

## Economy of Love as Manifested in William Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and *The Merchant of Venice*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper tries to make a study of William Shakespeare’s above plays with reference to his contemporary period’s views on money and love. Economy is inadvertently linked with love as we find during the time of Shakespeare. Two of the most important plays of Shakespeare – *King Lear* (1606) and *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-1598) shows how love is tested by economic considerations and how relationships get complicated when the two collide with each other. Market economics of the public sphere questions the love of the private sphere. Here love is equated to lust. This acquisitiveness is characteristic of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age with commerce and trade flourishing and the age itself being termed as the Golden Age. Gender roles are redefined in such a mercantile situation and the place of women in such society become endangered.

Key Words: Economy, love, gender, William Shakespeare, Elizabethan and Jacobean age.

With the continuous expansion of geographical boundaries and “sea-discoverers”<sup>1</sup> going to “new worlds”<sup>2</sup>, the concept of love became quickly linked with economics. While poets like John Donne alludes to contemporary scientific and geographical discoveries and claims that his love for his beloved being more powerful and sustaining than the unearthed treasures of the “new worlds”, dramatists like Ben Jonson dissects human beings and finds him savage in his latent lust for wealth and love. In the famously quoted:

“Come, my Celia, let us prove  
While we may, the sports of love  
.....  
‘Tis no sin love’s fruit to steal...”<sup>3</sup>

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Here love is equated to lust. This acquisitiveness is characteristic of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age with commerce and trade flourishing and the age itself being termed as the Golden Age. The economy was booming with Sir Walter Raleigh exploring the Americas, naming it Virginia after the Virgin Queen and engaging in piracy though there was economic recession in the form of plagues and fires. During this period alchemists were performing experiments to convert dross metals to gold and looting enemy ships for gold mined from the Americas. Money and love become inseparable terms both in literature and daily life when the women were seen as commodities and had no control at all over their destinies. William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, a comedy written probably around 1596 and the tragedy *King Lear* written in 1604-1605 deal with the common theme of economy of love. The comedy has its setting in Venice, Italy and the tragedy in medieval England but the social and political life of the characters are much Elizabethan in their tone. Both the plays lead to various searching questions about the interrelated topics of economy and love and show how the legal and moral spheres are often overlapping. They also question how gender discrimination operates if there is any.

Terry Hawkes in his essay "'Love' in *King Lear*" shows how the origin of the word 'love' itself has connotations of economy or money. Old English dictionary gives the meaning of the word 'lofian' or 'praise' from which the modern word 'love' has developed. 'Lofian' means "to appraise, estimate or state the price or value of".<sup>4</sup> He shows that love gets replaced by profit as Jesus Christ is betrayed by Judas for thirty pieces of silver. In the economy of exchange the women are the most affected as their place in the society was equated to property. In marriage, Elizabethan women were expected to procure dowry and all through her life she was dominated by her father, brother, husband or son. In the Shekhar Kapur directed film *Shakespeare In Love* (1998) starring Joseph Fiennes as the Bard and Gwyneth Paltrow as his lady love, Viola, is a stark depiction of the Elizabethan woman who has no control over her choice of love. In the above plays under discussion there is depiction of father-daughter relationships which reveal how fathers are concerned about the marriage of their daughters though adopting dissimilar ways. With parental permission the legal ages of boys and girls were fourteen and twelve respectively. A marriage contract included provision for bride's dowry, in cash or property by the bride's father and settlement or jointure was provided on her husband's death. The most fascinating point is that it was considered childish to marry in search of love, though if one is lucky love may occur in marriage. Shakespeare's plays' fathers always put a great demand on their daughters. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hermia's father Egeus refuses to accept her

lover Lysander as her husband to the extent even inflicting greater danger on his daughter. In this play we see the extent of the authority of the father. Surprisingly the mother figure is always absent from the plays and the daughters seem to take their mother's place.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the physical presence of the dead father of Portia is replaced by the 'will' or the legal document which determines the husband of the daughter. In this world of parental absolutism the word 'choose' loses its significance as Portia laments her dependence:

