ENG 510

Value, Social Order, and Self-Understanding in “The Merchant of Venice”

The third scene of “The Merchant of Venice” dramatizes an unusual and contentious negotiation between the usurious money-lender, Shylock, a Jew, and the socially esteemed but financially short-fallen Christian merchant, Antonio. The language excerpted here demonstrates psychological and rhetorical complexity while epitomizing the tangled, knotted intricacy of the mediums of exchange in the play’s social world, a Venice that is an “economy” in the broadest possible sense. In that Venice, economic transactions can never be isolated from other forms of exchange, and the famous bond between Shylock and Antonio, tying a sum of money to a pound of flesh, only literalizes a general condition: all value in Venice travels between and across multiple currencies, some monetary and quantifiable, others which can’t be counted. For that reason, as the following dialogue shows, Venetian accounts can never be squared; there will always be some remainder, whether monetary, social, affective, or linguistic, or erotic. Analysis of additional scenes demonstrates how not only the values of things but of people become difficult to parse, and relations to others and to one’s own self are inevitably uncertain. An unquantifiable world is an ungraspable one, and so objects, others, and minds almost entirely evade precise ordering and understanding, troubling Venice in a way the play never quite resolves.

Shylock responds, at the start of this excerpt, to an Antonio indignant at being reminded how he has abused his Jewish neighbor:

SHYLOCK:

Why, look you, how you storm.

I would be friends with you and have your love,

Forget the shames that you have stained me with,

Supply your present wants and take no doit

Of usance for my moneys, and you'll not hear me.

This is kind I offer.

BASSANIO:

This were kindness.

SHYLOCK:

This kindness will I show.

Go with me to a notary, seal me there

Your single bond, and, in a merry sport,

If you repay me not on such a day,

In such a place, such sum, or sums, as are

Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit

Be nominated for an equal pound

Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken

In what part of your body pleaseth me.

ANTONIO:

Content, in faith: I'll seal to such a bond

And say there is much kindness in the Jew. (1.3.133-149)

The beginning of this excerpt immediately indicates Shylock's reserves of self-control in navigating the multiplicity of the Venetian economy. We see not only an implied stage direction of Antonio's lines from 125-132 (when Antonio asserts he will spit at Shylock with impunity, and suggests the two negotiate as enemies, he must "storm"), but also a guide to the performance of Shylock's prior dialogue, wherein Shylock recounts the abuses he suffered from Antonio and mocks him for asking a reviled Jew for assistance. That speech ("Should I not say, / 'Hath a dog money?...') might be delivered onstage with a retaliatory energy, but because Shylock so coolly notes Antonio's anger in l. 133, the text instead suggests that Shylock recounted his victimization with equal coolness, or at least the pretense of it. The play will bear out a fascinating mingling of Shylock's calculating self-control and theatrical self-awareness with his desire for revenge, never, on the page, quite tipping whether one has triumphed over the other.

"Storm," too, foreshadows the fate of Antonio's vessels, and one might speculate in a larger essay about some relationship between the merchant's anger, or his play-opening sadness, and the vagaries and necessities of capitalism, but these first six lines more importantly indicate the capacity of the subtlety and cross-currents of Shylock's language to embody those general overlaps between business transaction and social exchange. "I would be friends with you" seems, on one hand, like an obvious ploy and a moment of rhetoric transparent to Antonio, a kind of civility or politeness in negotiation. On the other hand, unless one denies Shylock any human capacity for benevolence, it's not hard to hear some trace sincerity in his avowal, maybe some reference to the pre-textual history of the play's world, even if the first overture and slight are buried in Shylock's unconscious. Shylock "would" be friends, and would "Forget…shames," but Antonio will not hear it- or more precisely, in Shylock's words, "and you'll not hear me," which suggests both a rejection of Shylock's personhood (you'll not hear me v. you'll not hear

my case) and, with the conjunction "and" where one might logically expect "but," a suggestion that something other than logic informs relationships in Venice. "But you'll not hear me" suggests a causal relationship, that Antonio will not listen to Shylock, despite his friendly gestures. "And you'll not hear me" suggests a separate condition, so entrenched that it overrides causality, that Antonio does not, ever, as a way of being, hear seriously the claims or reasoning of Jews. The two men negotiate this particular contract and simultaneously reposition themselves in an ongoing negotiation about Shylock's social worth.

