PORTIA'S PORTRAIT:

REPRESENTATION AS EXCHANGE

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While this essay is about The Merchant of Venice, its real mission is to explore the problems that gave rise to the play in the first place. These amount to what Shakespeare’s Venetian duke calls, perhaps inadvertently, the “difference of our spirits” (4.1.368)—Jewish and Christian. So why bother with the play? The reception of this extraordinarily influential work has become part of the cultural history of Jewish-Christian understanding—in the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany—in such a way that the problems that gave rise to the play are often now seen entirely through it. Sometimes, though, we stubbornly mistake its insight into so-called Judeo-Christianity. For example, we often think of this play not only as expressing but also as driven by a set of simple polar oppositions—“Christian mercifulness and universalism versus Jewish mercenariness and particularism,” for example, or “the New Law versus the Old Law.” Or we figure we get to the heart of the play when we try to gauge morally the author’s anti-Semitism or his presentation of others’ anti-Semitism. One thesis of the present essay is that the familiarity of these polar oppositions and moralistic inquisitions, which are mostly doctrinal in a thematic sense, has distracted us from less comforting difficulties, which are mostly theological and monetary in a formal sense. One of these simultaneously theological and monetary difficulties goes to questions of divine incarnation and idolatry, and issues of theological representation and exchange, that are close to the heart of Judeo-Christianity.

The interrelationship between the supposedly disparate realms of God and money

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1Cf. Bassanio to Launcelot Gobbo: “... thy eyes shall be thy judge. / The difference of old Shylock and Bassanio” (2.5.1–2). All references to Shakespeare are from The Riverside Shakespeare, 2d ed. G. Blakemore Evans, J. J. M. Tobin, et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).
perceptions of shadows? The tricky shadow puppets in van Hoogstraten's works (fig. 3) and Sænredam's depiction of the Platonic parable about eídola (fig. 4) suggest otherwise. In any case, we know—even if Portia does not yet know—that the "inner" substance of Bassanio is not what his borrowed clothes make him out to be. In a play where one person, at least, is called upon to give and hazard all he has, Bassanio has nought of his own to give but blood ("... all the wealth I had / Ran in my veins"

**Fig. 1.** Thomas Nast. A Shadow Is Not a Substance. 1876. In David A. Wells and Nast, Robinson Crusoe's Money. Harvard College Library.
Bassanio, who comes by "note" (3.2.140), is himself actually "worse than nothing" (3.2.260). (Noting and nothing were often pronounced alike.) He has borrowed all he has from his self-sacrificing merchant friend Antonio.

PRODUCTION AND GENERATION

The Merchant of Venice was written about a commercial republic at a time when there still waged a debate, about images and merchandize, between elements we might call

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is another issue for us. I hope to reintroduce a theological element into what has been heretofore a largely thematic discussion about Judaism and Christianity in *The Merchant of Venice*. In these terms I shall try to suggest that the essential difference of spirit among the three “Peoples of the Book”—Christians, Jews, and Muslims—involves not only questions about mercy and revenge, to which two hundred years of criticism have riveted our attention, but also—and more importantly—theological and monetary questions about spirit and body, as well as related quandaries about ideal representation and real material.

I begin with a discussion of representation and exchange that has immediate iconological and economic consequences for our play’s comedy.

**PORTIA FOR PORTRAIT**

Portia: ...*if my form lie there*

*Then I am yours.*

(2.7.61–62)

At the center of *The Merchant of Venice* is a question about a work of representational art and its relationship to what is represented. Various men, you will recall, travel to Belmont because they want to marry Portia and gain her dowry and inheritance. Each must choose, according to the will of her late father, one of three metal caskets. Portia, the lady of their dreams, tells us of these caskets that “[t]he one of them contains my picture” (2.7.11): he who chooses the casket with the picture inside wins both the lady’s *persona* and her *purse,* both *Portia* and her apportionment. One suitor—the fortune-hunting Venetian Bassanio—finds a puzzling object inside the casket he has chosen. He asks about his *objet trouvé:*

*What find I here?* (3.2.114)

Is this a rhetorical question?

I assume that Bassanio does not know quite what he has found. That is to say, he recognizes it as a “picture,” but he does not know exactly what a “picture” is or wherein lies the ability of its representativeness both to stand for and to purchase what he seeks. How can anyone know what a picture means to people from another culture? Do we know precisely what is, or how works, an icon in Byzantium or Greece, a Madonna-painting in Rome, a figurine in Albania or Dalmatia, a statuette in Germany, a fetish

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2 António to Bassanio: “My purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlock’d to your occasions” (1.1.138–39).
(so-called) in West Africa? Do we know how things like this work in Portia's Belmont? Do we even know on which side, if any, of the Adriatic, east or west, Belmont is?

Still, Bassanio straightaway answers his question, "What find I here?" He says it is "[f]air Portia's counterfeit!" (3.2.115).

Now the term counterfeit can mean two apparently contrary things. First, it can mean a representation of an actual person or thing: a portrait. That is its usual meaning in painters' and coin-makers' manuals. Second, counterfeit can mean a representation that pretends to be something other than what it is: a fake. That is its usual meaning in jewelers' and bankers' manuals. Both of these meanings involve quandaries about religious credo and monetary credit: When does a representation become so like its original as to become the original? When does a fake operate so much like an original that it becomes, to all intents and purposes, the original?

One way or the other, Bassanio wants to try out his counterfeit. So he presents it to Portia, saying:

... Fair lady, by your leave,
I come by note, to give and to receive. (3.2.139–40)

Bassanio wants to cash in the portrait of Portia, his banker's note, for Portia and her dowry-like portion. A previous suitor, the Prince of Aragon, was disappointed to find how dissimilar to Portia was the portrait he discovered in the casket that he chose: "How much unlike art thou to Portia!" said he (2.9.56). But Bassanio finds his counterfeit Portia more than similar, more than lifelike. Like some artful Pygmalion watching an ivory statue spring to life, Bassanio asks:

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1All but the last of these places were part of the Venetian empire at one time or another. (In Venice itself, moreover, there were large ethnic groups: by the second half of the fifteenth century, Greeks, for example, were the second largest ethnic community in Venice after the Jews.)

2The Dutch painterly term kopersteyn means both "to make a portrait" and "to make a likeness." See Samuel van Hooaren ten's treatise on painting, Ingrijting tot de hooge schools der schilderkunst (Rotterdam, 1678), quoted in Lyndia de Pauw de Veen, De begrippen "schilder," "schilderij" en "schilderen" in de vermelde ene (Brussels: Paleis der academien, 1969).


5This is Shakespeare's only use anywhere of the word portrait. "What's here? the portrait of a blinking idiot, / Presenting me a schedule! I will read it" (2.9.54–55).
Move these eyes?
Or whether, riding on the balls of mine,
Seem they in motion? (3.2.116–18)

It is, for Bassanio, as if the portrait were, mysteriously, Portia. The exchange of Portia's representation for Portia herself, which Bassanio wants, begins here as a commercial metamorphosis worthy of an Ovidian capitalist. All along Bassanio's plan has been to convert Portia into himself and her portion into his. (Portia puts it thus: "Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours! Is now converted" [3.2.166–67].) Bassanio would use his picture, in the sense of "counterfeit representation," as if it were a picture, in the Elizabethan sense of "coin or monetary token."