“O me, the word ‘choose’! I may neither  
Choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike; so is  
The will of a living daughter curbed by the will of  
A dead father.” (I,ii,22-25)<sup>5</sup>

While in the case of Portia, her husband will be the one who will choose the right casket among gold, silver and lead; Cordelia in *King Lear* is to be auctioned to the lowest bidder. While Portia's dead father proves to “have good inspirations” (I,ii,28); Cordelia's father King Lear fails to distinguish between divine love and erotic love. Lear insecure of his political power seek to be reassured of affection from his daughters. Lear mistakenly confuses love with public display of affection and tries to buy love like a merchant and control love like a king. This love contest proves to be his last royal proclamation. Goneril and Regan like apt merchants successfully bargain with their father over slices of the country and their flattering speeches are overtly charged with economic terms. Goneril insists that her love cannot be measured: “Beyond what can be valued rich or rare” (I,I,56)<sup>6</sup> and Regan insists she is “made of that self metal as my sister”(I,I,68)

Even Cordelia's love is “According to my bond; no more nor less.”(I,I,92) This is very similar to that in *Holinshed* which is a source of the play –

“I protest unto you, that I have loved you ever, and will continuallie(while I live) love you as my natural father...ascertaine your selfe, that so much as you have, so much you are worth, and so much I love you, and no more.”<sup>7</sup>

Cordelia talks of the moral bond between a father and a daughter unlike the legal bond in *The Merchant of Venice*. While King Lear divides his last means to his first two daughters, *The Merchant of Venice* is stifflingly crowded with money and property dealings.

In the absence of any parental figure the bond in *The Merchant of Venice* is the bond or friendship between Antonio and Bassanio which needs to be scanned. Whether it is a friendship of virtue or of pleasure or utility has to be investigated. Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*

distinguishes between the two. While the former friendship is the ideal one and permanent, the latter is temporary and ends when the need ends. Antonio and Bassanio's relationship is both emotional and reciprocal but Bassanio benefits more. Bassanio confesses he is a 'prodigal'(I,I,129) and "owe the most in money and in love"(I,i131) and his very first verbal exchange with Antonio is full of legal terms like 'disabled estate', 'debts', 'warranty'(123,134,132).

To you Antonio,

"And from your love I have a warranty  
To unburden all my plots and purposes  
How to get clear of all the debts I owe."  
(I,I,130-134)

The question arises whether Bassanio is simply a parasite on Antonio and a fortune hunter or an opportunist. Is he a prodigal in the true sense of the term and can be reformed? Bassanio's speech to Antonio is heavily couched in legal terms of borrowal and possession –

Is Bassanio merely flattering his rich friend Antonio like Lear is flattered by his two elder daughters? Bassanio does not prove to be ungrateful like the evil sisters and instead acknowledges highly that his friend and benefactor is Antonio. We can also note the tone of urgency in Bassanio's words when he sincerely wants to release himself of debt from Antonio by executing a plan of winning a rich heiress, Portia. Bassanio uses the imagery of an archer who risks shooting a second arrow in the direction of the first one, to find out the first:

".....but if you please  
To shoot another arrow that self way  
Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,  
(As I will watch the aim), or to find both,  
Or bring your latter hazard back again,  
And thankfully rest debtor for the first."  
(I,I,147-152)

Life is indeed a 'hazard' and men are adventurous risking their prospects in it. Both Antonio and Lear are robbed of their property, the first unwillingly and the second willingly and thus they are brought to the level of common humanity stripped of their pretensions, royal

prerogatives and artificialities. While Antonio is relegated to the place of a bankrupt from a prosperous merchant while his merchant ships sailing to Tripolis, Indies, Mexico and England are reported to be wrecked or lost. Both Antonio and Lear after distributing their property become the essential man with only a name depending on the mercy of others. While filial ingratitude paves the way for Lear's fall, Antonio is saved from his professed enemy by Bassanio's wife, Portia. Lear is still trying to hold on to his powerless name:

“Only we shall retain  
The name and all th' addition to a king.”  
(I,I,134-135)

Daughters and wives are esteemed by the dowry they will bring in Shakespeare's world. While Lear talks about his “daughters' several dowers” (I,I,43), Portia is introduced by Bassanio to Antonio as “In Belmont is a lady richly left”(I,i,161) and then follows her virtues. In the world of mercantilism how much chivalric ethics survive? Bassanio compares his marriage venture as a business proposition to get a loan from the bank represented by Antonio. Bassanio's classical allusions to place his venture in a favourable light establishes the very ground that love and adventure are not always dissociated from money, gold, prize or trophy. Bassanio's argument in favour of Portia as a desirable wife is based on the harsh fact that:

“...her sunny locks,  
Hang on her temples like golden fleece,  
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchis strand  
And many Jasons come in quest of her.”

The Greek mythology<sup>8</sup> of the quest for the golden fleece involves ingratitude and treachery. Ingratitude manifests in sacrificing the ram with a fleece of pure gold to Zeus by Phrixus who was himself saved from being sacrificed by the ram, while love led Medea betray her father King Aeles of Colchis and brother Apsyrtus by giving a magical ointment to Jason to overcome the challenge in getting the golden fleece. Medea later is betrayed by the proud Jason who seeks to replace her with a new bride. Medea is exiled and jealous of her rival. Medea killed the latter by gifting a poisonous robe. Everyone is aware of Jason's infidelity and the example that Bassanio gives sounds dangerous. The “sunny locks” of Portia can be contrasted with that of the snaky haired Gorgon, Medusa who was conquered by the victorious Perseus who rescued Andromeda. Portia does not betray her father's will unlike Medea. Neither is Portia the rival

of Antonio for Bassanio's love. There is always potential for betrayal but *The Merchant of Venice* proves true to its genre.

*In King Lear*, Lear negotiates with the Duke of Burgandy and King of France about the “present dower” (I,I,191) of Cordelia. Lear admits that “But now her price is fallen” (I,I,196) while the Duke of Burgandy bargains with Lear “Give but that portion which yourself propos'd” (I,I,241). It is France who makes an evaluation of Cordelia by her merits. He proclaims: “She is herself a dowry” (I,I,239) and “Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor”(I,I,249). France like the ideal chivalrous prince takes the poor maid while the power politics are reversed in *The Merchant of Venice* where Portia is more economically powerful. With marriage to a rich lady comes economic power which empowers the man in both the plays though for very different ends. In *The Merchant of Venice*, as soon as Bassanio makes the right choice and is celebrating, news comes of Antonio's forfeiting the bond. Portia has already asserted to become the helpmate to her husband:

“I am half yourself,  
And I must freely have the half of anything  
That this same paper brings you.”  
(III,ii,247-249)

Portia loses no time in finishing the legal barriers to her marital settlement with Bassanio in order to arm him with her financial power. It sounds unconvincing that Portia could play her role as a lawyer perfectly but it is her father's intelligence which is handed over to her along with the property. Portia promptly stands upright in the midst of the crisis:

“First go with me to church and call me wife,  
And then shall you lie by Portia's side  
With an unquiet soul. You shall have gold  
To pay the petty debt twenty times over.”  
(III,ii,302-306)

In *King Lear*, Regan hastily declares Edmund the illegitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester, as her husband to make him equal in power to Albany:

“Take thou my soldiers, prisoners, patrimony;  
Dispose of them, of me; the walls are thine;  
Witness the world that I create thee here  
My lord and master.”