Shylock's plurals here matter, too, expressing a discomfiting honesty about the impossibility of satisfying all desires and needs. Shylock uses "moneys" frequently throughout the text, as well as, here, "shames" and "wants." "Moneys," especially, challenges the linguistic and cultural convention of using the collective noun "money," as if money, wealth, capital, is either an abstract force or a general category, a sort of shared bank vault in which we all participate, take from, give to, or live within. But "moneys" invokes difference: if moneys are always plural, they are always counted, always unequally distributed (you and I may both have money, but if we each have "moneys", the word does not elide the fact of inequality so smoothly), always divisible to meet multiple needs, always vulnerable to a taking away, and always necessarily plural because needs, desires, and debts are always plural. A true economy is slippery and dynamic, not easily stabilized in bonds, contracts, handshakes, or "money." Antonio wants "money" to help his friend, to route capital to a social occasion. Shylock offers him "moneys," which are harder to grasp, to pocket, to master, to account for, or to reify as a social good. Something of the difference is expressed in thinking, with contemporary objects, of a credit card, "money", as opposed to "moneys", a pocket full of coins. "Wants," similarly, conveys not an abstract condition but a quantity of needs, some of which can go unmet.

Worth brief mention, too, for its additional sense of Shylock's linguistic subversion and its socioeconomic implications, is the character's deployment of the term "usance." He offers, more fully, his good intention to "take no doit / Of usance for my moneys," and "doit," which is, per the Arden Merchant, a Dutch coin of little value, raises the specter of other nations, other cultures and systems of value, and other desires in competition with those of the Venetians'. But "usance" both sidesteps the charged term "usury" and suggests, by sound, "nuisance," either to tweak Antonio (I, Shylock, am a nuisance you have to face) or to disassociate Shylock from the term (I, Shylock, who will take no doit of "[n]u[i]sance", am deliberately not a nuisance in this circumstance). Both meanings, of course, can uneasily coexist, just as subjects in an early capitalist economy must coexist as cooperators and competitors. The negotiation, then, is not purely economic, but partly involving the manipulation of language and its cognitive and affective resonances.

Multiple wavelengths of meaning reside, too, in Shylock's "This is kind I offer". The optimistic reading, Bassanio's: "I offer kindness." The Arden edition notes "deed in kind," with a sexual connotation. Most hostile of the meanings: "in kind," as in, you will not or did not hear me when I would be friends with you, so I offer this in kind- this trap, this dangerous, vengeful contract. Bassanio, who is not the play's most discerning character, picks up on the sense of benevolence- "This were kindness". Linguistic quibbles in this play are never just that, and usually involve some special legal or scriptural expertise on matters of ethical and legal importance—on usury, or the interpretation of Shylock's bond with Antonio. And the disagreements always orbit Shylock, who exists in a community of his own, with interpretations, motives and meanings to ruffle the surface of the main Venetian cultural stream.[1]

[1] But it's still mildly unusual for this text that a word like "kind" can contain or suggest so many

Similarly, Shylock finds some agency in his capacity to re-speak words, to return normal communication with interest. He does not receive recognition of his name by the Venetians, who call him "Jew" or "dog" to assert superiority. "Shylock is my name", in a courtroom, resists. But more generally, that linguistic agency exists because words vary their meaning in context, and will be received differently by different hearers, at the boundaries of a linguistic community or even within it. A person can speak one sense and be heard in another. Words are not a stable currency, but one which can always gain or lose value, as in punning or playing on words- Shylock says "This is kind I offer" and Bassanio hears "kindness." A name, likewise, can be a reputation, one boosted by flattery or sunk by insult (Antonio: "I'll…say there is much kindness in the Jew). The world of the play, just as it has directed water into the Venetian system of canals, seems to aspire to an equilibrium of language and value, with no ripples of unintended or problematic meaning, yet the events of the drama prove how impossible that aspiration is. To attempt a crude translation of linguistic to market values, the unfixed nature of words in conversation would be something like a coin that leaves one's hand silver and becomes a different metal in the hand receiving it. Or, without translation, the contract between Shylock and Antonio enters the courtroom meaning one thing and exits meaning another, having earlier left the scene quoted above as a "merry bond" and reappeared as a malicious one.

