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The Merchant of Venice is Far from Perfect

In a perfect world, hatred would be without justice; love would be totally innocent. However, utopias like that are nonexistent; thus, one can easily look around, like Auden, and exclaim, "No hatred is totally without justification, no love is totally innocent." In *The Merchant of Venice*, there is an imperfect world, as well as a perfect world. The flawed world is the materialistic and bustling city of Venice. The impeccable world is the fairy-tale city of Belmont. Despite Belmont's perfection, a bit of justified hatred from Venice would ruin its innocence. (Paradise lost.) Alas, as Auden suggests, there are no utopias.

In Venice, time is of the essence. If one were to momentarily forget the real world, one would be trampled down by its massive stampede of events, bonds, et cetera constantly being made, ubiquitously in its domain. Shylock and Antonio are just one pair of culprits adding to the ultimate imperfection of Venice. However, the bond made between Shylock and Antonio sets them completely apart from the normal villainy dealings, "If you repay me not on such a day... let the forfeit / Be nominated for an equal pound / Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken..." Act 1, Scene 3. A shrewd merchant, Antonio does not immediately agree to this. He first reasons it out: "Within these two months—that's a month before / This bond expires—I do expect return / Of thrice three times the value of this bond." Act 1, Scene 3 If all goes well, our merchant of Venice would have no difficulties in paying Shylock back.

However, not all goes well; a while after this bond, rumors on the Rialto

suggest that Antonio has lost his fortunes at sea. With not enough wealth to compensate for his due payment, Antonio is now in danger of losing a pound of his flesh, which in those days meant almost certain death.

In Belmont's high peak, secluded from the merchants of Venice, time is a silhouette of the real world. Portia sits there weary and bored, waiting for the brave suitor who would agree to risk all for her. She is the perfect woman, wrought of both intelligence and beauty; she is like a doll trapped in Wonderland. In addition to those materialistic qualities, she is also a faithful daughter. She dutifully holds true to her father's dying wish and allows her suitors to be chosen by a lottery system. Thus, many heroic Jasons come in quest for this golden fleece. All abandon this quest, afraid that they would not choose the right casket, and thus might lose all. Dear Portia is innocently waiting in Belmont for love.

In Venice, daughters do not have deep faiths in their fathers. Tired of her "hell" house, Jessica elopes with Lorenzo. Perhaps she does so to ameliorate her status in the orthodox world; she seeks conversion to Christianity in order to justify her hated past Jewish life. Semitism is despised in Venice. Shylock, her father, portrays the typical Jewish hatred towards Christians, with justification, "I hate him for he is a Christian. Act 1, Scene 3" He will not allow her to mingle with Christians. "Nor thrust your head into the public street / To gaze on Christian fools with varnished faces... Act 2, Scene 5" Thus, he has destroyed her innocent love. In order to love, she would have to defy him.

In Belmont, true innocent love can be found. Even when her beloved Bassanio goes nigh to choosing a wrong casket, Portia does not stop him. " I pray you, tarry... I could teach you / How to choose right, but then I am forsworn. Act 3, Scene 2" She has faith in her father's will, even if it does mean that she loses her Bassanio. Bassanio, the impulsive lover, innocently reasons the three clues etched upon the walls of the caskets, and thus, chooses the right one. Bassanio finds a portrait of Portia in the casket, as well as a scroll that reads, " Turn you where your lady is / And claim her with a loving kiss. Act 3, Scene 2" He kisses her, still " giddy in spirit, gazing in a doubt." She gives him a ring, which she insists he must never remove. Do they live happily ever after?

From Venice, there comes a lamenting group. Lorenzo, Jessica, and Salerio arrive at the enchanted city of happiness, with news of Antonio's fortunes lost at sea. In lieu of the little time they have, Bassanio has to confess his secret to Portia, " When I told you / My state was nothing, I should then have told you / That I was worse than nothing; for indeed/ I have engaged myself to a dear friend, / Engaged my friend to his mere enemy, / To feed my means. Act 3, Scene 2" Antonio's problems have entered Belmont; via the joining of both worlds, the illusory harmony of Belmont is ruined.

From Belmont, there comes a stellar lawyer, apt to put up strong shields for the defendant. Shylock, powered by " a lodged hate and a certain loathing Act 4, Scene 1," attacks Antonio in court. Bassanio, the faithful friend, whom the bond should have been made to, tries all he can to mitigate his friend's predicament. Try as he might, he does not succeed; Antonio, as weary as ever, asks him to stop, as he knows that there are " no lawful means," to

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break their bond. "Live still, and write mine epithet. Act 4, Scene 1" At that moment, Portia enters the courtroom, with fake credentials of a "Doctor of Laws." Shylock is whetting his knife, preparing for justice to aid him in carrying out his revenge, his hatred for Antonio. She starts her part by playing with him, suggesting Shylock to relent to mercy, knowing full well that he would not consent to have mercy upon his enemy. She seems to give many hints suggesting him to break the bond; however, Shylock continuously insists that he "must have his bond." He is so impatient; it almost seems as if his base hatred has eliminated his hearing. Finally, she tires of his stubborn uncreative replies. She parallels his insistence for accuracy in interpreting the bond. "This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood; / The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh.' / Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh; / But in cutting it if thou dost shed / One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods / Are by the laws of Venice confiscate / Unto the state of Venice. Act 4, Scene 1".

In Venice, a Jew is foiled. By his own myopia, eyes shrouded by his intense need for revenge, he ends up losing all his wealth. And still, he does not get his "pound of flesh." The law of Venice defies aliens, of which Shylock is one. Consequently, as the law abides, half his money goes to the state, and the other half goes to the defendant. Shylock is surrounded by discriminating enemies. He is like a jewel lost amidst the rough. Justice's sentient eyes would distinguish him at first sight; he is a minority in this world of Christians. His hatred is profound, yet the law serves no recourse; justice does not serve him in carrying through with his revenge.

In Belmont, we find two lovers: Lorenzo and Jessica, away from the oppressive environment of Venice, alone and innocent, once more, with the consecration of love. As daybreak approaches, the defendant group arrives, valiant in their victory. Much teasing and merrymaking occurs, once again restoring happiness and innocence to Belmont. Timeless events occur there, once again... relieving the players of their past worries.

Shylock, abandoned as a poor misfit Jew, struggles in the real world down in Venice. He seems to be the sole person with discontentment in the closing of Act 5. Everyone else, including his ex-Jewess daughter, is happy. The lovers have all sacrificed an element of their innocence to love, which is the core of their euphoria. As a whole, this play may be seen as a comedy. However, as Shylock's predicament would imply, it would be a tragedy from the point of view of the Jews. Perhaps, with the drawing of the curtains, a silent fire still rages with petty hatred, with Shylock's firm justifications that he has been wronged, yet again.