(V,iii,76-78)

Jessica, while running away from her father, Shylock – the Jew, in haste and guilt with Lorenzo – the delayed lover does not forget to take her dowry: “Here, catch this casket; it is worth the pains.”(II,vi,33)

The theme of appearance versus reality, sight and insight connects the casket story in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Lear*’s apparent and Gloucester’s real blindness. This theme is clearly laid out in the scroll inside the golden casket chosen by the Prince of Morocco – “All that glitters is not gold.” (II,viii,65) While the Prince of Morocco and Prince of Arragon set out to get what they deserve holding high value for their desert and want to buy love rather than hazard for it. They choose the gold and silver caskets which are the metals of economic exchange. Thus Morocco chooses the gold one which says: “Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire”(II,viii,37). Morocco has high esteem of his strength, birth and equates Portia’s picture to an English coin with the figure of an angel in gold. The mistake of Morocco is that he measures the value of Portia in the Venetian marriage market. Love is that which cannot be measured. Similarly, Arragon interprets the inscription on the silver casket, “Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves” (II,ix,35) as the market profit of the investors. Arragon only thinks of making a fortune rather than love by his ‘stamp of merit’(II,ix,38) and embarks on men’s professions. His use of legal terms like estates, degrees, and offices makes him another candidate in the marriage market. Bassanio’s speech is also not much afar from the economic terms but he dismisses the appearance of virtue in religion hiding underneath hypocrisy and beauty which is “purchas’d” (III,ii,103-104) by the ‘dowry’(III,ii,95) of another lady. Bassanio remembers the suffering associated with Midas’ gold and rejects the silver also which is “pale and common drudge/’Tween man and man.” (III,II,103-104). This husband hunting test is based on the assumption that the defeated suitor would be honourable enough not to divulge his own choice to others and to remain unmarried.

The theme of sight and insight tries to solve the riddle of a complex being like man in *King Lear*. Kent in the very first scene points out the drawback of Lear –

“See better, Lear; and let me still remain

The true blank of thine eye.”

(I,I,158-159)

Lear fails to see the true colours of his two ‘pelican’ daughters and miscalculates when he disinherits Cordelia. In a way Lear is himself responsible for his suffering. Experience and age



do not help Lear to distinguish between truth and falseness which proves the same for Gloucester. Gloucester fails to see through the political machinations of his illegitimate son Edmund and commits injustice to the virtuous son, Edgar. It is only after Gloucester is blinded that he sees right and wrong clearly. But he has paid too gravely for it:

“I stumbled when I saw: full oft ‘tis seen,  
Our means secure us, and our mere defects  
Prove our commodities.”

(IV,I,19-21)

He is now for the first time able to comprehend his weeness in the vast scheme of life. But while he regains insight, he wants to commit suicide in despair from which he is saved by the disguised Edgar. Lear’s pathos and tragedy lies in that when in Act IV, scene vii he meets Cordelia after their estrangement, it is doubted whether recognition truly comes to Lear as the scene is so called. Lear is in a state of half-consciousness and drugged and it can be debated whether he awakens to a new reality after being pushed to the edge of insanity. In this regard Edgar can be termed as a ‘philosopher’(III, iv,151) as called by Lear. Edgar has learned to understand the meaning of life as a result of the adversity he has faced. He has been a guide to his father both physically and spiritually. Edgar disguises as the mad beggar Tom o’ Bedlam possessed by the fiend and thus uses appearance to induce reality into the minds of the diseased characters.

Love and marriage bring with it the attendant themes of sexuality, wills, inheritance, possession. Shakespeare in his collection of 154 sonnets to his friend implores him not to waste his legacy on himself but marry and procreate to pass his treasures to the next generation. In sonnet IV as in many other sonnets Shakespeare questions:

“Unthrifty loneliness, why dost thou spend  
Upon thyself thy beauty’s legacy?”<sup>9</sup>

and accuses his friend for “traffic[Ing] with thyself alone” (LL9). The terms ‘unthrifty’, ‘spend’, ‘legacy’. ‘traffic’, associates the friend with a merchant. The concept of children as coins or semblance of their father is present in both the plays concerned. In The Merchant of Venice, the Jewish moneylender Shylock justifies his charging exorbitant interests on borrowed money by citing examples from the Old Testament about Jacob tricking his father, Isaac and elder brother of his birth right and then using a birth trick of putting parti-coloured sticks in front of the ewes to breed his own race of hybrid sheep. Shylock aptly calls these



sheep in sexual act as “woolly breeders” (I,I,79) and Antonio rightly asks that, “Or, is your gold and silver ewes and rams?”(I,iii,91) to which Shylock argues, “I make it breed as fast”(I,iii,92). When Jessica elopes with Lorenzo, Shylock in his passionate rage confuses the loss of his daughter with the loss of ducats – “My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!”(II,ix,15). Shylock also uses ‘moneys’ and ‘sums’.. Cordelia calls her sisters “The jewels of our father” (I,I,267). In King Lear, Lear in his madness dressed in wildflowers utters:

“No, they cannot touch me for coining; I am the king himself.”(IV,vi,83-84)

‘Coining’ or minting of coins is a royal prerogative. Regan and Goneril by stripping Lear of the royal power produces counterfeit coins in the name of Lear by ‘touch’[ing] or exploiting him The production of fake coins is illegal and therefore producing children out of wedlock is unnatural and illegitimate. Lear connects filial ingratitude to lechery and adultery. Copulation and sexual perfidy are interlinked in Lear’s world. Lear says:

“The wren goes to’t, and the small gilded fly  
Does lecher in my sight,  
Let copulation thrive” (IV,vi,112-114)

Lear in Act I, scene iv, expresses suspicion about the parentage of Goneril and asks “Are you our daughter?”(I,iv,216) calls her “Degenerate bastard!”(I,iv,251) and curses her with infertility:

“Hear, Nature hear! Dear Goddess, hear!  
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend  
To make this creature fruitful!  
Into her womb convey sterility!” (I,iv,273-276)

Lear also threatens to put the same suspicion on Regan’s mother and says:

“I would divorce me, from thy mother’s tomb,  
Sepulchring an adult’ress.” (II,iv,128-129)

Gloucester recounts to Kent the breeding of Edmund and he “often blush’d to acknowledge him (I,I,9) and “cannot wish the fault undone.”(I,I,16)

Gloucester also refers to the insignificance of human beings in God’s universe who play with men’s lives like “wanton boys” killing flies “for sport”. Edgar, the legitimate son of Gloucester links the fall of Edmund to his place of origin. According to Edgar, Edmund is the product “of our pleasant vices” which

“Make instruments to plague us;  
The dark and vicious place where thee he got  
Cost him his eyes.”  
(V,iii,168-172)

“The dark and vicious place” may suggest a brothel where in exchange for a few coins Gloucester satisfied his lust and Edmund is the issue of that eros instead of love. Edmund also accepts this:

“.....An admirable  
Evasion of whoremasterman, to lay his goatish disposition  
To the charge of a star!  
My father compounded  
With my mother under the dragon’s tail,  
And my nativity was under Ursa major; so that it  
Follows I am rough and lecherous.”  
(I,ii,123-128)

Gratiano in *The Merchant of Venice* proposes casually a bet with Bassanio and says: “We’ll play with them the first boy for a thousand”(III,ii,213-214), which he insists producing off course within the wedlock. In Elizabethan age there were many illegitimate children produced who threatened the inheritance rights of the legitimate siblings.

Often illegitimate children resorted to ill means to climb up the social ladder or enter into the rigid society as does Edmund. Both Gloucester and Lear uses the term ‘bond’ to imply their relationship between father and child. In Act I, scene ii, Gloucester connects “These late eclipses in the sun and moon”(I,ii,100) to “the bond crack’d ‘twixt son and father.” Though he mistakes Edgar as the traitor, usurper and plotter against his life, Lear accuses Regan of breaking the “bond of childhood”(II,iv,176), “Effects of courtesy”, “dues of gratitude”(II,IV,177).

