

The Evil Bond in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*: The Source of Irrationality

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Abstract: *In William Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice" (1600), the evil 'bond' is the origin of the irrationality that Shylock, Antonio and Bassanio express. Obviously, the bond itself is devoid of reasonableness and it can logically be said that all those involved with the bond including the creator and the acceptors are equally unreasonable characters. In a word, there is no logic behind Shylock's cutting a pound of flesh for only 3000 ducats owed to him and the absurd agreement by Antonio and Bassanio. In addition, the absurd bond leads to other absurdities that take place during the trial especially when Shylock is forced to convert himself into a Christian. Certainly, he does deserve punishment for the cunning and brutal trap that he has set to hurt Antonio but none can ever justify the way his religion has been taken away from him. Therefore, this is entirely irrational since we must not forget that Shylock himself is the criminal not his religion i.e. Judaism.*

Keywords: *Bond, Evil, Injustice, Irrationality, Jew, Pound of Flesh, Prosaic Justice, Shylock, Venice*

1. INTRODUCTION

In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the bond itself is irrational and not only the maker, Shylock, "a ruthless moneylender" (*The Free Dictionary*, 2014) or "a moneylender who charges extremely high rates of interest" (*Oxford Dictionaries*, 2014) as his name suggests, is crazy but also Antonio and Bassanio display their unreasonable outlook by accepting the weird condition of the 'pound of flesh'. Apparently, Antonio borrows money from Shylock so that it becomes easier for his friend Bassanio to try and marry a rich woman, Portia. "Without Shylock's services, Bassanio could not win the lady richly left, Portia, and the Venetian businessmen could not finance their ventures. The conceit of usury as money breeding is a critical one for the play, and is based on Aristotelian teachings" (*Anti-Semitism and The Merchant of Venice*, 2006, p. 8).

Bassanio confesses that he has "disabled" his "estate, by something showing a more swelling port than [his] faint means would grant continuance" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 196). In other words, he is a foolish opportunist who tells Antonio that he wants to marry Portia, a woman who possesses much wealth. Here, he focuses on her monetary status more than her beauty- "in Belmont is a lady richly left" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 196). Bassanio cannot court her since he has wasted his money. So, he requests Antonio to back his courtship with Portia.

According to the bond, Shylock lends 3000 ducats but on the condition that if Antonio does not repay the loan on time, Shylock can "exact the penalty" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 199) of pound of flesh from Antonio's body. *The Merchant of Venice* also indicates the way England viewed Venice and its laws on economics at that time, which were exceptional compared to England's ones. According to M.M. Mahood (1987) in *The Merchant of Venice*, "the fact that Venice was known to have many unique laws may have helped the more informed spectators to swallow the

improbability of Shylock being entitled only to an exact and bloodless pound of flesh" (as cited in *The Merchant of Venice and the Economics of Risk and Investment*, n.d., para. 3). Evidently, in accordance with the modern readers and spectators, the protagonist of *The Merchant of Venice* is Shylock. The readers of the later era viewed Shylock as a scapegoat or a victim. However, the Elizabethan audience considered him as an antagonist and foolish person who tries to entrap Antonio but he himself is entrapped in the end. Moreover, Shylock was the despised Jew, though he wanted others to understand and like him:

The Merchant might have been intended as a satire on the sanctimonious avarice of the Christian characters and of their hypocrisy in projecting their own worst traits onto the scapegoated figure of the Jew. (O'rourke, 2003, p. 375)

Today, the readers somewhat sympathise with Shylock and consider him as a crashed man. In fact, both of these explanations are proper. Shylock is revengeful and tries to murder Antonio. He refuses the amount of money and stubbornly sticks to the bond according to which Antonio will lose his life. Indeed, he is cruel and has no mercy in him:

My deeds upon my head!

I crave the law,

The penalty and forfeit of my bond... (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 213)

Shylock could have taken the money and spared Antonio's life. Antonio does not deserve to die only for 3000 ducats. This is simple logic. But, Shylock wants Antonio's death because Antonio has insulted him many times earlier. Antonio has made fun of him, spat on his face, and even called him a dog. So, we can say that Antonio himself is also responsible for the mental pain that he goes through after he fails to pay the loan on time. Nonetheless, we feel sympathy for Shylock especially when we think from his perspective:

He hath disgraced me,

and hind' red me half a million; laughed at

my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation,

thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends,

heated mine enemies; and what's his reason?

I am a Jew. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 206)

Consequently, the same absurd bond leads to other subsequent irrationalities, which find their fullest expressions in the trial scene where Shylock crazily keeps on demanding the pound of flesh rejecting three times the money owed to him. Similarly, Portia, who disguises as a lawyer named Balthasar, keeps on telling Shylock to show mercy but she herself does not demonstrate kindness or forgiveness when it comes to the forced conversion of Shylock. Besides, the Duke's noticeable partiality for Antonio from the beginning of the trial till the end is something unreasonable in the sense that he, as a judge, should remain neutral. Even if he, like the readers, has sympathy for Antonio, he should not make others realise it. However, the most ridiculous part appears when Shylock is ordered by the court to convert himself into a Christian. This is absolutely illogical. Since "usury is a bad thing, and as such ought to be prevented" (Bentham, n.d., p. 6), we agree with the court's decision to take his property away but our conscience does not allow us to support the fact that a man, no matter how bad and cruel he is, should lose his religion forever. Besides, the court does not punish or criticise Antonio and Bassanio for agreeing with such a heinous and absurd bond!

Hence, Shylock has lost his daughter earlier. He loses his ducats, his property and religion after the trial. Shylock can bear the loss of property but how can he tolerate the loss of his religion? We, the readers, feel more sympathy for him after his forced conversion to Christianity. Definitely, Shakespeare plays with our feelings quite successfully. The hated Jew turns into a sympathetic character before our eyes within a few moments! Obviously, Shylock's religion is not guilty but he himself is. Again, some critics and scholars may argue that such conversion was common at that time but even a socially accepted thing may be wrong and brutal due to the hypocrisy in it:

Shylock refuses Christian demands and only the forced or procedural conversion of the trial resolves the irresolvable tension between law and mercy on display. And this resolution, as suggested, is then judged disingenuous or inauthentic and certainly violent. (Jackson, 2007, p. 73)

2. IRRATIONALITY IN THE EVIL BOND

The bond, schemed by Shylock and accepted by Antonio is itself absurd. The irrationality in the play is originated through the bond that leads everyone of the play towards the absurdities of the court scene. Antonio needs 3000 ducats to help his friend, Bassanio in wooing Portia. Coincidentally, Antonio's all the fortunes are engaged in business at sea. However, Antonio agrees to help his friend in utmost way. As "in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England did not have an established banking system that provided savings plans or personal loans" (Brown, n.d., p. 37), therefore Antonio needs to borrow the money from someone. With Bassanio, he rushes to Shylock, a Jew "who is forced to lend money because other professions are closed to Jews" (Weinstein, 2007, p. 191), to borrow money.