The text faces larger question about words as symbols or repositories of value. Marc Shell, in

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meanings. Other Shakespearean texts teem with a certain type of "poetic" language, rich in meaning and suggestion, foregrounding conscious, overt, conspicuous wordplay. "The Merchant of Venice" pushes wordplay under the surface, or with meanings corked tightly in the bottle or barrel of a single term, like "bond". No one riffs on different senses of "bond," or discourses at length on a single metaphor—the surfaces of the language are generally smooth. That smoothness or containment suggests language in this world under a kind of contract, where words are agreed to have common meanings. There is no wordplay, only word conflict, and always in an official and formal setting, a marketplace or courtroom. (This footnote is more of an intuition than an argument, and therefore might be overruled by closer knowledge or analysis of the texts in question.)

Money, Language, and Thought, discussing "The Merchant of Venice," brings up the neglected issue of verbal usury:

> To my knowledge, no one since the medieval era has devoted attention to the category of verbal usury in jurisprudence, rhetoric, and philosophy. (The phrase 'verbal usury') has been consistently overlooked even by compilers of dictionaries.) Yet 'verbal usury' is an important technical term in the Jewish Talmud, in the Christian church fathers, and in the Islamic Traditions. There it refers to the generation of an illegal—the church fathers say unnatural—supplement to verbal meaning by use of such methods as punning and flattering. (Shell 49)

Shell goes on to draw the relevant parallel between financial and verbal usury:

> As the Jew uses moneys (which Bacon calls "[the tokens current and accepted] for values") to supplement principals, so he uses puns to exceed the principal meanings of words (which Bacon calls "the tokens current and accepted for conceits.") (Shell 50)

Bassanio exceeds, speculatively, Shylock's "This is kind" with his "This were kindness", and stock prices rise on the news of Shylock's careful reply, "This kindness I will show." (The reply by Shylock is careful because he pledges to display kindness rather than to possess kindness-likewise Bassanio, in his pursuit of Portia, intends to show wealth without having it). Shylock offers, in kindness, a "single bond", and that noun, "bond," seems heavy with meaning, weighty, yet avoids being the subject of any punning or "verbal usury" in the play (as does the suggestive name, especially in a city of canals, "Shylock".) In this Venice, however, all bonds are at stake in every transaction and every exchange—"exchange" itself captures the multiplicity of social and other relationships, since the term fits neatly into an economic context and into so many

others. Both monetary usury and language itself introduce destabilizing excess into social and economic transactions, but the imbalance may inhere in all forms of exchange.

These thoughts on verbal usury conflate several things- a word having multiple meanings, a word being interpreted in multiple senses, and a word gaining meaning or having its intended meaning exceeded by a pun—and flattery, complicating this, is verbally usurious because it uses words to exceed or inflate the value of a person. This conflation tempts because it ties together symptoms of an underlying problem: words are not a stable means of exchanging information or value. And when words (and not numbers) enter into negotiations, contracts, social contracts, marriage contracts and relationships, and the exchange or commodification of women, this volatility only increases. Words cannot be quantified, priced, or cleanly bought, sold, or traded. No one owns words, holds or hoards them exclusively. Linguistic capital, for the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, resides in a speaker's social position and fluency with words, knowledge of vocabulary, facility at speaking clearly and combining words and thoughts in novel ways- but no one has any ownership of the capital inherent in the words themselves.[2] Other forms of "capital"—social, erotic, cultural—likewise cannot be easily quantified, priced, possessed, or exchanged, and therefore resist inclusion in an economic system.

