted. Interestingly enough, however, even after Portia's speeches at the trial have reminded Antonio and the court of the Christian principles they profess, Gratiano yet persists in demanding revenge. This incident serves as a thematic counterpoint to the opposition of Old Law and New, suggesting the disposition of Christians themselves to live rather according to the Old Law than the New. Such a counterpoint is developed at various points throughout the play—in Antonio's initial enmity to Shylock, in the jeers of the minor figures, in Shylock's statements likening his revenge to the customary vengeful practices of the Christians and his claim to a pound of flesh to their slave trade in human flesh (IV. i. 90-100). Thus the play does not present arbitrary, black-and-white moral estimates of human groups, but takes into account the shadings and complexities of the real world.

As Shylock and Antonio embody the theological conflicts and historical inter-relationships of Old Law and New, so do they also reflect, from time to time, the ultimate sources of their principles in a further allegorical significance. Antonio, who assumes the debts of others (rescuing Bassanio, the self-confessed "Prodigal", from a debt due under the law) reflects on occasion the role of Christ satisfying the claim of Divine Justice by assuming the sins of mankind. The scripture phrase which Antonio's deed immediately brings to mind points the analogy directly: "This is my commandement, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. / Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv.12-13). And Shylock, demanding the "bond" which is due him under the law, reflects the role of the devil, to whom the entire human race is in bondage through sin—an analogy which Portia makes explicit when she terms his hold upon Antonio a "state of hellish cruelty".

19 Italics mine.
The dilemma which that delightful malaprop Launcelot experiences with regard to leaving Shylock, whom he terms the “devil incarnation” (II. ii. 1-30), springs directly from the implications of this analogy. According to I Pet. xii.18-19, one must serve even a bad master “for conscience toward God”; thus Launcelot’s conscience bids him stay and the fiend bids him go. But on the other hand, to serve the devil is obviously damnation; so he concludes, “in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience to offer to counsel me to stay with the Jew”, and determines flight. Similarly, Jessica declares, “Our house is hell” (II. iii. 2), thus placing her departure in the context of a flight from the devil to salvation. As E. E. Stoll points out, the identification of Jew and Devil is repeated nine times in the play, and was a commonplace of medieval and Elizabethan antisemitic literature. Yet it seems to function here less to heap opprobrium upon the Jew than to suggest the ultimate source of the principles of revenge and hatred which Shylock seeks to justify out of the Law. Again the meaning is clarified by a Biblical quotation—Christ’s use of the same identification in denouncing the Jews for their refusal to believe in him and their attempts to kill him—“Ye are of your father the devill, and the lustes of your father ye will doe: Hee hath bene a murtherer from the beginning” (John viii. 44).

Bassanio and the Caskets

The story of Bassanio and the casket choice also appears to incorporate a “moral” and an “allegorical” meaning. At the moral level, the incident explores the implications of Christian love in the romantic relationship, whereas Antonio’s story deals with Christian love in terms of friendship and social intercourse. Morocco, in renouncing the leaden casket because it does not offer “fair advantages”, and in choosing the gold which promises “what many men desire”, exemplifies the confusion of love with external shows: like most of the world, he values Portia not for herself but for her beauty and wealth. However, the death’s head within the golden casket indicates the common mortality to which all such accidents as wealth and beauty are finally subject. Aragon, by contrast, represents love of self so strong that it precludes any other love. He renounces the gold because he considers himself superior to the common multitude whom it attracts; he disdains the lead as not “fair” enough to deserve his hazard; and in choosing the silver which promises “as much as he deserves” he declares boldly, “I will assume desert” (II. ix. 51). But the ‘slinking idiot in the casket testifies to the folly of him who supposes that love can be bargained for in the pitiful coin of human merit. Bassanio, on the other hand, chooses the lead casket which warns, “Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath” (II. ix. 21)—thus signifying his acceptance of the self-abnegation, risk, and venture set up throughout the play as characteristics of true Christian love. And the metaphor of the “venture” is constantly used with reference to Bassanio and Portia just as it is with Antonio. Bassanio proposes to venture like a Jason for the golden fleece of Portia’s sunny locks (I. i. 169-177), and, though Portia complains that it is