Antonio is eager to help Bassanio so that the latter can court Portia and this fact raises question within us. It is really pointless for Antonio to help Bassanio when the case is about marriage, not about some serious illness of Bassanio or something else, and at the same time Antonio's fortune is not at his hand. We see that Antonio is ready to even sacrifice his life for his friend but "there is not one instance in which Bassanio explicitly says he loves Antonio" (Colmo, 2001, pp. 307-308). The irony lies in the fact that Bassanio himself is not taking any risk. "His hazard is actually financed by someone else's money..." In a word, Antonio risks "everything in the game of love" (Gill, 1998, p. 124). Antonio-Bassanio friendship manifests one-sided love, which is atypical in friendship and it is further demonstrated in Bassanio's meeting with Portia to whom he does not mention the name of Antonio. Bassanio's urge towards Antonio, "You shall not seal to such a bond for me" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 199) is disposable since he does not take any solemn stride to stop Antonio from signing the bond. However, Antonio

not only gives Bassanio the money he needs to win Portia, but risks his life for him in the bond, placing poor Bassanio (who seems to spend the majority of the play becoming indebted to someone or other) in a grave debt that he will be forced to repay by remaining close friends with Bassanio. (Niekerk, 2003, p. 54)

In 16th century England, money lending was the only lawful business for the Jews. Obviously, Antonio lends money without interest for the sake of humanity whereas Shylock lets someone borrow with a high rate of interest to serve his own purpose. Though this practice is considered the most repulsive vocation, in truth, "it was the only profession open to the Jew" (Brown, n.d., p. 36). However, "Shakespeare's Shylock is a Tedeschi Jew who practices money lending and other small-scale banking services" (Kitch, n.d., p. 142). Evidently, Antonio is a renowned merchant in Venice and very naturally he has some other acquaintances from his profession who can help him in this critical situation. But, still why does Antonio need to borrow from Shylock, the Jewish money lender? Are there no other Jews from whom Antonio can have the loan? But, Antonio does not approach others: "Why Shylock? Did all of Antonio's friends, i.e., his fellow merchants, turn him down? Would no one lend the generous Antonio without charging interest?" (Colmo, 2001, p. 310).

Antonio's fortunes are at sea but it is not likely that all his wealth is engaged in business-purpose. All his ships are not in one place or his entire property is not in jeopardy. Certainly, he has some other properties that can be used to mitigate the need of Bassanio. So, Antonio's claim, "Neither have I money, nor commodity/To raise a present sum" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 197), is groundless. Shortly after Antonio's proposal: "therefore, go forth/Try what my credit can in Venice do:" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 197) implies that his lack of fund is reversed by his offer. The bond, signed by Antonio offers the condition, "Three thousand ducats, for three months, and Antonio bound" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 198). That means Shylock agrees to pay 3000 ducats on a brutal condition that if the money is not paid back within three months, Shylock will have the right to cut off one pound of flesh from Antonio's body. Surprisingly enough, Shylock himself cannot afford the amount rather he manages from another person of his tribe named, Tubal:

I cannot instantly raise up the gross
Of full three thousand ducats. What of that?
Tubal, a wealthy Hebrew of my tribe,
Will furnish me. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 198)

Antonio or Bassanio themselves may have approached Tubal to borrow money. However, Shylock wants the confirmation of his scheme to avenge on Antonio and so he desires him to seal the bond by going to a notary since he is quite sentient that "under Italian Private Law, a deed was (and still is) void if it was (and is) not validated by a signature" (Magri, 2009, p. 6). Shylock's proposed 'single bond' requires- Antonio will fulfill the conditions of the bond and Shylock has no liability towards Antonio. Therefore, Shylock's proposal "Go with me to a notary, seal me there/Your single bond" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 199) manifests "that the bond regards Antonio only, not himself" (Magri, 2009, p. 6).

Both Shylock and Antonio are aware of the fact that the bond is a 'unilateral' agreement where the principles remain unchanged. It is obvious that Shylock wants to take revenge on Antonio to satiate his animosity towards Antonio. Through the malicious bond, "Shylock wants to take revenge on Antonio because he bears a personal grudge against him as he is his rival in the money lending business and he has often spat and spurned him in public; on the other hand, Shylock also chooses Antonio as a scapegoat to assuage both his personal resentment and the collective rancour of other Jews for the prejudice and discrimination they are subject to" (Alonso, 1996, p. 276). Hence, Antonio knows it well that Shylock will endeavour to harm him somehow but still he foolishly risks his own life. Furthermore, this is also irrational that the person whom Antonio often spats upon and frequently attacks verbally has become his best choice to seek loan from!

Another absurdity of Antonio is to be noted that he is against taking interest as we find him telling: "I neither lend nor borrow/By taking nor by giving of excess" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 198) but he becomes ready without thinking for a second time to borrow with interest. Though he claims that "...to supply the ripe needs" of his "friend", he will "break a custom" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 198) but it is also a matter of thought how could a person of his nature and rank leave his custom so readily? Once more it is ridiculous that Antonio seeks the loan as an enemy rather than as a friend since he utters: "But lend it rather to thine enemy" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 199). Though Shylock mentions the 'single bond' merely a 'merry sport', he leaves no stone unturned to make it extremely formal:

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
Express'd in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
From what part of your body pleaseth me. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 199)

How could Antonio take the matter so lightly when it comes to signing the bond? The conditions, from a very surface level, reflect Shylock's villainous or vindictive attitude which Antonio, in spite of being a prominent merchant, fails to understand and blindly signs the bond believing it a 'merry sport'. However, it may happen that Antonio becomes sure of his protection or Antonio may have the confidence regarding "the law as a system working for the Christians and it regards Jews as the others" (Altindag, 2004, p. 35). He may have thought that as a Christian he has to pay nothing as forfeiture because the bond refers the most unreasonable penalty of 'Antonio's fair flesh'.

Possibly, Antonio's pride and overconfidence have led him to agree with such weird bond. Thereby, he thinks that he is more beneficial than Shylock in this agreement. On the other hand, Shylock may have observed that he can execute his long nourishing revenge through the bond.

So, both of them start to "believe they are better off for their curious bargain" (Allen and Seidlv, 1995, p. 840). It is apparent that both accept their conditions not for monetary gain only but for something more than this.

The bond is illegal in its first point since "the state laws forbidding any kind of deal between a Jew and a Venetian"; Shylock and Antonio "get involved in a bond that mocks the laws" (Altindag, 2004, p. 32). They defy the law after sealing their agreement with a notary. However, going against the law, they make the bond, which itself crops up a question: 'what kind of law is this that provides the opportunity to murder a person'? Signing a 'foolish bond', both of them have been laughed at and not only that 'the irrational bond' ridicules the law as well. In its exterior, the agreement simply grants Shylock to take Antonio's life.