A fundamental question would be whether the play offers separate modes of exchange that sometimes overlap, or whether they are all connected in some deeper, unarticulated system. In modern disciplinary terms, one might speculate neurologically about synaptic weights, or quantities of dopamine, psychoanalytically about libidinal "investment" or cathected objects, or in a quasi-Darwinian sense, of the possession and accumulation of resources in some broad

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[2] To translate this situation crudely into economic terms, it would be as if Antonio and Shylock could accrue no actual wealth others could not share, as if each of their dollars could be photocopied, and they possessed an economic advantage only in their ability to make numeric calculations swiftly and accurately.

economy of survival and advancement. Money is, after all, partly a social construct, a record of past labor or fortune and a placeholder for the power to make claims on the labor of others. And the language of "capital," a term which now drifts out of a strict economic context into a looser sociological one, suggests imperfectly some common recognition of value. For me, the play's exchanges- of words, respect, affect, money, economic capital, social or cultural capital- always come bundled together in ways that can't be easily disentangled. The lesson of this particular scene is that business is never pure business, not only because their bond connects a financial sum of money to a pound of flesh (and it's a pound of Antonio's flesh that's pledged, not a pound of any person's), but because the transaction is supplemented by rhetoric and the display of affect, by "kindness", by an avowal of "merry sport", and that exchange consolidated in Antonio's words of agreement: "Content, in faith", and in his speech act to Shylock's favor: "I'll… / say there is much kindness in the Jew." Shylock negotiates not only a financial bond but a linguistic, social, legal, and affective bond. He offers several things and receives several in pledge or exchange:

> money, the performance of good intentions and the exchange of positive affect, words, willingness to lend and willingness to overlook abuse

are exchanged for

> the pledge of Antonio's flesh, but also the performance of acquiescence by Antonio, linguistically (he agrees), affectively (he acts agreeable) and socially (he agrees in front of witnesses), and Antonio's willingness to recognize a Jew as a legal and economic peer.

These bonds tangle, and tug on others in the Venetian fabric, some fray, and others are torn; the citizens of Venice struggle over how to repair and reconstitute that fabric. The conspicuous victim, by our modern standard, is Shylock, but the deeper lesson is that all bonds are impermanent, endangered, and incapable of absolute security, and the Christian bondholders of Venice are typical in their willingness to collude in protection of their own interests. That existential insecurity and that self-interest may be reasons why Antonio, the merchant and financier who would bear witness to all of these things (and see how one fuels the other), is so sad, and Shylock may be so hated because he draws attention to the same vulnerability and need. Usury is, in some sense, the commodification of generosity or charity, and that collision of Christian values with economic ones may cause more cognitive dissonance than the play's Venetians can bear.

A world where so many things circulate, so many competing forms of value and exchange, some unquantifiable, and ungraspable, can also result in internal confusion (Antonio knows not why he is so sad) and confusion about the social order in general. The self, social rank, and private relationships become impossible to fix and know. Everything solid, as Marx said, melts into air. Relationships in the play are often strained or distracted in subtle ways, often masked by civility or diluted by self-interest. These problems come packed into the first utterance of the play, where Antonio admits confusion about his own emotion and subtly distances himself from his companions. He speaks, "In sooth I know not why I am so sad. / It wearies me; you say it wearies you;" (1.1.1-2), a line with an unusually pleasing musicality for a consideration of sadness—the modulation of vowels, the predominance of monosyllables, and the repetition of pronouns (I, it, you) give a strange lilt to the moment, a detached, weary pleasure in the contemplation of his own melancholy. The sadness, then, is partly undermined by a kind of

enjoyment. But the syntax also suggests feelings or meanings at odds with each other. "You say it wearies you" unfolds into several ambiguities. "It" could be, least likely, Salanio and Salarino's own sadness- sadness wearies me; you say sadness also wearies you—or it could be Antonio's sadness: "My sadness wearies me; you say you are also wearied by my sadness." In the latter sense, the language tells nothing about whether the weariness of Antonio's friends is sympathetic or impatient. They might be sad, compassionately, to witness Antonio's sadness, or they might be weary of hearing about his sadness, tired by his frequent sighs or frowns or moping shuffles. The uncertainty of that "it wearies you" is compounded by the two words coming before it, "you say." Antonio does not know how Salanio and Salarino feel, and he doesn't trust his own powers of observation (I see it wearies you) or judgment (I know it wearies you), or group himself with them in solidarity (It wearies us all). He knows only what he hears, that they "say" it wearies them, and he can't know the ultimate sincerity of their avowals. Even if Antonio did have confidence in their compassion, the origin of his feeling remains verbally unarticulated, an "it." He knows not why he is so sad, but "it" wearies him-- the cause of the sadness, the not-knowing the cause, or the sadness itself, and what wearies his friends can only be the same "it."