But how can this work? What Bassanio needs is a monetary pricing mechanism that would link shadowy aesthetic praise of Portia's counterfeit with the substantial economic prize that she is. He says:

Yet look how far
The substance of my praise doth wrong this shadow
In underprizing it, so far this shadow
Doth limp behind the substance. (3.2.126–29)

So how will Bassanio get the prize? As in Thomas Nast's A Shadow Is Not a Substance (fig. 1), the shadowy price must come to be understood as being—as well as standing for—a substantial prize.8

Primed by Portia to deprecate "outward shows" (3.2.73), Bassanio speaks of shadows as counterfeit.9 Not surprisingly so. By some accounts, copying shadows is the origin of representational painting (fig. 2).10 Moreover, shadows—like portraits—are often taken as evidence of the sometime existence somewhere of the real thing.11 (Hence shadows in representational paintings might persuade us that things represented are really there.) But can we really credit, or put our trust in, shadows or our

8For the term portion as "marriage dowry," see MM 3.1.221–22 and Sbr. 2.1.359.

9In his Critique of Political Economy, Marx writes that "[g]old, unlike Peter Schlemihl [who sold his shadow for money], has not sold its shadow, but merely uses its shadow as a means of purchase." Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, trans. and ed. Salomon W. Ryazanskaya (New York: Progress, 1970), 115.

10"Some there be that shadows kiss, / Such have but a shadow's bliss" (2.9.66–67).

11An interpretation of this work benefits from recalling what Pliny says: "Modelling portraits (fossere simulatio) from clay was first invented by Butades, a portrait of Sicily, at Corinth. He did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief, which he hardened by exposure to fire with the rest of his pottery." Pliny, Natural History, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967–1975), vol. 9, trans. Harris Rackham, bk. 35, sec. 43 (no. 151).

as they were called. Each of these arts in its own way affects our understanding of the exchange of portrait for thing portrayed that Bassanio wants.

Trade, the first of these bankers' arts, seems simple enough: by trade a "merchant prince" like the handler Antonio exchanges one thing for another and makes a more or less reasonable profit.

The second way of getting wealth involves methods of natural animal or plant generation. For example, by overseeing the sexual generation of nonhuman creatures, a shepherd ensures that "Jacob's ewes" (1.3.86) and a potent ram produce offspring. In The Merchant of Venice (1.3.77ff.), Shylock, the Jew, or "Jew,"16 tells the biblical story of Jacob and the natural increase of flocks (Gen. 30:25–43; 31:1–13).17 (Perhaps Bassanio's "more" suggests another sort of natural production: Portia is his "fulsome"—or "full sow" [3.2.137]—cash cow, and note means "the milk given by a cow over a certain period of time".)18

Monetary generation, or usury, is a third way of getting wealth. Famously, it is an art of wealth-getting that many Christians disliked. Why did they dislike it? The answer involves a Deuteronomic law: you are not permitted to lend money at interest to those who are brothers, as Shylock is a brother to Tubal (the ultimate source of funds in this play), but you are allowed to lend money at interest to those who are not brothers.

In England, this Deuteronomic rule is best understood as much in terms of the supposed tension between particularist Judaism and universalist Christianity as in terms of the feud between Protestantism and Catholicism. For when combined with a literalist interpretation of Jesus' universalist sentence that "[a]ll men are brothers," the Deuteronomic rule came to mean, for Jesus' Roman Catholic followers, that no Christian could lend money at interest to anyone human at all. (Contrariwise, in its eventual Calvinist interpretation, this rule came to mean that all men could lend money at interest to anyone.)19

In the present context, it may be useful to recall an ancient Greek notion of monetary interest. Aristotelic, and following him Thomas Aquinas, held that the monetary generation of use (stibos) from principals was unnatural while the sexual generation of

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16That is how the term "Jew" would have been spelled and pronounced. See Kökenier, Shakespeare's Pronunciation.

17The propagation of spurned lambs by black sheep and white sheep is comparable with one hinted-at possible outcome of the pregnancy of the Moorish woman by Itholomary. Cf., jokes about which at the Christian couples (Portia and Gratiano, Portia and Bassanio) will be fast to produce a child.


a lamb (tokos) from a ewe was natural. They believed that usurers devilishly confuse the natural realm with the unnatural, the sexual with the metallic, the inanimate realm with the animate. In John Lyly's mildly Protestant play *Midas*, one joke is thus that "angels"—that is to say, the English coins that depict angels and not the heavenly angels that the coins depict—propagate by means of monetary generation in the same way that chicken eggs do by means of biological generation.20 Just so, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio asks Shylock, "Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?" (1.3.95).21 Shylock then tells the Jacob story precisely in order to defend, in Greco-Christian terms, the relationship between sexual generation by ewes (which Antonio his interlocutor apparently likes) and the monetary generation of use (which Antonio says he dislikes).

It is not shepherding that Antonio means to disparage: shepherding was the "honest vocation" of "Old England," as J. F.'s *The Golden Flower* (*Auream Vellum*, 1679) reminds us. Antonio means rather to disparage confusing gold with ewes. His concomitant accusation, that Jews typically make this confusion of gold with ewes, or purse with person, seems driven by a need to project onto others what we fear to be true about ourselves. Even in *The Merchant of Venice*, after all, they are Christians, not Jews, who actually confute purse with person. It is Portia whose mind is, as she herself says, "mercenary" (4.1.418). Of course, Jews do often give and take monetary interest—especially in the circumstances of Renaissance Europe, where they were often compelled to practice the moneylender's art because ducal rulers and merchant princes required it of them and disallowed other means of livelihood. But they are Christian, nor Jews, who more readily identify coins with animals, as suggested in this foot-coin from Nîmes (fig. 5). Likewise, it is Christians who sometimes identify moneybags,
whose coins generate money, with the human scrotum, or male bag—like these two pouches, one resticular and the other monitory, collected and displayed at the Vatican (fig. 6).

In any case, by the end of The Merchant of Venice, Antonio’s merchandize and Shylock’s usury become virtually interchangeable. Antonio actually borrows money from Shylock as if they were Catholic universalist brothers—i.e., Shylock lends it to him free of interest or use—and Antonio is eventually revealed as being like a castrated sheep, “a tainted wecher of the fock” (4.1.114). Unlike Tubal, Antonio has no halls. Shylock, once fleeced, likewise is bereft of “stones”: first by his daughter Jessica, who steals herself away from him and “gilds [her]self” (as she says) with ducats (2.6.49); second by Portia, who threatens to take away Shylock’s life and then his means of livelihood.

Eventually Antonio becomes the user of Shylock’s money. And in the end it no longer matters “Which is the merchant here? And which the Jews?” (4.1.174) because, taken together, all this odd couple (Shylock and Antonio) does is make way for the fruitful ewe that is Portia.

ALCHEMY AND IDOLATRY

What is the moral power or legitimating authority of the fairy-tale-like trial-by-caskets that Portia’s late father established in order to test the character, or mettle, of the suitors to Portia and her portion? If any, that power would seem to reside in the testing of each suitor’s ability to interpret one or more of three kinds of things: first, a metal; second, an inscription or engraving; and third, a combination of metal and inscription, taken together.

Concerning metals: the suitor must choose a casket on the basis of the metal it is made from—lead, silver, or gold. Concerning engravings: the suitor has to choose on the basis of the inscription in that metal—“Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath,” or “Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves,” or “Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire” (2.7.5–9). The combination of engraved things with engraving effectively describes many deceptively familiar objects in this play—caskets, coins, rings, and so on—and is the subject of both iconology and monetary theory.