21 Morocco amusingly displays the illogic in his own position. He begs that he be not judged by his tawny complexion but rather by his valor and inner worth (II. i. 1-12), and then argues that the picture symbolic of Portia could be fittingly placed only in a golden casket (II. vii. 48-55).
hard to be subject to the lottery of the caskets, she accepts the premise that this hazard will reveal her true lover (I. ii. 12-34; III. ii. 41). Finally, when Bassanio goes forth to choose she likens his venture, upon which her own fate depends, to that of Hercules striving to rescue Hesione from the sea-monster:22 “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” (III. ii. 57-60).

At the “allegorical” level, the caskets signify everyman’s choice of the paths to spiritual life or death. This analogy is explicitly developed in the “Moral” appended to the casket story in the Gesta Romanorum which is almost certainly Shakespeare’s source for this incident.23 In the Gesta the casket choice tests the worthiness of a maiden (the soul) to wed the son of an Emperor (Christ). The moral declares, “The Emperour sheweth this Mayden three vessells, that is to say, God putteth before man life & death, good and evill, & which of these he chooseth hee shall obtaine.”24 This passage contains a reference to Deut. xxx. 15-20, wherein Moses warns, after delivering the commandments to the Jews:

Beholde, I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evill/. . .

But if thine heart turne away, so that thou wilt not obey, but shalt be seduced and woorship other gods, and serve them,/ I pronounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish. . . ./ Therefore chuse life, that both thou and thy seede may live./ By loving the Lord thy God, by obeying his voyce, and by cleaving unto hym: For he is thy life, & the length of thy dayes: that thou mayest dwell in the lande which the Lord sware unto thy fathers.

As a note in the Bishops Bible indicates, the last promise was taken to refer not only to the “land of Chanaan, but also the heavenly inheritance, whereof the other was a figure”. That Shakespeare intended to recall this Biblical allusion so pointed in the Gesta, and thus to make the caskets symbolize the great choices of spiritual life and death, is evident by the constant references in the lovers’ conversation to “life” and “death” just before Bassanio’s venture. Bassanio declares, “Let me choose, / For as I am, I live upon the rack”; Portia continues the “rack” metaphor, urging, “Confess and live”, a phrase which Bassanio immediately transposes to “Confess and Love” (III. ii. 24-35). When he goes forth to venture, Portia calls for music to celebrate whichever result, death or life, will attend his choice: “If he lose he makes a swan-like end, / Fading in music” into the “wat’ry deathbed” of her tears. If he win, music will celebrate his Hercules-like victory and the life of both—“Live thou, I live”. That the casket choice represents Everyman’s choice among values is further emphasized by the multitude at Portia’s door: some of them refuse to choose (like the inhabitants of the vestibule of Hell in Dante); others choose wrongly and, having demonstrated by this that they are already wedded to false values, are forbidden to make another marriage. Furthermore, Antonio’s action in making possible Bassanio’s successful venture reflects the role of Christ in making possible for the true Christian the choice of spiritual life, the love of God.

22 Interestingly, Morocco also compares the casket choice to an exploit of Hercules, but not to one fairly testing strength and true worth, as does Portia. Rather, he sees it as a dice game wherein by pure chance Hercules might loose out to his valet (II. i. 31-34).

23 A selection of stories from the Gesta was printed in English translation by Richard Robinson in 1577 and again in 1595. See Arden MV, pp. xxxii, 172-174.

The meaning of the symbolic caskets is further illuminated by James v. 2-3: “Your riches are corrupt: and your garments are moth eaten. / Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you.”