Those two lines set up the entire world of the play, one confused over interpreting and understanding the self, the opacity of one's own motives, and of the minds of others, and the unreliability of words, statements, and "bonds" to fix understanding. It is also a world of corollary social confusion. The opening lines of "Hamlet" and "King Lear" give two complementary examples: the first starts with a guard asking "Who's there?", and the second with Kent commenting, "I thought the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall." Knowledge of others' identities and minds are at stake, but within established

sociopolitical boundaries- a guard, defending the castle, wants to know who he hears; a counselor, observing the king's shifting preferences, wants to know what political ramifications to expect. "Merchant of Venice," on the other hand, offers a world with no knowledge of itself, and no trust in its inhabitants. Salarino offers an ostensibly economic explanation for Antonio's sadness—the merchant worries over his ships—but the economic theory comes with significant social meaning attached. He speaks:

> Your mind is tossing on the ocean,
> There where your argosies with portly sail
> Like signiors and rich burghers on the flood,
> Or, as it were, the pageants of the sea,
> Do overpeer the petty traffickers
> That curtsy to them, do them reverence
> As they fly by them with their woven wings. (1.1.7-13)

The ships are "like signiors and rich burghers," but whether Antonio also qualifies for that rank is unclear. His property, Salarino suggests, may have a higher social status than he does, yet even that status is no less confused than Antonio's consciousness. The Arden edition glosses signiors as "members of the Signoria or governing body of Venice, but possibly (English) gentlemen", and burghers as "citizens (OED 1), though in this case clearly dignatories". So Antonio's ships (and not Antonio) are like Venetian "dignatories" (but only "like" them), but whether they are lawmakers, gentlemen, citizens or dignatories remains, for this editor at least, an unanswered question.

So the terms of rank are indistinct, vague and interchangeable, and even the characters named in the play have shifting, unstable social positions. The list of roles preceding the play has

Antonio as “a Christian merchant,” Bassanio as “a Venetian lord” and Salarino and Salanio as “gentlemen of Venice and friends of Bassanio and Antonio”. Merchant, lord, and gentlemen seem to establish difference, though the happiest friendship might blur those nuances of social position. But the editor’s notes about this list of roles document how different editions of the play have varied in their designations of these same characters:

> Q3 describes ‘Anthonio’ as ‘a Merchant’; in Rowe he is ‘the Merchant’ and in Capell ‘a noble Merchant’. He is a ‘burgher’, who generates wealth by trade. (163)

Antonio, then, might be “a” merchant, one of a group, or “the” merchant, the most conspicuous, singular one, or “a noble” merchant, one of a group but a distinguished group. The editor concludes Antonio is a “burgher,” yet elsewhere expresses uncertainty about exactly what that label means. Antonio and Bassanio’s “friends,” Salanio and Salarino (alternately Solarino), and “gentlemen of Venice”, per Drakakis, are grouped by the third quarto as “Gentlemen of Venice, and companions with Bassanio’, Rowe has them as “Friends to Anthonio and Bassanio’, and Capell has ‘Solanio’ and ‘Salerino’ as ‘noble Venetians; and Friends to the Merchant, and Bassanio’ (163). As verbal characterizations of their relationships, then, we get companions “with” Bassanio (equals), friends “to” Antonio and Bassanio (the emphasis on their behavior and position toward the merchant and his close friend), or friends “to the Merchant, and Bassanio,” (the comma indicating a slight separation in their affections, friends to each but not friends to both).

These are not idle “academic” or pedantic debates- editors, in their most ideal form, pay the closest attention to the text under consideration and demand exacting linguistic precision. Each editor frames the play’s relationships slightly differently, and the text offers little to settle these confusions, which are emblematic of the play as a whole. When Antonio cannot tell why he is

sad, and knows only that his friends (or are they just Bassanio's companions, as the third quarto has it?) say they are wearied by it, but only that they say so, and not whether they are wearied because they feel with him or because they feel tired of his sadness, or whether they are wearied because they feel for his lack of self-knowledge, or are tired of it, he articulates a confusion that ripples forward through the play. He is confused affectively and socially, and Salanio and Salarino's theorizing adds new layers to his confusion, so that it may also be political and economic, sexual, romantic, or ultimately mysterious.