Alchemy

What sort of person would likely choose the correct casket on the basis of material alone? An alchemist. Alchemy, another banker’s art, is forerunner both to natural

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On the scrotum as purse, see Marc Shell, Art and Money (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), hereafter cited as AM, 36–37. Compare various uses in Shakespeare’s works on the words titer, tithe, and testril.
Fig. 6. Statue of Mercury. Vatican Museum garden. Author’s photograph.
Fig. 7. Seminate aurum vestrum in terram albam foliarum (now your gold in white foliated earth). Michael Maier, Aralanta fugiens, Oppenheim, 1617. BL 90.i.19, Emblem VI, p. 33. By permission of The British Library.

sciences like chemistry and biology and to social sciences like monetary economics.23

In fact, the golden fleece that Bassanio seeks is the objective of much alchemical literature, including The Golden Fleece, Helvetius’s The Golden Calf, and several treatises by John of Antioch and Elias Ashmole.24 (Bassanio’s name, from the Greek ἄσπας, indicates the black “touchstone” used to test precious metals.)25 Many alchemical processes—“sublimation,” “conversion,” “conjunction”—involve both the generation of metals and the generation of natural animal or plant creatures (fig. 7). A few such processes are concerned with the same stories about the creation or winning of gold that inform The Merchant of Venice. Helvetius and Maier, for example, draw from the same myths of Hercules.26 The Roman-pagan Hercules wins golden apples (fig. 8) and he saves a virgin by defeating a terrible monster;27 in The Merchant of Venice, the Venetian Bassanio is called “Hercules” (or “Alcides” [3.2.55]).

In the first casket-choosing scene in The Merchant of Venice, the Prince of Morocco makes his choice of casket by trying to figure out the relationship between image and


25Cf. Latin basanitas (lapis).


27Portia identifies herself with the sacrificial victim whom Hercules rescues “when he did redeem / The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy / To the sea-monster” (3.2.55–57). Bassanio refers to Hercule’s beard hairs (3.2.85).
imaged thing in the case of a particular icon-coin. This is the English angel, a coin on which is shown the best-known Anglo-Christian counterpart to Hercules: the archangel Michael killing a devilish dragon (fig. 9). England and Venice favored yet another dragon killer, Saint George, and Venetian artists often depicted George killing the dragon in much the same way that Saint Michael does it (fig. 10).

Coins and Idols

The Prince of Morocco is trying to figure out which one of the caskets would mean marriage to Portia. Using language that bears directly on aesthetic, monetary, and religious issues, Morocco imagines an English angel (the coin) and then proceeds to analyze it in terms of the relationship between its two roles as a picture: first, as the portrait that depicts an angel; second, as the coin or picture that is an angel:

...They have in England
A coin that bears the figure of an angel
Stamp'd in gold, but that's insculpt'd upon;
But here an angel in a golden bed
List all within. (2.7.55–59; emphasis added)

As we prepare to consider Morocco's analysis of Christendom's angels, it is useful to bear in mind a famous passage of numismatic interpretation in the Christian gospels.

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The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine has it that George, a Dalmatian, saved the life of a king's daughter (Cleodoline) who was about to be devoured by a dragon terrorizing the neighborhood. George then converted the local population. In Venice there are still many paintings showing him killing the beast. One from the workshop of Guariento (c. 1400) is now at the Museum Correr. One by Carpaccio (c. 1507) is now at the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, which was founded by the Dalmatians in 1451. In the courtyard of the Ducal Palace is an oddly conglomerate statue purportedly showing Theodorus killing the dragon. George is the patron saint of England.

For Morocco, choosing the wrong casket means being barred from generating legitimate kin.

Fig. 10. Icon. Saint George Killing the Devilish Beast. Cretan School, mid-sixteenth century. Museum of Icons, Scuola di San Nicolò dei Greci, Venice. Author's photograph.

There the Christian godman Jesus is presented by Jewish scribes and Pharisees with a metal ingot inscribed with the word, and engraved with the image of, Caesar (Matt. 22:17–21; cf. Luke 20:21–25, Mark 12:14–17). This is the Roman tax penny, or denarius. Jesus then distinguishes, by means of an extraordinary economy, between two aspects of the coin. On the one hand, there is the denarius's picture of a proclaimed pagan godman—the Roman Augustus Caesar. On the other hand, there is the denarius's material substance which, according to one Christian economy, belongs properly to God, whose son (according to Christians) is a godman.⁶⁰

Now the Muslim Morocco—who loses out in the trial-by-caskets—makes a dis-

⁶⁰See analysis of this episode in Shell, "Tax Advice," AM, 44–47.
tinction that stands at odds with Jesus’ viewpoint. Consider Morocco’s opposition between upon and within. On the one hand, Morocco suggests, there are angels that are “stamp’d in gold” or “insculpted upon.” He might mean a medal or coin where the real material of the picture (gold) and the ideal representation (a picture of an angel) are, to some extent, one and the same. The ideal angel that the coin depicts and the material coin that depicts the angel are one. By way of example: a person might become a golden metal sculpture through and through. That is precisely what happens to those people whom King Midas touches. Touched by Midas’s “finger,” they become “fictions,” golden simulacra of themselves, whether as solid gold statues or as automatons.

On the other hand, there are angels that “[lie] within” gold. Morocco might mean an animate angel inside of a hollow gold statue, say, or locked in a casket. For example, a person might be superficially gilded over. That is what happens, in Ian Fleming’s spy thriller Goldfinger (1959), to Jill Masterson: Masterson is completely gilded over by Oddjob. In The Merchant of Venice, they are fools who are “[s]ilver’d o’er” (2.9.69), and Jessica gilds herself with ducats. Venetian women, incidentally, still sometimes cover themselves with gold paint at carnival time. And in some orthodox traditions along the Adriatic, proximate to the old Venetian empire, icons are still encauscated in silver or gold.

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34 Maybe that is what eventually happens to the shadowed lover of Bourcades’s daughter in Pliny’s story. See n. 11, above.

35 The Latin term *fingere* provides the link between the English terms fiction and finge. Fingere means “[to sculpt] to make a likeness of, represent [in clay, metal, etc.]” as well as “[to compose] [poems and other literary works]” and “[to invent, coin] [words, names].” See Oxford Latin Dictionary, ed. P. G. W. Glare (1982), s. v. *fingere, fingera, fissa, fiscum,.* 3 and 6.

36 How to determine whether a sculpture is golden throughout or merely superficially was what Archimedes was looking for when he shouted out his famous *Eureka!* See Vitruvius, De Architectura, 9.9–12.

37 As Stanley Cavell writes: “‘The statue is not in the stone (except on a certain myth of the sculptor); the statue is not on the stone (except in the case of intaglio). The statue is the stone’ (Cavell, The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979], 398). From the outside, at least, one cannot absolutely distinguish an artfully robotic machine from an artificially created life (see Hilary Putnam, ‘Robots: Machines or Artificially Created Life?’ The Journal of Philosophy 61.21 (12 November 1964): 668–91.

38 As Ian Fleming writes: “If their bodies were completely covered with gold paint, the pores of the skin wouldn’t be able to breathe. Then they’d die. . . . Bond saw the dreadful Oddjob with his nose of gold paint, Goldfinger’s eyes glinting over the glistening statue, the fierce possession. . . . It had [also] happened to some cabaret girl who had to pose as a silver statue.” Ian Fleming, Goldfinger (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 199. In the 1964 film Goldfinger, directed by Guy Hamilton, Shirley Eaton plays Jill Masterson, whom Auric Goldfinger has Oddjob murder by means of skin suffocation.