Morocco, the pagan, with his boasts of bravery in battle and of the love of the “best-regarded virgins of our clime”, with his sensuous imagery and dashing superlatives (II. i. 1-38) is a fit type of worldliness, Mammon. The warning of the death’s head is that such a life is spiritual death: “Many a man his life hath sold / But my outside to behold,—/ Gilded tombs do worms infold.”

Aragon, the Spaniard—the very embodiment of Pride according to the Elizabethan caricature—is the type of Pharisaical self-righteousness: his sonorously complacent language about the “barbarous multitudes” and the faults of others (II. ix. 19-52) rather suggests the “sounding brasse” and “tinkling cymbale” of Paul’s image (1 Cor. xiii. 1), and certainly recalls the Pharisee’s prayer. But through its first line, “The fire seven times tried this”, the scroll refers Aragon to the twelfth Psalm, which denounces vanity and proud speaking. It then refers to the casket as merely “silver’d o’er”—thus suggesting Christ’s comparison of the scribes and pharisees to “whited sepulchres” (Matt. xxiii. 27). Also, the blinking idiot within the casket mutely testifies that since all men are sinners pharisaical pride is folly. This defeat and lessoning of Morocco and Aragon foreshadows the defeat and conversion of Shylock, for he represents in somewhat different guise these same antichristian values of worldliness and self-righteousness.

Bassanio’s choice of the lead casket is the choice of life, the love of God. The use of romantic love as a symbol for divine love is of course a commonplace in mystical literature, deriving chiefly from the example of the Song of Solomon, which was understood to treat, as the caption in the Bishops Bible expresses it, “The familiar talke and mystical communication of the spiritual love between Je sus Christe and his Churche”. Bassanio’s meditation on the caskets (III. ii. 73-107) symbolically suggests his understanding and renunciation of the two kinds of “Ornament” which oppose this love: his description of the silver as “thou common drudge between man and man” suggests his knowledge of the pretense of righteousness with which men generally cover their vices when presenting themselves to others, and the skull image which he uses in denouncing the gold indicates his awareness of the transience and corruptibility of worldly goods. Also clarifying the significance of Bassanio’s choice is Portia’s remark, “I stand for sacrifice”, made in relation to her Hercules-Hesione simile as she sends Bassanio forth to choose (III. ii. 57). The word “stand” is ambiguous, suggesting at once that she occupies the position of a sacrificial victim whose life must be
saved by another, but also that she "represents" sacrifice—the very core of Christian love. The exact counterpart of Portia's remark, both in form and ambiguity of meaning, is Shylock's later comment, "I stand for judgement. . . . I stand here for law" (IV. i. 103, 142).

The Trial

The trial scene climaxes the action at all the levels of meaning that have been established. As has been suggested, it portrays at the moral level Shylock's degradation to a cur and a monster through his commitment to revenge, and by contrast, Antonio's attainment of the fullness of Christian love through his abjuration of revenge. Allegorically, the scene develops the sharpest opposition of Old Law and New in terms of their respective theological principles, Justice and Mercy, Righteousness and Faith; it culminates in the final defeat of the Old Law and the symbolic conversion of the Jew.