Moreover, the bond that includes such type of propositions cannot be a legal contract: "a bond of that nature would never have been legal in the first place" (Perell, n.d., pp. 4-9). So, the agreement they have made is invalid at the initial emergence. It is worth mentioning that how could the law of a city like Venice, renowned for business, have loophole that paves the way to make such kind of invalid agreements? Shylock knows it very clearly that "according to the laws of Torah and of Venice, Shylock has a right to interest" (Weinstein, 2007, p. 189).

Usury became legal in England many years before Shakespeare's staging the play, *The Merchant of Venice*. So, Shylock is legally right to demand interest as "in 1571, the English parliament established a law which allowed usury at 10 per cent interest in England" (Ludwig, 2003, p. 98). But, Shylock is irrational in demanding "the most absurd penalty of all: namely, a pound of human flesh" (Weinstein, 2007, p. 190). As has been pointed earlier, the law of the city is also at a stake. The law system that is exhibited in *The Merchant of Venice* came into exertion at 12th century and lasted until 19th century in England. The justice system was as follows:

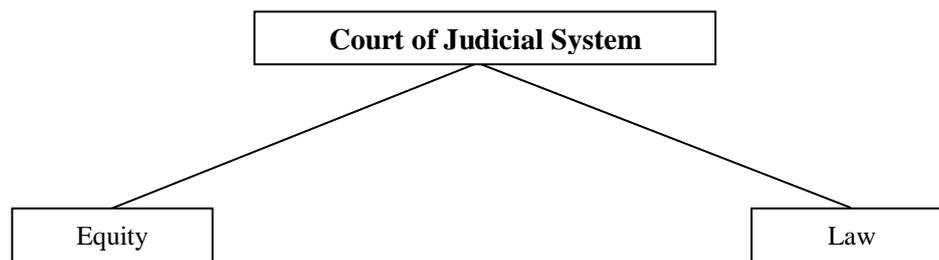


Fig 1. *The Judicial System of England at 12th Century*

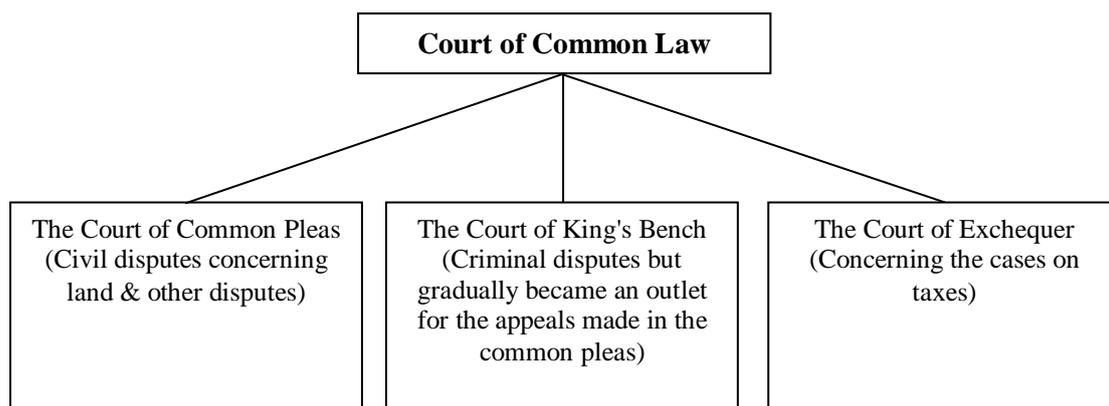


Fig 2. *The Judicial System of England at 12th Century*

In such a system of law, the forfeiture of the bond, sealed between Shylock and Antonio, falls under the Courts of Common Law. Notably, 'law' is an English word, originated "from the Norse word "Lagu", which means "to lay down in good order"" (as cited in Perell, n.d., p. 4) but the bond does not conform to this definition of law. The contract is sealed under a law, which ensures the lender of his forfeit, is an absurd bond because it discards the basic meaning of law since the provisos are not laid for any good. It simply makes the way clear for Shylock to have revenge of old animosity i.e. taking away the life of Antonio. Irony also lies in the fact that law is seen "as a

means to life, not as a threat to life" (Colmo, 2001, p. 320) yet the agreement is signed to put a life in danger.

Undoubtedly, usury was a legal profession for the Jews at that time but how a person could claim 'human flesh' as penalty for nonpayment of 3000 ducats and that is also in accordance with the law! Abiding by the law so strictly, how could Shylock and Antonio make this absurd agreement, and how is it possible for Shylock to proceed with this illegal bond even to the court? It is a general belief that law ensures security and welfare to every citizen but Shylock's bond is never made to secure Antonio's life rather it risks his (Antonio) life though the bond is prepared under a law. However, it is acknowledged that law never permits Shylock and Antonio to agree with these sorts of conditions since "Shylock's bond incarnates the blood, flesh, and the monetary bond". Law defies any kind of annihilation where Shylock's bond exhilarates slaughtering of a person. Therefore, Shylock and Antonio's bond is the "unnatural" bond of commerce, and the propositions Shylock places into the bond are "absurd and dangerous" (Ludwig, 2003, p. 116).

It should also be taken into consideration that we have never been shown Antonio's tension regarding the payment of the bond. As it is evident from Antonio's conversation with Salarino and Salanio that Antonio has fund to repay the dues thereby "by refusing to pay the bond on time, Antonio entraps Shylock" (Colmo, 2001, p. 319). He accepts the bond "willingly to spite Shylock because he knew Shylock would not be allowed to take a pound of flesh" (Ganyi, 2013, p. 127). Even if this may not be the exact matter,

it's somewhat surprising that Antonio fails to take advantage of other means to protect himself from Shylock. A little marine insurance, for example, would have saved him a good deal of anxiety and made this tale significantly shorter and simpler. (Skwire, n.d., p. 26)

Whatever his intention is, Shylock, placing these sorts of conditions, proves himself as the most unreasonable person. Even so Antonio, accepting these provisions, is also no exception to it. The evil bond entails 'a pound of Antonio's flesh' and the court refers to Shylock, stating that he is "entitled under the law to his pound of flesh, but, as we see it today, it would have been an injustice for him to have taken it" (as cited in Smith, n.d., p. 14). Undoubtedly, this is the most irrational penalty that is drawn by Shylock and acknowledged by Antonio.