While ‘bond’ in *King Lear* assumes the meaning of bond or relationship between two people, in *The Merchant of Venice*, it also adds the meaning of ‘bond’ as a legal document. As a trade economy, the setting of the play in Venice throws up a realistic scene of business dealings. In this light the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio needs to be analysed – whether Bassanio is the time-server and maintains his relationship only for utilitarian purposes. The enmity and dissent between the Christians and the Jews is an instance of racial intolerance.

While Christianity disapproves of charging interest to a friend because all men are equal, and a man should not try to exact excess from the lent goods which was lying dormant with him. But the Jewish scripture which is the Old Testament allows taking interest from strangers and men of other religion. Antonio as the Christian “lends out money gratis” (I,iii,40) which brings down the rate of interest on borrowed money. Shylock as a Jew can carry on the business of usury due to intolerance suffered by his tribe in any other trade and holds a grudge against Antonio for ruining his business prospects. Antonio detests Sylock both for his religion and business and asks:

“As to thy friends, for when did friendship take  
A breed for a barren metal of his friend?”  
(I,III,129-130)

But Shylock bent on revenge counterfeits “I would be friends with you, and have your love.”(I,iii,134) but charging no interest on the borrowed money but in spite of that sign a dangerous ‘bond’. The bond of ‘merry sport’ which Shylock tries to translate as harmless is indeed a life-threatening condition. The ‘bond’ no more implies the relationship between two friends but a legal bond which if forfeited entails punishment. The extraction of a pound of flesh from Antonio suggests an ancient custom of the Roman society where failure to repay a loan made the debtor a slave of the creditor and if the number of creditors were many, the debtor was simply chopped into pieces and distributed among them. Bassanio is saved from being a parasite on his friend and causing his death by his newly won wife Portia who is ready to:

“Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond  
Double six thousand, and then treble that,  
Before a friend of this description  
Shall lose a hair through Bassanio’s fault.”  
(III,iii,298-301)

Antonio performs moral usury on Bassanio by borrowing not from a friend but an enemy which Bassanio pays with his gratitude and help. Lear has already tried to buy love and now tries to buy gratitude by reminding Regan:

“Thy half o’th’ kingdom hast thou not forget,  
Wherein I thee endow’d.”  
(II,iv,178-179)

While the land in King Lear becomes the measure of love, the ‘ring’ in the other play becomes the token of love, marriage contract and symbol of fidelity. Tubal reports to Shylock about the filial ingratitude of Jessica who during the honeymoon with Lorenzo sold the turquoise ring for a pet monkey which her mother, Leah gave to Shylock. This is an outrageous act of Jessica though it may be an act of revenge against her money hoarding and pleasure-hating father. Portia in a playful jest accuses Bassanio of infidelity because he has parted with their marriage ring while in reality it is she who as the youthful lawyer, Balthazar begged the ring as his fee. Portia laments:

“If you had known the virtue of the ring,  
Or half her worthiness that gave the ring,  
Or your honour to contain the ring,  
You would not then have parted with the ring.”  
(V,I,199-202)

There is suddenly a serious tragic strain in the romantic scenario when a wife accuses her husband that “some woman had the ring”. The ‘some woman’ implies a prostitute with whom Bassanio slept and bought the sexual gratification in exchange of a ring. Romantic sensibility is crushed to the ground when even after knowing the truth Portia threatens with similar retribution:

“Since he hath got the jewel that I lov’d(V,I,224)  
.....  
I’ll have that doctor for my bedfellow.” (V, I,233)

Though it is a comedy and the problem is solved by Portia herself and the tension eases out, the harsh real commercial mercantile society of Venice constantly intrudes and intermingles with the romantic, idealised imaginary retreat of Belmont.