39 Jessica: “I will . . . gild myself! With some more ducats, and be with you straight.” Gratiano: “Now by my hook, a gentleman, and no Jew!” (2.6.49–51), Jessica is the literal living embodiment of a golden coin: it is no wonder that Bassanio’s foil (Lorenzo) seeks to marry her. “These be the Christian husbands!” (4.1.294) is what the unhappy Jewish father says of such as Gratiano. Jessica, who has behaved like a bird escaping from Shylock (3.1.24–30), probably recalls the Venetian medal- and coin-like *sulle*. See Aldo Jervis, Cronistoria delle *sulle* di Venezia (Venice: Instituto Veneto di arti grafiche, 1912).

on Mount Sinai, they backslide to Egyptian calf-worship. That is to say, they take a living calf and turn its figure into a golden god. These literalist "capitalists" fashion the real material of Egyptian gold into the ideal figure or form of a calf. Upon his descent from Mount Sinai, Moses eliminates the unbelievers, grinds up the golden calf, and makes his followers consume water into which the ground gold has been mixed.12

The "Episode of the Golden Calf" is a locus classicus for discussing idolatry. Saint Augustine, for example, says that the gold water that the Jews drank was the body of the devil, and in this fashion he distinguishes the onetime slaves' gold water from the corpus Christi that Christians consume in the rite of the Eucharist.13 No wonder that Christians, who claim to want to expel moneychangers from the temple, called Jews money devils. The specific association of the golden calf with coined money and idolatry is a subject of illustrations from Titoreto to Eichenberg (figs. 11, 12).14 In thus setting up Christ as a polar opposite to the golden calf, Augustine may be projecting onto the Jews an anxiety that Christ himself is in some ways an edible, humanoid idol with numismatic qualities. After all, the blessed theophagy, or god-eating, that is the Eucharist stands as much in identity with as in inversion of the monstrous Jews' eating of gold. "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" (1.3.98).

12 "And they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 32:4). For the drink, see Exod. 32:20.


14Usury is compared to the worship of the golden calf in Philip Massinger and Nathan Field, The Fatal Dowry, ed. Carol Bishop (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, 1976), 2.1.86.
It is worth noting in this context two factors about the Christian god that help to explain the vehemence with which Jews are often accused of cannibalism by believing Christian detractors (fig. 13): the god is edible and he is represented in the flesh as a human being. In The Merchant of Venice, quite brilliantly, the Christian group is seen to project onto Shylock the cannibalism on the physical or literal level that characterizes the Christian group’s creed on the spiritual or figural level.\(^4\) (Shylock looms as partly human and partly nonhuman devilish monster: a werewolf or man-wolf [4.1.128–38].) So, in The Merchant of Venice, a defensive Shylock jokes that the flesh of man is worth less, at least to those groups of people who have the relevant dietary restrictions (principally Muslims and Jews), than the flesh of ewe:

A pound of man’s flesh taken from a man
Is not so estimable, profitable neither,
As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats. (1.3.165–67)

\(^4\)In this sense, Shylock “becomes” what his Christian enemies project onto him. “Thou call’st me dog,... But since I am a dog, beware my fangs” (3.3.6–7). Earlier Shylock had told Salanio of the flesh of the self-sacrificing Antonio: “[If] human flesh] will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge” (3.1.53–54). Cf. “Your worship was the last man in our mouths” (1.3.60).
There is a puzzle here. All flesh “taken from a man” is “man’s flesh”—as the lewe says. But in one case, at least, and perhaps more, a man’s flesh may be also nonhuman—the case of a godman, say, or a werewolf.66

Augustine may also be projecting onto the Jews a common anxiety that Christ—the Master’s Son—is himself golden, so we might add here a clarifying word about how the godman is gold or how he is feared or hoped to be. On the one hand, the Jews had no angel-like god “[s]trump’d in gold” (2.7.57; cf. “grav’d in gold,” 2.7.36). They had only a gilded chest in which to store, “all within,” the Torah (2.7.59; Exod. 25:10–11). (There were strict prohibitions against the reproduction of the Pentateuch by means of chrysography, or “writing with golden ink.”)67 On the other hand, they are Christians who called their god “gold,” that is to say, called christor “chryssos.” In several alchemical treatises written in Christendom about spiritual redemption and sublimation,68 for example, the term intermediating life and death, spirit and body, is “gold.” In fact, John Donne reminds us in his poem “Resurrection Imperfect” that, after death and before resurrection, Christ was all gold: “For these three days [Christ] become a mincrall; / Hee was all gold when he lay downe, but rose / All tincture.”69 “Tincture” is the term indicating the highest step up the alchemical mount—or Bel-mont (fig. 14): It is “an immaterial substance whose character or quality may be infused [like God] into all material things” (OED). As Midas’s neighbor, the Ephesian philosopher Heraclitus, used to say, there is “an exchange of all things for gold and gold for all things.”50

*Golden Girls*

Midas, to whom Bassanio refers when he chooses the lead casket, has the power to convert anything into gold by picking it up (tollere) or touching it. (Thus Ovid writes: “Tollit humo saxum: saxum quoque palluit avo” [Midas picked up a stone from the ground. The stone showed a golden hue].)51 When Midas chryssopermus, or gold-

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66In the relics markets of Europe, a piece of the godman Jesus’ body, cut off with a knife, by butcher or mason, would have been the most valuable thing of all. That piece was not the heart, which many figure is the item that Shylock seeks. It was rather the foreskin. See Shell, AM, 30–37.

67On chrysography and its Jewish prohibition, see Shell, AM, esp. 52–55.


Protestant” and “Catholic” or even “iconoclast” and “iconodule.” Strangely familiar to us quasi-secular capitalist republicans (in the United States nowadays) is the play’s simultaneously aesthetic and religious presentation of the various “banker’s arts,”


In fact, the Republic of Venice itself was projected into world history—into becoming something like “the hinge of Europe”—by the debate about icons in the eighth century (William H. McNeill, Venice: The Hinge of Europe, 1081–1597 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974]). At that time the “iconoclast” Byzantine Emperor Leo III ordered the destruction of all icons throughout his dominions and the moderate (some would say “iconodule”) Pope Gregory III encouraged Venice and its neighboring villages to oppose the order. Orosio (or Ursus) of Venice was chosen to lead the Venetians. He was the first Venetian dux (pronounced doge in the Venetian dialect), and his election to the office inaugurated a republican duchy that lasted more than a thousand years (John J. Norwich, A History of Venice [New York: Vintage, 1989], 12–13).

Concerning the opposition in the 1590s between “Protestantism” and “Catholicism” in Venice: Pope Clement charged Venice in 1598 with Calvinism. (Iconoclasm was not the immediate issue.) The doge, Marino Grimani, responded: “What is a Calvinist? We are Christians, as good as the Pope himself, and Christians we shall die, whether others like it or not” (cited in Norwich, History of Venice, 509).

15Thomas Wilson, A Discourse upon Usury by Way of Dialogue and Orations (1572; London: G. Bell, 1925), uses the phrase “banker’s art.”
There is a puzzle here. All flesh “taken from a man” is “man’s flesh”—as the Jewe says. But in one case, at least, and perhaps more, a man’s flesh may be also nonhuman—the case of a godman, say, or a werewolf.46

Augustine may also be projecting onto the Jews a common anxiety that Christ—the Master’s Son—is himself golden, so we might add here a clarifying word about how the godman is gold or how he is feared or hoped to be. On the one hand, the Jews had no angel-like god “[s]tamp’d in gold” (2.7.57; cf. “grav’d in gold,” 2.7.36). They had only a gilded chest in which to store, “all within,” the Torah (2.7.59; Exod. 25: 10–11). (There were strict prohibitions against the reproduction of the Pentateuch by means of chrysography, or “writing with golden ink.”)47 On the other hand, they are Christians who called their god “gold,” that is to say, called christos “chryson.” In several alchemical treatises written in Christendom about spiritual redemption and sublimation,48 for example, the term intermediating life and death, spirit and body, is “gold.” In fact, John Donne reminds us in his poem “Resurrection Imperfect” that, after death and before resurrection, Christ was all gold: “For these three days [Christ] become a minerall; / Hee was all gold when he lay downe, but rose / All tincture.”49 “Tincture” is the term indicating the highest step up the alchemical mount—or Bel-mont (fig. 14): It is “an immaterial substance whose character or quality may be infused [like God] into all material things” (OED). As Midas’s neighbor, the Ephesian philosopher Heraclitus, used to say, there is “an exchange of all things for gold and gold for all things.”50

Golden Girls

Midas, to whom Bassanio refers when he chooses the lead casket, has the power to convert anything into gold by picking it up (tollere) or touching it. (Thus Ovid writes: “Tollit humo saxum: saxum quoque palluit auro” [Midas picked up a stone from the ground. The stone showed a golden hue].)51 When Midas chrysofermos, or gold-

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47On chrysography and its Jewish prohibition, see Shell, AM, esp. 52–55.