3. THE TRIAL AND THE IRRATIONALITY IN SHYLOCK'S CONVERSION

According to the provision of the bond, Antonio fails to pay the money back to Shylock. So, logically and legally Shylock does deserve the pound of flesh from Antonio's body. "The focus on Antonio's absurd bond is a way of drawing our attention to the fact that there are some things that a reasonable person simply cannot want to do or to have happen to him, and the law cannot sanction these things" (Colmo, 2001, p. 323). In one hand, perhaps Shylock appears as a villain and heartless human being by demanding a pound of flesh, but it is because the Christians have made him a victim for so many years. On the other hand, we must agree that Shylock is not a guiltless sufferer. He is also at fault because of the plot of the pound of Antonio's flesh to kill him in the name of justice:

Shylock the Jew is certainly a complex character: he is greedy, yes, and merciless, but he is also—at least to some extent—justified in his demands. Unlike Iago or Don John, he has no interest in evil for its own sake. Nor, unlike Claudius or Macbeth, is he fueled by unscrupulous ambition...After years of enduring the "sufferance" which "is the badge of all our tribe," (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 199) when Shylock at last has the opportunity to lawfully best a Christian, it is no wonder that he insists that the bond be paid. (Boulton, n.d., p. 122)

Revenge is what Shylock wants and the letter of the law must be in his favour. Therefore, he believes that he will be successful in taking revenge against Antonio and all of the Christians of Venice, who have been supporting Antonio by going against Shylock. However, another view is that Antonio

tries to make Shylock the instrument of his own dramatic death, the better to entrap Bassanio forever in his love. To hold Bassanio beyond the grave, Antonio must not only use Shylock. He must make the law a murderer by making it the instrument of his own suicide. (Colmo, 2001, p. 319)

Now, if we highlight on the English judicial system, it will be easier for us to understand the different applications of the law in the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice*. The general law of England has three parts, statute law, equity law and common law:

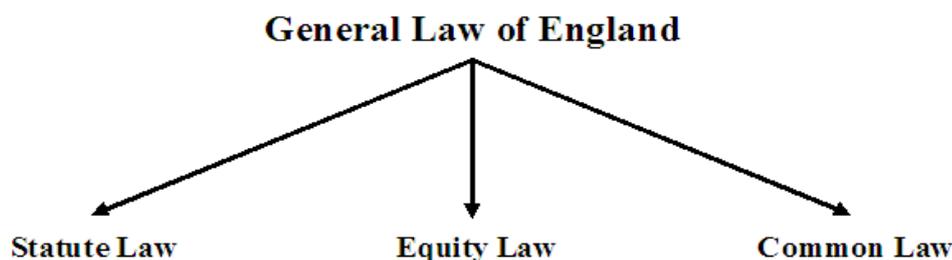


Fig 3. *General Law of England*

The common law is the entire body of English law. Whereas, the legislature forms the statute law and equity law was developed by the Court of the Chancery. The judgment is based upon equity and conscience in the Court of Chancery, which indicates the sense of natural righteousness of the Lord Chancellor. However, according to Salmond in V.N. Paranjape's (2001) *Studies in Jurisprudence and Legal Theory*, 'equity' has three meanings:

In the first place, it connotes the embodiment of the principles of morality, honesty and righteousness. In the second sense it is synonymous with natural justice and thirdly in its narrower sense, it consists of set rules of equitable law as opposed to common law. (as cited in Farha, 2006, p. 84)

In accordance with such a structure of law, the courts of common law deal with the provisions of penalty of the bond. It leads Shylock to be successful in his revenge by murdering Antonio. Notably, the common law was very strict and insufficient during the 13th century in England. It had three chief flaws such as, absence of remedy, inadequacy of remedy and excessive formalism causing great unfairness to plaintiffs. Therefore, it became essential to supplement the severity of the common law by rules directed by the ethics of the judge acknowledged as the Lord Chancellor. D.V. Mahajan (1996) states in *Jurisprudence and Legal Theory* that the outcome was that,

a party who could not get any relief in the ordinary course, applied to the Lord Chancellor who would consider those applications and give relief in fit cases, particularly in those of frauds, errors and unjust judgments. In course of time, the Lord Chancellor advised the judges of the Court of Chancery to supplement the law by principles of equity justice and good conscience. Thus equitable principles, at that time came to be recognized as principles superior to the rules of common law. (as cited in Farha, 2006, p. 84)

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the trial over the 'pound of flesh' "takes place in a Venetian court of justice, and justices are indeed present, but from the first moments of the scene the Duke himself presides, and from his first words we see that he is inclined toward Antonio and against Shylock" (Short, n.d., p. 204). The Duke is sorrowful for Antonio and he sympathises with him by calling Shylock

A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch,

Uncapable of pity, void and empty

From any dram of mercy. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 212)

Portia and her maid, Nerissa, appear in court by disguising themselves as men. The former as the young lawyer, Balthasar, and the latter as his clerk. Doctor Bellario of Padua has permitted the young lawyer to act as his substitute. Portia, the wife of Bassanio, dresses as a lawyer so as to trick the court. However, her intention is righteous and unselfish. The pretense of a lawyer, particularly by a female at that point in time, was illegal. But, Portia has no other choices other than impersonating herself to save a man's life. After entering the court, Portia says, "Which is the Merchant here? and which is the Jew?" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 213). It seems rather absurd to us and it would be better if she asked, 'Who is Antonio, the merchant? and who is Shylock, the usurer?'

Shylock wants justice although he realises that he will get moral victory only. "According to him, the exact equivalent to the sum of money is the 'pound of flesh', which ultimately refers to 'the death of Antonio'" (Ziaul Haque, 2013, p. 143). "...If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge..." (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 206). This speech reveals his extreme sourness. As "it is important to die honourably" (Seneca, n.d., chapter 27), it is also important to 'live honourably'. Unfortunately, Shylock is not honoured at all by Antonio and his friends and this is the reason why he has become unreasonably revengeful. Shylock goes on to say:

The pound of flesh, which I demand of him,
Is dearly bought; 'tis mine, and I will have it.
If you deny me, fie upon your Law!
There is no force in the decrees of Venice.

I stand for judgement: answer; shall I have it? (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 212)

Here, Shylock recollects that he has avowed to value the contract. Plainly, the 'pound of flesh' is owed to him. This promise binds him to "an oath, an oath...in heaven" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 214) and he cannot break it. "The pound of flesh paves a way to several explanations. Firstly, it becomes a symbol of two closest relationships of the drama; secondly, it also represents Shylock's firm obedience to the law. The friendship of Bassanio and Antonio is very strong and it becomes stronger day by day. Shylock has the feeling that he has lost his own flesh and blood and is searching for the recompense by collecting it from his rival, Antonio. Lastly, the pound of flesh continually reminds us of the hard world of Shylock where numerical calculations are more important than sympathy or mercy" (Ziaul Haque, 2013, p. 143). In fact, "all is ugliness..." (Sophocles, 1974, p. 63) in Shylock's own world. Perhaps, like Iago, he obtains certain sort of "mental luxury or cognitive crutch" (Thomas, 1989, para. 7) "through this cunning plot. Indeed, the pound-of-flesh resolution itself is doubtful and his way of defending his position is more doubtful" (Ziaul Haque, 2013, p. 144).