When Salanio and Salarino depart from this first scene, their mannered, polite exchange with Bassanio and Antonio manages to be both civil and awkward at once. Politeness, of course, can be a way to smooth over or delay conflict, as Touchstone famously parodied in "As You Like It," with seven layers of increasingly direct disagreement, from "the Retort Courteous" through to "the Lie Direct", existing to accommodate an unkind judgment about "the cut of a certain courtier's beard." Something of that nature lies in the polite mix of self-deprecation and sincerity from 1.1.'s lines 57 to 68, with competitive rivalry, insecurity and alienation swimming under the gauzy surface of civility:

> SALANIO: Here comes Bassanio, your most noble kinsman,
> Gratiano and Lorenzo. Fare ye well,
> We leave you now with better company.
> SALARINO: I would have stayed till I had made you merry,
> If worthier friends had not prevented me.
> ANTONIO: Your worth is very dear in my regard.
> I take it your own business calls on you,
> And you embrace th'occasion to depart.

SALARINO: Good morrow, my good lords.

BASSANIO: Good signiors both, when shall we laugh? Say, when?

You grow exceeding strange: must it be so?

SALARINO: We'll make our leisures to attend on yours. [Exeunt Salarino and Salanio] (1.1.57-68)

Salanio gestures to "your most noble kinsman" and "better company," and Salarino to "worthier friends." Antonio reassures, and offers a different reason for their departure, "your own business." "lords" and "signiors" return with the same ambiguity, and Bassanio laments how those signiors "grow exceeding strange." These lines can be played in multiple ways, as tense or awkward meeting, as warm good humor, or as emotionally hollow, mechanical ritual. But the ritual is a strange one to have at all, whatever its emotional tenor, and shows the Venetians' concerns with the quality of their relationships, their relative social positions, business, delayed intimacy ("when shall we laugh"), and deference to others' convenience.

With Antonio and Bassanio left alone onstage, the latter admits to his social performativity and its lack of economic backing:

'Tis not unknown to you, Antonio,

How much I have disabled mine estate

By something showing a more swelling port

Than my faint means would grant continuance. (1.1.122-125)

This moment is one of candor and intimacy between friends, but those moments are rare throughout the play. Shakespeare tends to pair characters in his dramatic staging, often with an

arc like that in this first scene: two or three characters arrive on stage and talk in a small group, the group is swelled by others joining, then slowly dissipates. But many of those quiet moments contain a trace or sliver of their social environment, so that Bassanio moves quickly to discussing Portia and his desire for her; Portia and Nerissa speak directly to each other at the start of 1.2, but move quickly to her father, her suitors, and Bassanio. There is no real solitude, and little pure, paired friendship, with one character speaking directly to another about the interiority of either.

The dramatic technique under consideration here is common, to begin with two people, discussing their world, as in the opening line of "King Lear." Yet that play, for example, has "mad Tom," Lear alone on the heath, the soliloquy about bastardy, and Kent disappearing into a tree. Venice is a densely populated and confined city, without any escape into full privacy or solitude, and the gaze rarely turning inward.

One critic, testing the play against the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, writes:

> The commercial relation is a faceless one, leaving it outside of ethical interaction with the other and positioning it within the field of what Levinas terms "rhetoric," speech which "approaches the other not to face him, but obliquely" (TI, 70). The practice of commerce stands within the Levinasian notion of rhetoric, as against ethical, non-rhetorical discourse: 'Across the gold that buys him or the steel that kills him the Other is not approached face to face; even though they traverse the interval of a transcendence commerce aims at the anonymous market, war is waged against a mass" (228-29) (Baker 27).

Most of the private moments in the play, the escapes from a complex social world into intimate conversation between two friends, still have their characters approach each other obliquely, usually bringing some outside person or problem into consideration, or even announcing the

arrival of another person, or the need to travel to see one.