51Ovid, Metamorphoses 12.110; my translation. One popular translation of the 1930’s has it thus: “He touched a clod / And by his potent touch the clod became / A mass of shining gold.” Ovid’s Metamorphoses in English Blank Verse, trans. Brookes More (1922; Francesctown, N.H.: M. Jones, 1957), 516.
It is worth noting in this context two factors about the Christian god that help to explain the vehemence with which Jews are often accused of cannibalism by believing Christian detractors (fig. 13): the god is edible and he is represented in the flesh as a human being. In *The Merchant of Venice*, quite brilliantly, the Christian group is seen to project onto Shylock the cannibalism on the physical or literal level that characterizes the Christian group’s creed on the spiritual or figural level.\(^{25}\) (Shylock looms as partly human and partly nonhuman devilish monster: a werewolf or man-wolf \[4.1.128–38\].) So, in *The Merchant of Venice*, a defensive Shylock jokes that the flesh of man is worth less, at least to those groups of people who have the relevant dietary restrictions (principally Muslims and Jews), than the flesh of ewe:

*A pound of man’s flesh taken from a man
Is not so estimable, profitable neither,
As flesh of muttons, beefs, or goats.* (1.3.165–67)

\(^{25}\)In this sense, Shylock “becomes” what his Christian enemies project onto him. “Thou call’dst me dog . . . . / But since I am a dog, beware my fangs” (3.3.6–7). Earlier Shylock had told Salario of the flesh of the self-sacrificing Antonio: “[H]uman flesh will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge” (3.1.53–54). Cf. “Your worship was the last man in our mouths” (1.3.60).
Fig. 14. Conjunction. The steps ascending up the alchemical mount are calcination, sublimation, solution, putrefaction, distillation, coagulation, and then tincture. Steffan Michelspacher, Cabala: Spiegel der Kunst und Natur in Alchymia, Augsburg, 1616. BL 1032 c. 3 (1) pl. 3. By permission of The British Library.
engendering, is in touch with himself or touches himself, “his own flesh and blood”
turns to gold—or part of it does. Just which bodily part first turns to gold varies from
tale to tale. (Ovid begins with the arm: when Midas lifts his arm, or sublates it, the
arm turns to gold: “ad caelumque manus et splendida bracchi tollens.”)32 Other storytellers
begin with the beard hairs. Sometimes artists suggest that the first part of the body
to turn is the skeleton.33 A few insist that Midas’s spiritual parts—his anima, for ex-
ample—as well as his bodily parts turn to gold. (“Vix spes ipse suas animo capit aurea
fungens / Omnia” [Midas’s soul itself could scarcely grasp its own hopes, dreaming of all
things turned to gold].)34 In John Lyly’s play, Midas says: “I, that did possess mines of
gold, could not be contented till my mind were also a mine.”35

But the notion of one’s own “flesh and blood,” which plays so large a role in The
Merchant of Venice, includes in its purview more than one’s individual body and soul. It
includes also the bodies and souls of those people who are one’s own, whether by com-
mercial contract (as his servant Launcelot is presumably Shylock’s) or by kinship (as
his daughter Jessica is supposedly his “flesh and blood,” 3.1.37). What this larger pur-
view means for Midas borders on universal astonishment. In Lyly’s play, the chryso-
poetic king thus gives his servant “a good box on the ear, that [he] might have a golden
cheek.”36 And in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s version of the story, the daughter becomes a
golden statue of herself at the instant her father kisses her. (Writes Hawthorne about
the statue: “All the features and tokens of [the daughter] were there; even the beloved
little dimple remained in her golden chin. But, the more perfect was the resemblance,
the greater was the father’s agony at beholding this golden image, which was all that
was left him of his daughter”; King Midas, 34.) The midway moment in the daughter’s
transformation from flesh-and-blood being to golden statue mourning for herself is
famously illustrated by Eichenberg (fig. 15).37

What happens literally to Midas’s daughter happens figuratively to Shakespeare’s
Jessica and Portia. The Merchant of Venice suggests the literal commodification, or a-
stonishment in gold, of daughters by fathers: the lives of Portia and Jessica are commer-

32Ovid, Metamorphoses 11.131.

33See, for example, Michel Journiac’s sculpture Contrat pour un corps, 1972. This is a human skeleton

34Ovid, Metamorphoses, 11:118–19; adapted from Frank J. Miller’s translation, Loeb Classical Library

35Lyly, Midas 3.1.7–9.

36This person, Peculius, jokes about the difference between “beaten with gold and being beaten gold.”

37On Eichenberg, the German-American illustrator of Hawthorne’s tale, see Vier Meister des Holzschnitts:
The transformation of Midas’s daughter from life (which can be beaten with gold) to death (which is beaten
gold) is a lifelike trompe l’oeil aesthetic production. A “mourning picture” is made for the explicit purpose
of mourning its model. For this use of the term, see Terence Hanbury White, The Elephant and the Kangaroos
(London: Jonathan Cape, 1948), 170.
cially bound up with fathers who conflate inanimate metal with animate mettle. The will of Portia's dead father threatens her with losing her portion if she will not play along with the supposedly mettle-testing trial-by-caskets.58

Jessica's father Shylock thinks of his daughter as his "flesh and blood" (3.1.37), just as if Shylock—the "pennyfather" (or usurer) of the piece59—were a shepherd and Jessica were his monetary as well as biological offspring. So Shylock is said to confuse person and purse, or natural offspring with supposedly unnatural offspring, in the way that Christians claim that Jews usually do. "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!" (2.8.15) is what Shylock is reported by Christians to cry out after learning that Jessica has stolen herself and his ducats from a house that Shylock has already described as if it were his own body (2.5.29–36). For Hawthorne's Midas, in fact, the "daughter" literally becomes the "ducats": "It had been a favorite phrase of Midas, whenever he felt particularly fond of the child, to say that she was worth her weight in gold. And now the phrase had become literally true" (King Midas, 36).60 In view of the legendary Midas's conflation of purse with person, it is not surprising to learn that the wife of

58"[S]o is the will of a living daughter curb'd by the will of a dead father" (1.2.24–25). Yet Portia cheats, and so may seem to "fail" utterly her father's test.


the historical Midas—Demodice—was among the persons said to have been the first to make coins and that her native town, Cyme, practiced sacred prostitution.61

Mediating body and spirit is the human heart. The heart is the organ that Shylock comes to seek from the Christlike Antonio, presumably in order that Antonio’s heart make up for the loss of the flesh and blood that are Shylock’s daughter. So the heart can serve as gold as well as turn into gold.62

Consider here a relevant story about the golden astonishment of a human heart. The story relies for its “surprise effect” on a Pauline understanding of what is a figural heart and what is a literal one. Once upon a time, Saint Antonio (a probable namesake for Antonio in The Merchant of Venice) was preaching in Italy at a miser’s funeral. In the story Saint Antonio points to the dead miser’s treasure-box and cites from Scripture: “Ubi enim thalamos vester est ibi et cor vestrum erit” [Where your wealth is, there will your heart be also] (Luke 12:34). Take it literally, and we should expect the miser’s heart to be translated over to his ducats. In paintings, postmortem surgeons find the dead miser’s heart not in his bloody body-chest but in his golden treasure-chest.63 In a relief representing the Miracle of the Miser’s Heart executed by the Venetian sculptor Tullio Lombardo, a Doubting Thomas explores the body-chest cavity through an incision (fig. 16).