According to the *Deuteronomy* 24:6, "it is interesting that the Jewish law to which he here implicitly appeals is the same one that forbids taking a bond that would threaten a man's life" (as cited in Colmo, 2001, p. 321). Here, Shylock appears to be an irrational or mad person since he starts to consider "error as truth, lies as reality, violence and ugliness as beauty and justice" (Foucault, 2001, p. 23). "Madness seems to belong to [his] tragedy. It lends a distinctive suffering of inevitable self-destruction" (Sheetz, 2012, para. 5) of Shylock. He behaves like an animal. Therefore, his "madness discloses a secret of animality which is its own truth, and in which, in some way, it is reabsorbed" (Foucault, 2001, p. 71). Actually, Shylock's irrationality derives from his 'suffering' by the Christians especially by Antonio. In other words, he is dying inside. So, his suffering "is already the plenitude of death" (Foucault, 2001, p. 28). "Suffering is a universal human experience; it is impossible to live without suffering. When suffering reaches a certain degree, one wants to die, one wants to commit suicide" but Shylock does not kill himself rather he decides to murder Antonio in his uncontrollable anger and irrationality since his suffering has made him "fearless, and this fearlessness translates into decisive action" (Hammond, chapter 45, para. 1).

Now, mercy is an aspect of God and its status is higher than authority, law and majesty. The Duke and the others in the court request the Jew to show mercy and let the merchant go. When the scene opens, we see that the Duke presses Shylock to forget the bond and be gracious:

Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,
That thou but ledest this fashion of thy malice
To the last hour of the act, and then 'tis thought
Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange
Than is thy strange apparent cruelty;
And where thou now exacts a penalty,
Which is a pound of this poor merchant's flesh,

Thou wilt not only loose the forfeiture,
But, touched with human gentleness and love,
Forgive a moiety of the principal. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 212)

However, the speech ends with vicious witticism: "We all expect a gentle answer, Jew" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 212). "We must acknowledge that this is, in part, a threat, a hint at the demonstration of sovereign power yet to be fully demonstrated, especially in that what actually happens meets the Duke's "expectations" perfectly" (Jackson, 2007, p. 73). "Common humanity supports revenge as well as it supports mercy. Portia cannot reach Shylock until she appeals to a ground higher than mere humanity. For Shylock, that higher ground is Jewish law" (Colmo, 2001, pp. 319-320).

When the law intimidates that Shylock's property will be taken away from him, he responds that "You take my house when you do take the prop/That doth sustain my house; you take my life/When you do take the means whereby I live" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 215). "Shylock and Portia (playing the role of a male lawyer) haggle about payment by flesh or funds in lieu of flesh: Portia reminds Shylock that as a Jew, in the eyes of the law he is not a citizen of Venice; rather, he is an alien and therefore could be sentenced to death for any attempt on a citizen's life, which removing a pound of Antonio's flesh would surely constitute" (Shields, Fenton, McGinn & Manley-Casimir, 2012, p. 54). Yet, "Shylock refuses to be intimidated. He defends the legality of his contract and points out persuasively that if the people of Venice can presume to hold contracts that make human beings their property, then he can surely lay claim to a pound of flesh. What he wants, he maintains, is justice..." (Short, n.d., p. 205).

Christian hypocrisy seems to be more hateful throughout the trial. When the duke asks Shylock, "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 212). Then, the blunt Shylock answers:

What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?
You have among you many a purchased slave,
Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,
You use in abject and in slavish parts,
Because you bought them: shall I say to you,
Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?
Why sweat they under burthens? let their beds
Be made as soft as yours and let their palates
Be season'd with such viands? You will answer
'The slaves are ours': so do I answer you: (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 212)

Nevertheless, Portia's understanding of mercy is anchored in the way Christians in Shakespeare's era realised the differentiation between the Old and the New Testaments. During the trial, Portia delivers a significant speech on mercy before Shylock:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes...
It is an attribute to God himself; (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 213)

Apparently, Portia says that Shylock should be kind towards Antonio, and free him from the bond. However, Shakespeare's real intention is also demonstrated here in his endeavour to convey a message that everyone should show and accept mercy; all human beings are a combination of both virtue and vice.

But, the cunning Shylock is not to be restrained so easily. He supports his stance by saying that the Christians treat their servants like dogs. Therefore, it is entirely illogical for them to talk about mercy and they should stop asking him to be merciful. Here, an important observation is that perhaps Antonio's being Christian, rich and a gentleman, the court urges Shylock to be merciful. But, the bitter truth is that

The defendant and his supporters fear that Shylock's likely success in killing a popular and supposedly righteous merchant speaks to the amoral nature of the free market. Mercy has no sway in such a situation because, as an emotional appeal, it is outside the realm of commerce. (Long, 2012, p. 5)

Shylock has already lost his daughter who has eloped with the Christian, Lorenzo. Besides, he has not got back the ducats and gold that his daughter has taken away with her while leaving home forever. As a result Shylock sticks to his position quite legally and looks forward to taking the retribution. However, his obstinacy turns him into a villain:

As a result of the Christians' collective characterization of Shylock, he becomes a particularly villainous character, when in fact he is simply acting in an economic system that he supports alongside Antonio. (Long, 2012, p. 5)

Definitely, Portia is defending a person named Antonio who is partially guilty by accepting the evil bond. Even if Shylock is reasonably right, he is indefensible since he is not a well-known citizen of Venice like Antonio. Her actions may have had positive consequences for Antonio, but they scarcely contribute to righteousness and societal relations in Venice where the law should be firmly imposed specifically because it is related to business and earnings:

Antonio's trial...further distinguishes between Shylock's perceived villainy and the disconcerting changes brought about by the market system. When Shylock demands the payment of his bond, Antonio's supporters must sacrifice their moral outrage and personal love for Antonio in order to preserve the integrity of the city's laws. Shylock warns the court, "If you deny it [my bond], let the danger light/Upon your charter and your city's freedom" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 212). The "freedom" which Shylock leverages alludes to Venice's reputation for rigorous civil courts and unfettered free markets, much as Fynes Moryson described in 1617. Accordingly, while the Duke doesn't conceal his preference for the Christian defendant, he is reluctant to endanger Venice's reputation for upholding contracts; he hesitates before yielding to what critic Michael Ferber describes as "the dissolution of the traditional 'organic' society into an aggregate of individuals who do as they like". Shylock's instruction to the court to consider his insistence on Antonio's pound of flesh as his "humour" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 212) underscores this conflict between individual freedom and community well-being. (Long, 2012, p. 6)

Now, "Shylock's court-room argument is that since Venice permits the keeping of slaves it has already accepted the principle that flesh can be owned...Capitalism did not achieve its full development until slave-ownership was abolished and the market in human flesh replaced by a market in its derivative, labouring power. To the Marxist critic questions about the character of Shylock, the wrongs we are to believe were done him and the justice of his revenge against the hypocritical Christians, are no more central to the play than Shakespeare's exploration of the economic principles of burgeoning capitalist culture" (Egan, 2004, p. 103-106). Portia knows it well that Shylock deserves the flesh according to the law as she says, "lawfully by this [contract] the Jew may claim/A pound of flesh" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 214). However, she also discerns that it is impossible to alter this strict law:

There is no power in Venice

Can alter a decree established:

Twill be recorded for a precedent,

And many an error by the same example

Will rush into the state. It cannot be. (Shakespeare, 1973, pp. 213-214)

When Portia feels that Antonio is entirely trapped by the strict stand of the state law, she, as far as Lucan's perception about bravery is concerned, "boldly dares [to] withstand the mischiefs" (as cited in Montaigne, 1877, p. 28). She immediately takes the assistance of the rules of equity law to save him "from the desolation of this ruin" (Montaigne, 1877, pp. 33-37). There was a law during the 16th century in England, which held, according to P.M. Furmston (1991) in *Law of Contract*, "...chancellors were prepared to interfere...They could not...defy the common law, but they could and did apply their peculiar remedy of specific performance" (as cited in Farha, 2006, p. 89). "Venetian law is as likely as Jewish law to be treated as an end in itself. Portia means to foreclose this possibility by presenting the law as a means to life, not a threat to life" (Colmo, 2001, p. 321).

"Now the question is whether there is any connection between the Divine quality of Mercy and the moral law of the world. The Divine quality of Mercy is the Divine law of the New Testament. This Divine law has become the moral law" (Farha, 2006, p. 91). D.V. Mahajan (1996) says in *Jurisprudence and Legal Theory* concerning moral law, that "its principles are common to all the states because they have been laid down by God for the guidance of mankind. It is an unwritten law as it is not to be found in the form of a code. It is not written in the brazen tablets or pillars of stone but by the finger of nature in the hearts of men" (as cited in Farha, 2006, p. 91).

"Similarly, Portia is seen practicing such moral law to save both Antonio..." (Farha, 2006, p. 92). Consequently, she makes the bond look meaningless with the authority of the equitable law and uses Shylock's utmost weapon i.e. the law against him. Portia cleverly interprets the bond for the second time by relying her argument on a provision that is not expressed in the bond with a view to ensuring justice for Antonio. She declares:

Tarry a little, there is something else.
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 the 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. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 214)

Now, Shylock himself is trapped entirely. So, he finds a way out of the situation as soon as possible. He seems confused much and his mind appears 'blank' to him- "Dark heart of Shylock did experience 'blank darkness'/While he was all null in utter madness" (Ziaul Haque, 2014, p. 54). Thus, he tries his best to take the argument to Bassanio's previous offer to "pay the bond thrice" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 214). But, Portia restates and indicates the order of the law at this time by rejecting Bassanio's offer: "The Jew shall have all justice. Soft! no haste/He shall have nothing but the penalty" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 214). This remark follows her suggestion a few lines earlier that Shylock "shall have justice, more than thou desir'st" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 214).

"What happens next—and how this next moment differs from both the one we have just examined and the later moment of "procedural" conversion—is what fascinates me. Immediately after Portia tells Shylock that he shall have nothing but the penalty she presses the demand of the law in a shocking and disturbing way, shocking and disturbing not just to Shylock, but to everyone on stage and to a great many audiences prepared to enjoy a "comedy"" (Jackson, 2007, p. 74):

Therefore prepare thee to cut off the flesh.
Shed thou no blood; nor cut thou less, nor more,
But just a pound of flesh: If thou tak'st more,
Or less, than a just pound, be it but so much
As makes it light, or heavy, in the substance,
Or the division of the twentieth part

Or one poor scruple, nay, if the scale do turn

But in the estimation of a hair,

Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 214)

As others have noticed, Portia demands that Shylock should take the flesh without the blood and her claim is not so much an objection about Venetian law or about the wording of the bond as it is a reminder of and an appeal to Jewish law:

Only you shall not eat the blood;

You shall pour it upon the earth as water. (*Bible Hub*, 2014)

Perhaps, Shylock is the one person in the courtroom who does know how to cut the flesh without spilling the blood. But, the thought of the act does horrify him. Eventually, when Shylock visualises that he is treating Antonio as an animal is treated, he wants nothing more to do with the pound of flesh that he has recently demanded:

Let me put this another way, specifically the way of Genesis 22: in that earlier moment of the scene when Portia limits the contract to flesh without blood Shylock experienced no "fear and trembling" at the call of the Law in part because he did not fully recognize it as such. At that point Shylock still experiences himself as in control of the (man-made) law, even though Portia's ruling has turned against him. He still believes he can negotiate a good deal and flee. In the (momentarily) later Abrahamic instance, however, Shylock suddenly and newly recognizes the utter strangeness and alterity of the call of the Law, the call of the Law to give death, a call that demands he act utterly and completely against his own self-interests. In other words, Shylock suddenly and subtly finds himself in something more like the actual position of Abraham in Genesis 22—called to give death even though it will cost him everything—rather than in the position he believed himself to be in: someone with the Law on his side, an Abraham with a license to murder—not a son—but a hated enemy. I am suggesting that, like Kierkegaard's Abraham or, more precisely, the reader of Abraham trying to come to terms with Abraham's actual position in Genesis 22, Shylock is momentarily paralyzed in Act Four by the call of the other, caught up short and unexpectedly by the Law which he thought he knew. To reiterate, the usually fast talking, hard driving Shylock hesitates at this Abrahamic instant, called to give death even though it means his utter ruin. (Jackson, 2007, p. 77)

Certainly, Shylock does not agree with Portia's proposal that he should have a doctor nearby to stop the wounds in order that Antonio does not lose much blood and die. He stands by the letter of the bond by claiming that there is no reference to the surgeon in it. It seems interesting and astonishing to us that after Portia permits him a pound of flesh without shedding any blood, Shylock simply asks, "Is that the law?" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 214) "He does not reply to the call of the Law to kill" (Jackson, 2007, p. 77). He answers next:

I take this offer then; pay the bond thrice

And let the Christian go. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 214)

Now, Shylock seems crushed to us. He has argued with her about the doctor but does not start the argument about the blood. He could have said that it is not mentioned in the bond. He should have said, in the words of George Anastaplo, that "a valid contract implies the likely means necessary for its execution" (as cited in Colmo, 2001, p. 320). Nonetheless, any court of justice could not gravely consider it for an instant because, as John Wilders (1969) mentions in *Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice Casebook Series*:

By every principle of interpretation, a bond that could justify the cutting of human flesh must also justify the shedding of blood, which is necessarily implied in such cutting. Portia's interpretation of the bond is merely a quibble of a bright girl playing the lawyer. (as cited in Farha, 2006, p. 89)

Indeed, Shylock has one option in his hand i.e. to kill Antonio. Now, Shylock may actually want to expand a particular type of kindness just to save himself but it is not related anymore to the distinctiveness and the claim of the Law than the fact that his primary wish to take Antonio's life matches with the call of the Law to confer loss of life:

His own anger and hurt seeps out more poignantly because that pain actually mitigates the iron clad claim of the law. His personal motivation he knows in this court, would cloud, rather than reinforce, the basis for his claim, the absoluteness of the contract. (Jackson, 2007, p. 79)