Throughout the first portion of Act IV, until Portia begins the dramatic reversal with the words, "Tarry a little, there is something else—" (IV. i. 301), the action is simply a debate between Old Law and New in terms of Justice and Mercy—but that debate is carried forth in a dual frame of reference. The phrase in the Lord's Prayer rendered by both the Bishops and the Geneva Bibles as "Forgive us our dettes, as we forgive our detters", is alluded to twice in this scene, making the debtor's trial in the court of Venice a precise analogue of the sinner's trial in the court of Heaven. The Duke inquires of Shylock, "How shalt thou hope for mercy rend'ring none?" (IV. i. 88), and Portia reiterates, "Though justice be thy plea, consider this, / That in the course of justice, none of us / Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy, / And that same prayer, doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy" (IV. i. 194-198). In his Exposition of the Lord's Prayer a contemporary clergyman, William Perkins,29 works out a similar analogy: "For even as a debt doth binde a man, either to make satisfaction, or els to goe to prison: so our sinnes bindes us either to satisfie Gods justice, or else to suffer eternall damnation." Shylock is referred for this analogy not only to the Lord's Prayer but also to his own tradition: Portia's language (IV.i.180 ff.) echoes also certain Old Testament psalmists and prophets whose pleas for God's mercy were explained by Christian exegetes as admissions of the inadequacies of the Law and testimonies of the need for Christ.30 For example the striking image, "Mercy . . . droppeth as a gentle rain from Heaven upon the place beneath", echoes Ecclesiasticus xxv. 19, "O how fayre a thyng is mercy in the tyme of anguish and trouble: it is lyke a cloud of rayne that commeth in the tyme of drought." This reference should also remind Shylock of the remarkable parallel to the Lord's Prayer contained in a passage following close upon this one: "He that seeketh vengeance, shal finde vengeance of the Lord. . . . / For-give thy neyghbour the hurt that he hath donne thee, and so shal thy sinnes be forgeven thee also when thou prayest / . . . He that sheweth no mercie to a

30 See Psalms 103, 136, 143. With reference to such passages, Henrie Bullinger declares (Fiftie Godlie and Learned Sermons, trans. H. I., London, 1587, p. 403), "The ancient Saints which lived under the old testament, did not seeke for righteousness and salvation in the works of the lawe, but in him which is the perfectnes and ende of the law, even Christ Jesus."
man which is lyke himselfe, how dare he aske for fierce of his sinnes” (Ecclus. xxiii. 1-24).21

Through these allusions, Antonio’s predicament in the courtroom of Venice is made to suggest traditional literary and iconographical presentations of the “Parliament of Heaven” in which fallen man was judged. Both sides agree that Antonio’s bond (like the sinner’s) is forfeit according to the law, and that the law of Venice (like that of God) cannot be abrogated. Shylock constantly threatens, “If you deny me, fie upon your law” (IV. i. 101), and Portia concurs, “there is no power in Venice / Can alter a decree established” (IV. i. 214-215). The only question then is whether the law must be applied with strictest justice, or whether mercy may somehow temper it. In the traditional allegory of the Parliament of Heaven,22 Justice and Mercy, as the two principal of the four “daughters” of God, debate over the judgement to be meted out to man; Launce- lot Andrews in his version of the debate33 aligns these figures with the Old Law and the New respectively—“Righteousnesse, she was where the Law was (for, that, the rule of righteousness) where the Covenant of the Old Testament was, doe this and live (the very voyce of Justice)”, whereas “The Gentiles they claim by Mercy, that is their virtue.” So in the trial scene Shylock as the embodied of the Old Law represents Justice: “I stand for Judgment. . . . I stand here for Law” (IV. i. 103, 142), whereas Portia identifies herself with that “Quality of Mercy” enthroned by the New Law. Also, another conception of the Heavenly Court is superadded to this by means of several references during the trial to Shylock as Devil (IV. i. 213, 283). The scene takes on something of the significan ce of the trial described in the medieval drama, the Processus Belial, in which the Devil claims by justice the souls of mankind due him under the law, and the Virgin Mary intercedes for man by appealing to the Mercy of God.34

In either formulation, the demands of Justice and Mercy are reconciled only through the sacrifice of Christ, who satisfies the demands of justice by assuming the debts of mankind, and thus makes mercy possible. Therefore it is not surprising that the courtroom scene also evokes something of the crucifixion scene—as the moment of reconciling these opposed forces, as the time of defeat for the Old Law, as the prime example of Christian Love and the object of Christian Faith. Both plot situation and language suggest a typical killing of Christ by the Jew. Antonio, baring his breast to shed his blood for the debt of another, continues the identification with Christ occasionally suggested at other points in the play. Shylock’s cry, “My deeds upon my head” (IV. i. 202) clearly suggests the assumption of guilt by the Jews at Christ’s crucifixion—“His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt. xxvii. 25)—and his later remark, “I have a daughter — / Would any of the stock of Barrabas / Had been her husband, rather than a Christian” (IV. i. 291-293) recalls the Jews’ choice of the murderer Barrabas over Christ as the prisoner to be released at Passover (Matt. xxvii. 16-21). A similar fusion of the symbols of debtor’s court and crucifixion occurs in a Christmas sermon by Launcelot Andrews on Gal. iii. 4-5:

If one be in debt and danger of the Law, to have a Brother of the same

21 Bishops Bible
22 For a resume of this tradition see Samuel C. Chew, The Virtues Reconciled (Toronto, 147).
bloud . . . will little avail him, except he will also come under the Law, that is, become his Surety, and undertake for him. And such was our estate. As debtors we were, by vertue of . . . the handwriting that was against us. Which was our Bond, and we had forfeited it. . . . Therefore Hee became bound for us also, entred bond anew, took on Him, not only our Nature, but our Debt. . . . The debt of a Capitall Law is Death.35

Throughout the action thus far described, Shylock has persistantly denied pleas to temper justice with mercy—to forgive part of the debt, to accept three times the value of the debt rather than the pound of flesh, or even to supply a doctor “for charity” to stop Antonio’s wounds. His perversity is rooted in his explicit denial of any need to “deserve” God’s mercy by showing mercy to others, for he arrogates to himself the perfect righteousness which is the standard of his Old Law—“What judgment shall I dread doing no wrong?” (IV. i. 89). Accordingly, after Portia’s “Tarry a little”, the action of the scene works out a systematic destruction of that claim of righteousness, using the laws of Venice as symbol. Shylock is shown first that he can claim nothing by the law: his claim upon Antonio’s flesh is disallowed by the merest technicality. This reflects the Christian doctrine that although perfect performance of the Law would indeed merit salvation, in fact fallen man could never perfectly observe it, any more than Shylock could take Antonio’s flesh without drawing blood. According to Paul, Romans iii. 9-12, “all, both Jewes and Gentiles are under sinne, / . . . There is none righteous, no not one. / . . . there is none that doth good, no not one. / Therefore by the workes of the Law shall no flesh be justified in his sight”. Next, Shylock is shown that in claiming the Law he not only gains nothing, but stands to lose all that he possesses and even life itself. He becomes subject to what Paul terms the “curse” of the Law, since he is unable to fulfill its conditions: “For as many as are of the worke of the Lawe, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every man that continueth not in all things, which are written in the booke of the Lawe, to do them” (Gal. iii. 10).

The names applied to and assumed by Portia during the trial reinforce these meanings. When Portia gives judgment at first in Shylock’s favor, he cries out, “A Daniel come to judgment: yea, a Daniel! / O wise young judge”, in obvious reference to the apocryphal Book of Susanna, wherein the young Daniel confounded the accusors of Susanna, upholding thereby the justice of the Law. The name, Daniel, which means in Hebrew, “The Judge of the Lord”, was glossed in the Elizabethan Bibles as “The Judgment of God”.36 But the name carries other implications as well, which Shylock ironically forgets. Portia has assumed the name “Balthasar” for the purposes of her disguise, and the name given to the prophet Daniel in the Book of Daniel is Baltassar—a similarity hardly accidental.37 According to Christian exegetes, Daniel in this book foreshadows the Christian tradition by his explicit denial of any claim upon God by righteousness, and his humble appeal for mercy: “O my God, encline thyne eare, & hearken, open thyne eyes, beholde howe we be desolated . . . for we doo not present our prayers before thee in our owne righteousnesse, but in thy great

35 “Christmas i609”, XCVI Sermons, p. 28.
36 See glossary, Geneva Bible.
37 The slight variation may be due to imperfect memory: the king whom Daniel served was named Balthasar.
mercies." (Daniel ix.18). These implications greatly enrich the irony when Gratiano flings the title back in Shylock's face—"A second Daniel, a Daniel, Jew" (IV. i. 329).