Salanio and Salarino, the most urban or urbane characters, obsess, as in 3.1, over "news" and gossip, the activities of others rather than their own selves. They start that scene alone on stage, with Salanio asking "Now, what news on the Rialto?" (3.1.1) The friends do not speak of their own feelings, their own lives, their own feelings of social inferiority. Instead, Salarino reports a rumor that "Antonio hath a ship of rich lading wracked" (l. 2-3). One might expect some sympathy here for their friend, on whose leisure theirs attends, but instead Salarino goes on to describe the spot where the ship was wrecked, gestures toward the unreliability of gossip, which is picked up by Salanio, and finally, after ten prose lines go by, the conversation returns to "the good Antonio" (between which Salanio worries ironically about "slips of prolixity"). Finally, Salanio concludes, "Why, the end is, he hath lost a ship.", and Salarino, finally showing sympathy, replies, "I would it might prove the end of his losses." The pair participates in gossip and prolixity even as they recognize it, and place a temporal, verbal, and emotional distance between Antonio's wreck and Antonio's personal suffering. They gossip enjoyably about his wreck, praise his character in excess, and hope his "losses" "end". Some of the blame here goes to their economic world, and Antonio's own separation from his capital, so that "losses" seem emotionally and personally distant (though we know for Antonio that is not the case). But gossip itself places the sufferings and follies of other people on a plane of entertainment, and Salarino might alternately have reported "Grave news about Antonio, his ship wracked on the seas", and Salanio expressed shock or genuine concern. Instead, to borrow Levinas' wording, the friends approach each other obliquely, gossiping about others, and they face Antonio's suffering obliquely as well. Shylock arrives onstage, to be mocked by Salanio, who asks Shylock for "news." Shylock sees past this insincere gesture: "You knew, none so well, none so well as you,

of my daughter's flight" (3.1.22-3). His famous monologue ("Hath not a Jew…"), partly against Antonio, seems applicable in part to his interlocutors here: "He hath…laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains", might also apply to the laughing and mocking Shylock suffers in this scene. More significantly, his plea for recognition as an individual being is entirely ignored. Salanio and Salarino have no verbal response to Shylock's soliloquy, and they leave almost immediately afterward.

Tubal appears onstage, and Shylock becomes the one to ask for "news" about his daughter, but the news bears directly on him personally. Tubal reports, plainly, "I often came where I did hear of her, but cannot find her." Shylock responds in prose, directly, voicing his pain; he knows why he is so sad:

> Why, there, there, there, there! A diamond gone cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfurt. The curse never fell upon our nation till now; I never felt it till now. Two thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels. I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear; would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin. No news of them? Why so? And I know not what's spent in the search. Why, thou loss upon loss! The thief gone with so much, and so much to find the thief, and no satisfaction, no revenge, nor no ill luck stirring but what lights o'my shoulders, no sighs but o'my breathing, no tears but o'my shedding. (3.1.76-88)

He talks about jewels, ducats, and his daughter in a way which, like the rest of the play, confusingly mingles economic, symbolic and personal value, but he talks about his losses, and has the verbal resources to explain why their pain him so greatly (The thief gone with so much…). The staging of the scene matters, and Tubal might be as much cipher as confidant, but Shylock takes him into his confidence. When Tubal shifts to news from Antonio's creditors, for

which Shylock is “very glad,” Tubal offers more bad “news”: “One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey” (3.1.107-8). Shylock, here, claims the ring as something he would have held apart from the entire Venetian economy of economic and symbolic exchange: “Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my turquoise: I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.” (3.1.109-111) Again, he can articulate his own interior experience, and he “values” that ring, from his deceased wife, so highly that it transcends any valuation, and becomes priceless. Shylock’s hurt and anger in that scene solidify his intention to punish Antonio, according to their bond, but the moment transpires first as one in which uncertain social worth, opaque interiority, and shifting exchange values recede for the only time in the play. The emotional and social nakedness on display, at the depth of Shylock’s suffering, may be the text’s only example of unmediated authenticity. Shylock’s insistence on the “bond,” and on inflicting similar suffering on Antonio, might be read as an unconscious attempt to drive Venice to authenticity of the same kind; the Venetians, for all their corrupting confusion, do, in the pivotal courtroom scene, ultimately side with a law which places the integrity of Venetian life above all other considerations, at least for a moment. Even in their cruelty to Shylock, the violence is largely symbolic, and humiliating as that aggression may be, no one ever considers exacting a retaliatory pound from Shylock’s flesh.

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