It is quite clear to us that any tough call of the Law is 'Jewish' in the play but the law is in one way 'Christian' also especially when Portia tells Shylock to push the dagger into Antonio when it comes to sustaining the legality of the Venetian state. Jen Bloomfield (2007) remarks in "The Quality of Mercy: Portia's Oration in *The Merchant of Venice*" that "according to the writing of St. Paul in the New Testament, the Old Testament depicts God as requiring strict adherence to rules and exacting harsh punishment for those who stray. The New Testament, in contrast, emphasises adherence to the spirit rather than the letter of the law, portraying a God who forgives rather than punishes. He offers salvation to those followers who forgive others" (as cited in Farha, 2006, p. 91). "But Portia encourages the Duke and, thus, the Venetian law, to be merciful to Shylock whenever this does not infringe upon Shylock's legal obligations to others. The law is for the sake of life, not of obedience, and the Duke is free of the law whenever it does no harm to others. In this way, the Venetian Duke becomes, in fact, more god-like than the Persian King, because the Duke does not treat the law as an end in itself" (Colmo, 2001, p. 322).

The Duke does not put Shylock to death and it reveals his amazing demonstration of kindness. He even proposes that he will avoid claiming half of Shylock's assets and fine him only if Shylock behaves modestly. But, Shylock rejects the mercy suggested by the Duke. Consequently, they have their pound of flesh i.e. Shylock's heart. "Thus, not only does Shylock lose his 3000 ducats, his daughter, and his chance for revenge; he is also robbed of his income, his entire estate, and his religion (Antonio later stipulates that he must convert to Christianity), all in one fell swoop. By this feat of wit and merciless judgment, Portia permanently establishes Shylock as the scoundrel and herself as the hero" (Boulton, n.d., pp. 123-124). Shylock's procedural destruction can be exhibited through the illustration below:

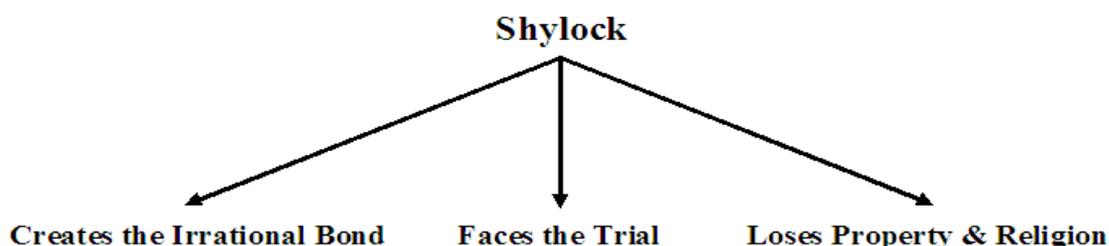


Fig 4. The Destruction of Shylock

Aaron T. Beck (1979) mentions in *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* that the "cognitive models of abnormal behaviour focus on the way people think about themselves, others and the world" (as cited in *Abnormal Psychology*, n.d., p. 319). Now, Shylock reveals his madness when he repeatedly claims the pound of flesh by rejecting the three times the money owed to him. Possibly, his mental disorders are caused because of the

distorted cognitive processes – such as selectively attending to some information and ignoring other information, exaggerating negative feelings, expecting the worst, or making inaccurate attributions about events. (*Abnormal Psychology*, n.d., p. 319)

So, when Portia and the court request Shylock to 'season' righteousness with kindness earlier, we should be ever cautious as Derrida persists since they are all calling for a particularly Christian translation or sublimation of this unreachable mercy or reward formerly proposed. "Even though Shylock is the cause of all the legal mishaps, Portia tries to save him through applying moral law or the virtuous quality of Mercy. The trial scene ends with the triumph of equity and moral law in resolving the legal and human crisis caused by the rigidity and the inadequacy of the common law" (Farha, 2006, p. 83). D.V. Mahajan (1996) affirms in *Jurisprudence and Legal Theory* that, "equitable law (meaning the principles of natural justice) does give the judges or the lawyers the provision to temper the fixed rules of the construct law" (as cited in Farha, 2006, p. 90). Portia does exactly the same to save Antonio. When she finds that the construct law is inadequate and

inflexible, she relies instantly on righteousness, equity and ethics. But, the gift called mercy itself—if it exists—remains distant and distinct. As Derrida (2001) writes:

This analogical—and Christian—articulation between two powers (divine and royal, heavenly and earthly), insofar as it passes through the sovereignty of mercy and the right of grace, is also the sublime greatness that authorizes or enables the authorization of every ruse and vile action that permit the lawyer Portia, mouthpiece of all Shylock's Christian adversaries from the merchant Antonio to the doge, to get the better of the Jew, to cause him to lose everything, his pound of flesh, his money, even his religion. (p. 20)

However, let us analyse the trial scene from a different point of view. The court actions in *The Merchant of Venice* occur in Venice where law is completely different from the perspective of formation and organisation. Obviously, Shylock and Antonio face the trial in what appears to resemble the English version of the Court of Equity. He should have been tried for a civil dispute in the court that deals with criminal cases or in the court that deals with civil disputes. Nevertheless, Shakespeare relates the plot of the play to a court formation that the Elizabethan people can realise and tackle. Shylock simply loses his case. "Correspondingly, the play's treatment of Shylock the Jew and, in particular, the forced conversion to Christianity he experiences, directly contradicts the prime directive of our ethics..." (Jackson, 2007, p. 69). It is really tough for him to tolerate or accept the punishment since he has done nothing serious. Only a minor fine would have been proper. However, Shylock's "madness is...cured" by Portia and fortunately enough it does not lead to any "tragedy and death" (Sheetz, 2012, para. 5) since Portia has successfully stopped him from threatening the life of Antonio.

Ironically, we find the presence of 'mercy' neither in the Christians nor in Shylock. "Strikingly, though, the mercy that Portia so eloquently describes is not ever extended to the Jews of the play" (*Anti-Semitism and The Merchant of Venice*, 2006, p. 11). The play reveals another bitter aspect that law itself can be modified by the authority in order to save the favoured ones. One of the absurd phenomena is that Shylock has been called 'Jew' for 23 times, which certainly is derogatory for him and an attack on his ethnicity. Besides, Portia interprets the law and cleverly twists it to save Antonio. It is noticed that the Duke, the doctor and everyone else present in the court try their best to rescue Antonio in spite of the bond that he has signed. Therefore, law has been obviously defied. The bond rests upon both parties and Shylock is legally responsible to have it and Antonio is bound to pay it. Certainly, Shylock's forced conversion reveals the Christian hypocrisy and the ultimate irrationality:

One version of this perspective sees Shakespeare as intending to portray Shylock as vicious only because of the treatment he has received, and therefore credits Shakespeare with writing a dark condemnation of Christian hypocrisy. A more extreme version of this law is that Shakespeare intended to write a play portraying Shylock as a simple and contemptible villain, and unwittingly revealed the prejudice and anti-Semitism present in himself and in his time, thereby producing an even darker condemnation of Christian hypocrisy. These views conclude that, whatever Shakespeare's intentions, the play must now be read and experienced as one in which Shylock has ample grounds for his anger and murderous intent, having been driven to rage by a vicious, cruel society that hypocritically calls itself Christian. (Short, n.d., p. 200)

4. CONCLUSION

In the end, if Shylock is guilty of producing such an evil bond, Antonio and Bassanio are also equally guilty of accepting it. If Shylock deserves punishment, the acceptors should also be penalised even a little but this does not happen in the play, which seems irrational to us. We observe that Shylock does not turn into a devil or villain before others because he is revengeful towards a Christian but because he is a Jew and thus intrinsically wicked or inherently evil. This anti-Semitic unfairness, this illness, this 'fiend', is the source of the evil in *The Merchant of Venice*:

The Venetians turn a blind eye to Antonio's complicity in the market system and instead demonize Shylock, constructing a scapegoated Other on which to blame the perceived faults of the free market system. They decry Shylock's greed, Judaism, and usury despite the fact that the characteristics of capitalism that the Venetians so distrust--that is, the market system's

tendency to erode ritual constraints on resentment-result from the individualistic system as a whole. So although anti-Semitism drives the play's surface conflict, in reality Shylock is merely a scapegoat for the community's distrust of the free market and the fluid hierarchies that it inaugurates. (Long, 2012, p. 5)

The modern readers are shocked at the way Shylock is penalised in the trial scene. He has been deprived of a 'pound of flesh' that is his lawful due according to the bond. Perhaps, it is "pride, not revenge" that drives him to claim the flesh; "Adler's Shylock would want to terrify and humiliate his enemy, but at the supreme moment, Antonio's life in his hands, he would refuse the murderous pound of flesh" (Horowitz, 2007, p. 12). Eventually, Shylock undergoes religious and material doom after Portia smartly deals with the case. In the same way, "the fact that Freud fled to London from the Nazis (after the German annexation of Austria in March 1938) and died there somehow parallels the ending of Shylock, each being alien in his community" (Chiu, 2012, p. 41). Shylock's assets are snatched away and he is forced to accept Christianity, which means that he loses everything. "Shylock, too, gives and hazards all he has- and he loses. The man who's lost his religion has lost everything" (Gill, 1998, p. 124). As Derrida (2001) opines:

...Shylock loses everything in this translation of transaction, the monetary signs of his money as well as the literal pound of flesh- and even his religion, since when the situation takes a bad turn at his expense he will have to convert to Christianity, to translate himself (convertere) into a Christian, into a Christian language, after having been in turn forced, through a scandalous reversal- he who was entreated to be merciful- to implore the doge for mercy on his knees... (p. 189)

Plainly, the Duke willingly does not give Shylock death sentence and it can be seen not from the perspective of forgiveness but only to demonstrate the disparity between the Christian humanity and Jewish brutality. It should be mentioned that the proposal is from Antonio. Thus, Shylock accepts all these conditions with the words- "I am content" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 215) and goes away from the court as a broken person. Evidently, religion is the most-loved thing to Shylock and nothing can be as unjust as taking away a person's treasured religion forcibly. Besides, the worse thing is that Shylock does not have any privilege to appeal to any upper court of justice. Hence, this judgement of the enforced conversion of Shylock to Christianity is the mark of extreme inequality and unkindness. This is not a 'poetic justice' but just the opposite i.e. "prosaic justice" (Ziaul Haque, 2014, p. 127) since justice is not carried out as it should be:

Like a seraph from the heaven above,
Portia did carry the message of humanity,
And mercy ending up with an assumed 'poetic justice',
That many do appreciate and others disapprove of. (Ziaul Haque, 2014)

It must also be said that much of Shylock's "pain is self-chosen" and even none can heal his "sick self" (Gibran, 2001, pp. 70-73). He destroys himself psychologically. In other words, he behaves unwisely by making such an irrational bond and commits psychological suicide by rejecting the threefold amount in the court, which, according to S.C. Boorman (1987) in *Human Conflict in Shakespeare*, is not "the supreme symbol of a wise man's ability to be the sole arbiter of his own fate" (as cited in Al-Qassas, 2011, p. 4). As Snyder (2009) opines, "...turning down an offer of three times the principle of the bond in the trial scene, Shylock is perceived as crazed or foolish for not accepting this offer" (p. 2). Some critics are of the opinion that Shylock's soul has been saved through the conversion but others consider it as a heartless effort to disgrace the crushed man more. Shylock's extremity of emotions leads, as Gulsen Sayin Teker (2012) says in "Empowered by Madness: Ophelia in the Films of Kozintsev, Zeffirelli, And Branagh", to "melancholy and eventual breakdown" (as cited in Maki, n.d., para. 12) when he says that "I am content" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 215).

However, like mercy, real conversion can never be enforced. Even it was realised by some of the Popes in the darkest eras of anti-Semitism. "If Shylock becomes a Christian and he is suddenly kinder, what does that mean about the difference between Christians and Jews? If he does not change due to this religious switch, how should we judge him then?" (Wonnacott, 2013, pp. 9-10). Moreover, Shylock is a shrewd pragmatist; he knows how to temporise and dissimulate. Yet,

he could have followed the numerous apparent converts and their successors in Europe in Shakespeare's day to survive: in spite of maintaining the forms and attending the obligatory cathedral services, they practised their true religion secretly.

Since "forced individual conversions were rare" (Gatta, n.d., p. 34), "for many, if not most, the "forced conversion" of Shylock leaves the play horrifically situated in the post Pauline Christian discourse...beyond salvaging for a modern audience. Even if one argues, like Rene Girard, that the play self-consciously exposes rather than indulges a certain economizing hypocrisy at the heart of Christianity one is left with a reading that condemns Christianity as "too Jewish," a reading that perversely condemns Judaism in an attempt to condemn Christianity" (Jackson, 2007, p. 71). Candidly, such a conversion is utterly meaningless. Correspondingly, a question can be raised whether Shylock is truly content or not. "Almost no one these days thinks Shylock really means it. That doubt stems from our belief that no real-life Jew at that time under those circumstances could possibly have been "content" with a coerced conversion to Christianity" (Beauchamp, 2011, p. 89). Therefore, "...the sentence condemning Shylock to deny his religion falls like a thunderbolt" (Kline, 1971, p. 69). In other words, though he says in words, "I am content" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 215), his heart definitely says, 'I am [not] content':

Is Shylock content truly?

Even after losing his religion eternally,

As someone bids farewell,

To a departing soul bound for heaven or hell!

It indeed is arguable,

Yet what my heart longs to tell,

Is that Shylock does deserve penalty,

But his religion certainly is not guilty! (Ziaul Haque, 2014)

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