This transposition of flesh and blood from body-chest to treasure-chest suggests how the theological and iconological “symbolism” underlying the dear exchange that Shylock wants—a flesh-and-blood heart (Antonio’s) instead of the darling of his heart (Jessica)—is close to the Christian doctrine of transmogrification.64

61 Julius Pollux, Onomasticon (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1967), 9.83. To Cyme’s numismatic signs, we will return below.

62 “[Midas’s] heart had been gradually losing its human substance, and transmuring itself into insensible metal” [Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Tale of King Midas and the Golden Touch, with color lithographs by Fritz Eichenberg (New York: Limited Editions Club, 1952), 43]. The “Stranger” in King Midas says to the grieving father: “Your own heart, I perceive, has not been entirely changed from flesh to gold. Were it not so, your case would indeed be desperate” (39).

63 See Francesco Vecellio’s Il Santo fa ristore il cuore dell’avaro in un forziere (sixteenth century) at the Scuola del Santo (in Claudio Bellinati et al., La Basilica del Santo storia e arte [Padua: Messaggero, 1994], 287) and the fourteenth-century Tuscan Saint Francis and the Miracle of the Miser’s Heart at the Pinoteca, Vatican (in Camillo Semenzato, Sant’ Antonio in settecentocinquant’anni di storia dell’arte [Padua: Messaggero, 1985], pl. 8).

64 This transposition is close to the one suggested by the Roman Law of the Twelve Tables, a distinctly non-Jewish bankruptcy law that allows creditors to cut up their debtor’s body into “parts”—including hearts and testicles—proportionate to each one’s debt. (“Where there were several creditors . . . the debtor might, as the creditors’ election, be divided and his body partitioned between them.” Leges XII tabellarum, c. 3; cited in Carl G. Bruns, Fontes iuris roman antiquitatis [Leipzig: Mohr, 1893], 21; cf. Aulus Gellius, The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius, trans. John C. Rolfe [London: W. Heinemann, 1927–1928], 20.1.45–54; Leopold Wenger, Institutes of the Roman Law of Civil Procedure, trans. Otis H. Fisk [New York: Veritas Press, 1940], 223–30; Max Weber, Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftstheorie [Tübingen: Mohr, 1922], 413–56; and William Blackstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England, 4 vols. [1765–1769; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960], 2:472–73.) For the view that more in Roman law refers not to the cutting of the debtor’s body but to “the
Resurrection, or re-membering the parts, is the narratological key to romantic comedy, so it is worth recalling that after Midas transforms his living daughter’s flesh and blood into inanimate golden art, he soon thereafter gets to transubstantiate that golden art back into animate flesh and blood. The doubleness of the exchange likewise suffuses Shakespeare’s work. In *The Winter’s Tale*, for example, Paulina (a female version of “Paul”) transforms the flesh-and-blood Hermione into statuary and then transforms the statue back into flesh and blood. There is always in such stories a question as to whether the transformation is trompe l’oeil or real. Was that really a statue of Hermione that Paulina transforms into flesh and blood? Or was Hermione’s so-called statue actually flesh and blood all along? In *The Winter’s Tale*, the possessive King Leontes remarks, about the eye socket in the “statue,” that it seems almost to evince vital animation: “The fixture of her eye has motion in’t, / As we are mock’d with art” (*WT* 5.3.67–8). This is the same “motion” that Bassanio thinks he sees in Portia’s “counterfeit” (3.2.118).


Shylock is eventually barred from taking the heart only by means of a clever twist on the Jewish rule of *kaufbrat* that requires removing blood from flesh. See Marc Shell, “The Wether and the Ewe,” *Money, Language, and Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 47–83. For other references to flesh and blood in the play: 2.2.91–92 (Gobbo: “I’ll be sworn, if thou be Launcelot, thou art mine own flesh and blood”); 3.1.34–40 (Shylock: “My own flesh and blood to rebel!”); 5.2.68 (Shylock: “I say, my daughter is my flesh and blood”); 5.1.36 (Salerio: “There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory, more between your bloods than there is between red wine and Rhenish”). Cf. various relevant passages in 3.2, 4.1, 5.1.
(Indeed, representational paintings in Christendom often “assume a specifically Christian meaning by presenting a container of wine and a loaf of bread—the Eucharistic elements.” Among such paintings are works by the trompe l’oeil artist Otis Kaye [fig. 17]. In many “niche paintings” two-dimensional objects issue forth as real. Among such works are Jan Brueghel the Elder and Rubens’s *Madonna in Floral Wreath* [fig. 18] and Jan Davidsz de Heem’s *Eucharist in Fruit Wreath* [fig. 19].)

This “artistic exchange” between artwork and living thing is often theological anathema to Muslim and Jew, but it pervades Christian representational art generally as well as Christianity’s essential creeds of incarnation and resurrection. Consider Caravaggio’s *Madonna of Loreto* (fig. 20). Its Virgin is a Mary of gold to match Midas’s daughter. The life-size statue of the Virgin Mary that Caravaggio here represents was

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64 See Kathryn G. Humphreys, *Counterfeiting Authenticity: Fictitious Portraits in the Age of Photography* (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1988). One might think here of romantic works by James, Wharton, and Wilde as well as Hawthorne. One may draw the life into artwork or somehow restore life to it; conversely, a figure may come alive off an apparently two-dimensional canvas or out of an apparently three-dimensional statue. Restorers and museum keepers sometimes say the same thing about making artworks come alive. Fedorov, the nineteenth-century Russian philosopher of museum culture, posits an ideal museum “centered around the idea of returning life to the dead,” a new temple for which mere portraits are, as it were, merely “fakes.”
Fig. 19. Jan Davidsz de Heem. Eucharist in Fruit Wreath. Oil on canvas, 138 x 125.5 cm. (GG 571) Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

believed mysteriously to come alive on specific occasions, as she does at the moment depicted by this painting. Midas's daughter in Hawthorne's story is named, aptly, "Marygold."

A Preliminary Conclusion

To recast our findings: Bassanio, visitor to Belmont and something of an anthropological oddity there, thinks of fair Portia's counterfeit as "transsubstantiatable" both for Portia and for her fair portion. Portia's counterfeit thus recalls Christian traditions of how some tokens—specifically mèreaux and Eucharist wafers—represent or are exchangeable.

A mèreaux is a token, generally metal, traded for the privilege of receiving the Eucharist or given as a sign of having received it. Many mèreaux thus depict what they have been or will be traded for: wine and bread (figs. 21 and 22). (An apt comparison is "Maundy money." Maundy sometimes means "Last Supper," and according to the new "commandment," Maundy money is given on the anniversary of the Last Supper.)

A Eucharist wafer, we know, is the edible item that mysteriously becomes the flesh and blood of Christ in an essential rite of Christendom. (SCIO CUI CREDIDI reads the inscription on many mèreaux, fig. 23.)