Within the economy of exchange comes the vital question of what is the worth of man? Lear evaluates it at a retinue of hundred knights while Goneril slowly cuts it down to fifty then Regan to twenty-five then again to ten or five by Goneril and at last Regan asks him, “What need one?”(II,iv,262) Lear in desperation and rejection from his daughters asks the fool:

“Does any here know me? This is not Lear  
Does Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?  
.....  
Who is it that can tell me who I am?” (I,iv,222-227)

and the fool replies “Lear’s shadow.”(I,iv,228) Stripped of all his external glory and power, Lear has come to an awareness of his connection with common humanity and in the storm scene he feels an oneness with the poor people. Lear himself distinguishes between the basic need of beggar with the higher class:

“O! reason not the need; our basest beggars  
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:  
Allow not nature more than nature needs,  
Man’s life is cheap as beast’s. Thou art a lady;  
If only to go warm were gorgeous,  
Why nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear’st,  
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need”  
(II,iv,263-269)

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Bassanio comes to woo Portia with his train of followers like Launcelot Gobbo dressed in “a livery/more guarded than his fellows”(II,ii,148-149) and Gratiano and the servant of Portia is impressed by his “Gifts of rich value”(II,ix,90). After the spectacular entry of Bassanio, later when Antonio is in danger, Bassanio confesses,

“Rating myself at nothing...When I told you  
My state was nothing, I should then have told you  
That I was worse than nothing.”  
(III,ii,256-259)

Bassanio himself rates himself at ‘nothing’, while Shylock has bought Antonio’s one pound of flesh or a man’s life with three thousand ducats. Shylock equates a man’s moral character with his financial condition. When Shylock says “Antonio is a good man”(I,iii,12) he means ‘sufficient’(I,iii,15) by the epithet ‘good’. A man’s life retains no value and is as insignificant to nature as any other animals. Lear with dead Cordelia laments:

“Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,  
And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never!”  
(V,iii,305-307)

The word ‘never’ uttered five times shows the insignificance and futility of human existence.

The interconnectivity of love and monetary economics encourages serious questions about the power relations between men and women, Christian and non-Christians. Does Portia represent every Venetian woman? Does Christians truly believe in equality and money and extending love to all? French Humanist, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa in *De mobilitate et praecelestia foemineae sexus* (1529) translated into Italian in 1549 talks about the condition of women in the sixteenth century. Most of the women were neither a merchant nor a lawyer like Portia and conventional restrictions were placed on them for the honour and good of the society. The women were excluded from education, military training and public office. Lucrezia Marivella compares the restrictiveness of Roman Catholic Italy with the accommodating societies of France, Spain and England where women were able to inherit where especially in Germany, Flanders and France they were engaged in commerce. Portia's question in the trial scene – "Which is the merchant here and which the Jew?" (IV,I,172) encompasses the inability of strict distinction. The 'merchant' in the title may refer to Antonio, Shylock or Portia herself.

In Venetian economy women were often oppressed by their father cheating his daughter of her inheritance which happens to Cordelia, or their brothers embezzling with the sister's dowry, husbands liquidating his wife's dowry which we know will not happen to Portia. It was also a strategy of the upper classes to limit the descent to a single line by depriving the daughters of marriage. Unwanted daughters were often sent to convents to save their dowry. Portia talks about pretending living like a nun in a "monastery two miles off" (III,iv,31) from Belmont while Bassanio is away in Venice. Portia is fortunate as she is the single child of her father unlike Cordelia who has two more sisters to compete with. The choice given to women was whether she wanted to enter a convent or not, as if she really can choose otherwise. Portia despairs of her condition –

"O me the word 'choose'! I may neither  
Choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike"  
(I,ii,22-23)

Lear is always blaming his daughters and dead wife but never himself. Lear utters misogynistic remarks throughout the play. There is silencing of the completely good character Cordelia in the course of the play. Thus men often use their power and money to 'silence' the 'other'. The 'other' may be women or non-Christians like Shylock, a Jew who is always differentiated and termed unequal by the Christian characters. While the Christian God says, "Love thy neighbour", the Christians show 'love' by robbing Shylock of his religion and property. The

Jews are only unequal, different and competitors in the market as Launcelot Gobbo blames Jessica for raising the price of the pork.

### End Notes:

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