Shylock's "forced conversion" (a gratuitous addition made by Shakespeare to the source story in Il Pecorone) must be viewed in the context of the symbolic action thus far described. Now that Shylock's claim to legal righteousness has been totally destroyed, he is made to accept the only alternative to it, faith in Christ. Paul declares (Gal. ii.16), "A man is not justified by the works of the Lawe, but by the fayth of Jesus Christ", and a note in the Bishops Bible explains, "Christ hath fulfylled the whole lawe, and therefore who so ever beleeveth in him, is counted just before God, as wel as he had fulfylled ye whole law him selfe." Thus the stipulation for Shylock's conversion, though it of course assumes the truth of Christianity, is not antisemitic revenge: it simply compels Shylock to avow what his own experience in the trial scene has fully "demonstrated"—that the Law leads only to death and destruction, that faith in Christ must supplant human righteousness. In this connection it ought to be noted that Shylock's pecuniary punishment under the laws of Venice precisely parallels the conditions imposed upon a Jewish convert to Christianity throughout most of Europe and also in England during the Middle Ages and after. All his property and goods, as the ill-gotten gain of usury, were forfeit to the state upon his conversion, but he was customarily allotted some proportion (often half) of his former goods for his maintenance, or else given a stipend or some other means of support.

There is some evidence that Shylock himself in this scene recognizes the logic which demands his conversion, though understandably he finds this too painful to admit explicitly. His incredulous question "Is that the law" (IV. i. 309) when he finds the law invoked against him, shows a new and overwhelming consciousness of the defects of legalism. Also, he does not protest the condition that he become a Christian as he protested the judgment (soon reversed) which would seize all his property: his brief "I am content" suggests, I believe, not mean-spiritedness but weary acknowledgement of the fact that he can no longer make his stand upon the discredited Law.

Indeed, Portia's final tactic—that of permitting the Law to demonstrate its own destructiveness—seems a working out of Paul's metaphor of the Law as a "Schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be made righteous by faith" (Gal. iii. 24). The metaphor was utilized by all the major Christian theological traditions, and received much the same interpretation in all of them:

The law was our pedagogue in Christ. . . . So also did he [God] wish to give such a law as men by their own forces could not fulfill, so that, while

88 Bishops Bible. A note on this passage declares that it shows how "the godly flee only unto gods mercies and renounce theyr owne workes when they seeke for remission of their sinnes." Cf. Bullinger, Fiftie Sermons, p. 434: "And although they did not so usually call upon God as wee at this day doe, through the mediatour and intercessour Christe Jesus . . . yet were they not utterly ignorant of the mediatour, for whose sake they were heard of the Lord. Daniel in the ninth Chapter of his prophecy maketh his prayer, and desirith to bee heard of God for the Lordes sake, that is, for the promised Christ his sake."

presuming on their own powers, they might find themselves to be sinners, and, being humbled, might have recourse to the help of grace. (Aquinas)  

Another use of the law is ... to reveale unto a man his sinne, his blindnes, his misery, his impietie, ignorance, hatred and contempt of God, death, hel, the judgment and deserved wrath of God to the end that God might bridle and beate down this monster and this madde beaste (I meane the presumption of mans own righteousness) ... [and drive] them to Christ. (Luther)  

Some ... from too much confidence either in their own strength or in their own righteousness, are unfit to receive the grace of Christ till they have first been stripped of every thing. The law, therefore, reduces them to humility by a knowledge of their own misery, that thus they may be prepared to pray for that of which they before supposed themselves not destitute. (Calvin)  

And, from the contemporary sermon literature the following commentaries are typical:

The law... was given because of transgression... out of the which they might learn the will of God, what sin, right, or unright is; and to know themselves, to go into themselves, and to consider, how that the holy works which God requireth are not in their own power; for the which cause all the world have great need of a mediator... Thus was the law our schoolmaster unto Christ. (Myles Coverdale)  

The law... shewes us our sinnes, and that without remedy: it shewes us the damnation that is due unto us: and by this meanes, it makes us despaire of salvation in respect of our selves: & thus it inforceth us to seeke for helpe out of our selves in Christ. The law is then our schoolemaster not by the plaine teaching, but by stripes and corrections. (Perkins)  

Thus Shylock, as representative of his entire race, having refused the earlier opportunity to embrace voluntarily the principles of Christianity, must undergo in the trial scene the harsh “Schoolmastership” of the Law, in order to be brought to faith in Christ.

The Ring Episode and Belmont

The ring episode is, in a sense, a comic parody of the trial scene—it provides a means whereby Bassanio may make at least token fulfillment of his offer to give “life itself, my wife, and all the world” (IV. i. 280) to deliver Antonio. The ring is the token of his possession of Portia and all Belmont: in offering it Portia declared, “This house, these servants, and this same myself / Are yours ... I

41 A Commentarie of M. Doctor Martin Luther upon the Epistle of S. Paul to the Galathians (London, Thomas Vautroullier, 1575), n.p.  
give them with this ring, / Which when you part from, lose, or give away, / Let it presage the ruin of your love, / And be my vantage to exclaim on you” (III. ii. 170-174). So that in giving the ring to the “lawyer” Balthasar—which he does only at Antonio’s bidding—Bassanio surrenders his “claim” to all these gifts, even to Portia’s person, and is therefore taunted at his return with her alleged infidelity. But Belmont is the land of the spirit, not the letter, and therefore after Bassanio has been allowed for a moment to feel his loss, the whole crisis dissolves in laughter and amazement as Antonio again binds himself (his soul this time the forfeit) for Bassanio’s future fidelity, and Portia reveals her own part in the affair. At the moral level, this pledge and counter pledge by Bassanio and Antonio continue the “venture” metaphor and further exemplify the willingness to give all for love. At the allegorical level, despite the lighthearted treatment, Bassanio’s comic “trial” suggests the “judgment” awaiting the Christian soul as it presents its final account and is found deficient. But Love, finally, is the fulfillment of the Law and covers all defects—Bassanio’s (Everyman’s) love in giving up everything, in token at least, for Antonio, and Antonio’s (Christ’s) love toward him and further pledge in his behalf.

Belmont functions chiefly at the anagogical level (if one may invoke the term): it figures forth the Heavenly City. Jessica points to this analogy explicitly—“It is very meet / The Lord Bassanio live an upright life / For having such a blessing in his lady, / He finds the joys of heaven here on earth” (III. v. 67-70). Here Gentile and Jew, Lorenzo and Jessica, are united in each other’s arms, talking of the music of the spheres:

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!

Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold,
There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eye’d cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls (V. i. 54, 58-63)

And Portia’s allusion upon returning, “Peace!—how the moon sleeps with Endymion, / And would not be awak’d” (V. i. 108-109) also suggests eternity, for Diana, enamoured of Endymion’s beauty, caused him to sleep forever on Mount Latmos. In Belmont all losses are restored and sorrows end: Bassanio wins again his lady and all Belmont; Antonio is given a letter signifying that three of his argosies are returned to port richly laden; and Lorenzo receives the deed naming him Shylock’s future heir. Lorenzo’s exclamation, “Fair ladies, you drop manna in the way of starving people”, together with the reference to “patens” in the passage quoted above, sets up an implied metaphor of the heavenly communion. Here all who have cast their bread upon the waters in the “ventures” of Christian love receive the reward promised:

Whoever shall forsake houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or landes, for my names sake, hee shall receive an hundreth folde more, and shall inherit everlasting life (Matt. XIX.:29).

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