What have mèreaux and Eucharist wafers to do with ewes and rams or, for that matter, with gold and silver? "Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?" is how Antonio puts the question (1.3.95). Mèreaux and Eucharist wafers often depict the godlamb, the agnus dei, into which they will be transformed (fig. 24). And in The Merchant of Venice, the Golden fleece that the Christians seek is both contrasted and

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6 For a description of the foot-washing ceremony done on the day of the Last Supper as practiced by Queen Mary in the sixteenth century, see C. B. Josset, Money in Great Britain and Ireland (Rutland, Vt.: C. E. Turtle, 1971), 94. See John 13:34 on the new mandatum. With mèreaux it is worth comparing the Venetian tesseræ displayed in the coin room of the Museo Correr, Venice.
**Fig. 22.** Communion tokens. From Bulletin of American Numismatic and Archaeological Studies 22:1 (1887). Harvard College Library.

**Fig. 23.** SCI0 CUI CREDIDI. Communion token. 1613. Bulletin of American Numismatic and Archaeological Studies 22:1 (1887). Harvard College Library.

**Fig. 24.** Eucharist wafer depicting lamb of God (agnus dei). Diameter 1 1/2 in. Author's photograph.
identified with the golden-fleeced lamb that is the mysteriously nonnatural offspring (robot) of God.68

Many Christians see, but fear to recognize, the structural similarity of coins to mèreaux and Eucharist wafers. How could they not see it? Mèreaux and Eucharist wafers are manufactured in much the same way as coins. Moreover, the bread-body and the wine-blood both represent and are the flesh and blood of the mysteriously cannibalized Christ. “Take, eat. This is my body,” read some golden mèreaux, quoting the Gospel according to Matthew (26:26) or Luke (22:19). “I am an angel,” reads the numismatic inscription on an English angel. Many graphic artists, working in the same interstice between letter and image that Christian monetary signs here suggest, have seen that a “transsubstantiative” act of cannibalism makes for money: Nast includes the theme in his Milk-Tickets for Money in Place of Milk (fig. 25): “This is money by the act of cannibals” (fig. 26).

Still, these same Christians are often bothered by the numismatic aspects of Christianity’s theopagical tokens.69 How could they not be? Many of us have been taught that God and Mammon are entirely different: “You cannot serve both God and Mammon” (Luke 16:13) is one of Christianity’s outstanding thematic devices. And the Christians’ money devil—Shylock is perhaps his principal incarnation—has been a central topos in writing and visual arts in Christendom for over twelve hundred years (figs. 27 and 28). Moreover, few people have bothered to delve into the structural identity (or the polar opposition) between Christian mercy (for which Portia—qua-Balthazar in the courtroom scene seems to argue) and merchant-like mercenariness (a characteristic of Portia when, pretending to be Balthazar, she takes the ring back from Bassanio). Most suppress even the simple philological fact that the term “mercy,” in its pagan Latin form merces, means “payment.” So these people often put forward too-much-protesting assertions about how flour and gold (the stuff of Eucharist wafers and the stuff of coins) differ. For example, some claim that flour is edible and gold is inedible. In The Merchant of Venice, Bassanio thus calls gold a “[h]ard food for Midas” (3.2.102). “Hard food for Midas” is a phrase that Marx much admired.70 Defoe’s Rob-

68 Motley associates the agnum dei with the Golden Fleece: “What could be more practical and more devout than the conception [of the Golden Fleece]? Did not the Lamb of God, suspended at each knight’s heart, symbolize at once the woven fabrics to which so much Flemish wealth and Burgundian power was owing, and the gentle humility of Christ which was ever meant to characterize the order?” (John L. Motley, The Rise of the Dutch Republic: A History, 3 vols. [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902–1903], 1:48; cf. Encyclopædia Britannica, 11th ed. [1911], 15:862A.) Anthropologically speaking, Bernhard Laun’s book Heiliges Geld: eine historische Untersuchung über den sakralen Ursprung des Geldes (Tübingen: Mohr, 1924) is of special interest in this context.

69 Frank Gaynor, Dictionary of Mysticism (New York: Philosophical Society, 1953), 185, defines theophagy as follows: “Literally, eating the god. The practice, found in a great many primitive religions and in the esoteric mysteries (‘mystery religions’), of eating the flesh of a sacrifice or sacred animal in whose flesh the god is believed to dwell, in order to absorb supernatural powers.”

inson Crusoe likewise never tires of telling us how useless gold is. Who has not been told that Midas could not eat gold (fig. 29)?

Yet there are at least two problems with accepting the view that "real" divine *transubstantiation* differs from "unreal" mundane *exchange* insofar as flour is edible and gold is not. First, gold is edible: gold shavings are often taken into the system as a food or medication in order to maintain life. This was one use of gold in Elizabethan England,
where *aurum potabile* was a resurrecting restorative.\(^{71}\) (Just so gold is imbibed in Germany and elsewhere to this day.)\(^{72}\) Second, the assertion that gold is not a "real" food

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\(^{71}\) See Jonson, *Volpone*, 1:4:73.

\(^{72}\) Concerning gold as food: a traditional German drink, called *Goldwasser* (made of alcohol with shavings of gold in it) is an actual *aurum potabile* cf. the *feuilles d'or* sometimes served with French desserts. In Lyly's play *Midas*, Midas drinks liquid gold. Concerning gold as medication: Lyly's *Midas* (2.2.38–39) includes Petulus's advice that "[g]eps pouched are for a weak stomach, and gold boil'd, for a consuming body." Concerning gold as death-dealing: a favorite Roman method of execution was pouring molten gold down the throat. In *Antony and Cleopatra* (3.1.1–4), Ventidius alludes to how Orodes, King of Parthia, poured melted
while flour is sidesteps the essentially Christian conflation of material with spiritual alimentation.

Finally: is not Christ called golden?—as we have already considered. Bassanio, we know, calls gold “gauzy” (3.2.101), or crass; but willy-nilly, Bassanio also means—has it in his heart—that gold is godly, or divine. Shylock’s would-be exchange of gold for Antonio’s flesh is derided as cannibalistic; but, in this tradition, is gold qua money not also at once both Eucharistic and numismatic?

The preceding question suggests the main theoretical point I would like to make, especially as that question is generalized to encompass the long history of anti-Semitism in a Judeo-Christianity where Christians worry about the sameness of God and Mammon or about the interdependent, mutually reinforcing polar opposition between God and Mammon. On this theoretical plane, I here go no farther. It is far enough to help figure out generally “how to think money.”

**Variations on a Theme**

On a more practical plane, we are now a little closer to knowing how to think about some kinds of representational and monetary objects in the “post-Reformation” period.

gold into the mouth of the dead body of his enemy Marcus Crassus, called Dives [rich]. See Frank E. Adcock, *Marcus Crassus, Millionaire* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1966). In his *King Midas*, Hawthorne seems to recall debates about Christian transubstantiation like that informing the Lateran Council of 1215 A.D.: Hawthorne’s Midas “lifted a spoonful of coffee to his lips, and, sipping it, was astonished to perceive that, the instant his lips touched the liquid, it became molten gold, and, the next moment, hardened into a lump” (28).
And this may have the dramaturgical payoff for would-be directors of *The Merchant of Venice* of knowing how to think about the presentation on stage of various objects at the heart of the play. We can, then, begin again by way of Bassanio’s question, “What find I here?” This time, in heuristic good humor, we can try to answer it.

**Painting**

_Little Marygold’s hair had now a golden tinge, which (Midas) had never observed in it before she had been transmuted by the effect of his kiss. This change of hue was really an improvement, and made Marygold’s hair richer than in her babyhood._

—Hawthorne, _King Midas_

We may hypothesize that Portia’s portrait—the counterfeit that Bassanio finds—is a painted picture of Portia. If so, then according to the alchemical economy of symbols that I have been proposing, part of that painting ought to be made of the material, gold, that both represents and partly is Portia’s appportionment. (Concerning the metonymy here: an alchemist makes a lot of gold from just a little. Suidas reminds us that golden fleece denotes a scroll written on sheepskin with alchemical recipes for converting a little gold, even a “touch” of gilt, into cornucopian quantities.)

The golden part of Portia’s portrait would be the picture’s gold-paint or gilt representations of the fleece that is Portia’s locks: her hair.

Various meanings of golden fleece are recognizable here. The Order of the Golden Fleece and its emblem—a captured ewe or ram (fig. 30), often depicted on medals and in paintings (fig. 31)—were linked with the Christian topos of the agnus dei. The fleece was also associated with the classical myth of the Argonauts (sometimes depicted on the panels of Italian bridal chests), with the biblical story of “Gideon and the Wool” (Judg. 6:36–40), and with the wool trade in Renaissance England and Italy. Most relevant here is its frequent alliance with “the fleece of golden hair of Marie de Rambrugge,” mistress to Philip the Good at the time that he dedicated the Order

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73Suidas, in his tenth-century gloss on the term _chemaia_, says that the Golden Fleece was “an alchemical treatise written on sheep-skin which gave instructions for gold making” (Suidas, *Lexicon*, ed. Ada Adler, 4 vols. [Stuttgart: Tubner, 1928–1938], 4:804). In Jenson’s _Alchemist_ (2.1.89–91), Sir Epicure Mammon uses the phrase “Golden Fleece” to refer to the alchemical treatise on gold making.

74As reported in Apollonius of Rhodes, _Argonautica_; Ovid, _Metamorphoses_ 7.1ff.; and in Philostratus, _Imagines._

Fig. 30. Insignium of The Order of Knighthood of the Golden Fleece. Drawn by William Gibb. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911. 15:860B.
of the Golden Fleece. From this point of view, Portia’s “goldilocks” are her golden fleece. (Those fleecy locks are also the marine fleets that she eventually finds for Antonio.)

Renaissance gilders’ handbooks for painting are pervasively concerned with when precisely to use gilt. In John Bettes’s An Unknown Man in a Black Cap (fig. 32), the gold coloring in the beard hairs is a lead-tin mixture (fig. 33)—“All that glisters is not gold” (2.7.65). However, the letters of Bettes’s chrysographic signature are gold-leaf (fig. 34). Likewise a Self-Portrait by Nicholas Hilliard has a chrysographic inscription that calls Hilliard Aurifaber, a term that literally means “gold-maker” or “goldsmith,” like the Greek chrysopoe (fig. 35). In a portrait of Elizabeth I attributed to Hilliard (fig. 36), there is gold-colored hair made of gold (fig. 37).

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76 This was also the time of his third marriage.

77 “Before a friend of this description / Shall lose a hair through Bassanio’s fault” (3.2.301–2). In British literature “the faire one with the golden locks” is often called the “golden fleece”; for nineteenth-century examples, see James R. Planche, Songs, Duets, Choruses, &c. in the new grand classical extravaganza entitled “The Golden Fleece, or, Jason in Colchis, and Medea in Corinth,” in two parts by the author of “The Fair One With the Golden Locks” (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1845).

78 Edward Norgate, in his More Compendious Discourse Concerning Ye Art of Liming (see Hilliard, below in this note), 104, writes: “As for gold, you may lay your ground flat with English ochre tempered with liquid gold; yet there is a stone growing the ox’s gall which they call a gall-stone, which if ground and tempered with gold is of excellent lustre and beauty; in the shadowing of which in the deepest and darkest places must be mixed a little black. The heightening must be the finest and purest gold (I mean liquid). If in your gold work there be any carving or embossing, and that in the lighter parts, it must be sparkling and pleasant.” On gilders’ guilds, see Peter and Ann Macnaggart, Practical Gilding (Welwyn, Hers.: Mac & Me, 1984); on seventeenth-century views of gilding, see John Stalker and George Parker, A Treatise of Japanning and Varnishing, 1688 (London: Tiranti, 1960). See also Nicholas Hilliard, A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning, ed. Robert K. R. Thornton and Thomas G. S. Cain, including More Compendious Discourse Concerning Ye Art of Liming, by Edward Norgate (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1992), 43.

79 Hilliard was, says King James I, “our principal drawer for the small portraits and embosser of our medallions of gold” (quoted in Hall, Dictionary, 190).
Fig. 32. John Bettes. An Unknown Man in a Black Cap. 1545. Oil on panel, 47 x 41 in. Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, New York.

Fig. 33. "Beard." Detail from Bettes. An Unknown Man in a Black Cap. Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, New York.
Fig. 34. "oh in the signature Johan." Detail from Better, An Unknown Man in a Black Cap. Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, New York.

Fig. 35. Nicholas Hilliard. Self-Portrait. 1557. Vellum on card. Diameter 4.1 in. Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. V & A Picture Library.
Jewel

But let us assume that Bassanio finds a jewel (instead of a painting). By jewel I mean “a precious stone” or “a small ornament, used for adornment chiefly of the person, containing [within] a precious stone.” A person may be called a jewel⁸⁰ or confused

⁸⁰Shakespeare, Witt. 2.2.204.
with one: Guilty Jessica, for example, in gilt disguise at the carnival where she gilds her father, is worth the jewel that is "a Jewess' eye" (2.5.43). In *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* a daughter's "eyes [are] as jewel-like, / And [cas'd] as richly" (Per. 5.1.111). Or consider *Twelfth Night*, where Olivia says, "Here, wear this jewel for me, 'tis my picture" (TN 3.4.208). Olivia's phrase "for me" means both "for my sake" and "instead of me." It is as if Olivia were her own picture.

In fact, many items of jewelry bear "within" themselves the thing they depict. *Gemma Precisior Intus* [There is a gem more precious within] was the inscription on a jeweled collar of Queen Elizabeth's, for example. *Didior In Toto Non Alter Circulus Orbe* [No other circle in the whole world more rich] is the inscription on another jewel of the period. The locket-jewel that Queen Elizabeth gave to Francis Drake locks in a portrait done by Hilliard (fig. 38). (Its gold cover is set with a cameo of a white princess and a black prince, reminiscent almost of Portia and Morocco [fig. 39].) Does Portia in The Merchant of Venice have in mind such a locket when she says, about the worked metal object she presents to Bassanio, "I am lock'd in one of them" (3.2.40)?

**Ring**

But maybe what Bassanio finds in the casket (instead of a painting or jewel) is a ring, so that Portia's counterfeit is that ring's picture. An example of such a picture-ring would be Queen Elizabeth's locket made of mother-of-pearl and ruby (fig. 40). Venice is a city famous for a carnival where the doge marries the sea with a ring, and the common telos of most alchemical processes is the marriage ring (fig. 41). A ring would seem appropriate for transcending the monetary and bodily give-and-takes and metamorphoses that drive the action of Shakespeare's Venetian play.

It may be worth speculating here about how the ring got into the lead casket in the first place. Did Portia's father deposit it there? Is it the ring of Portia's possibly dead mother? If it is the mother's, then Portia's father probably would have been keeping it for his daughter's marriage day. In the same way, Shylock has kept the ring of

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82The same inscription appears on several jewels and signet rings. Diana Scarisbrick, *Tudor and Jacobean Jewellery* (London: Tate Publications, 1995), 54.


84The annual ceremony of the marine marriage takes place off Forte di Sant'Andrea near Venice (at the Lido). See *The Fisherman Presenting St. Mark's Ring to the Doge* by Paris Bordone, a painter from Treviso who settled in Venice. *The Fisherman* is at the Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice.
his deceased wife Leah. (Jessica stole away that ring and then gambled it away). In this view, Portia's counterfeit would be the picture of "Portia's mother"; the mother's absence in The Merchant of Venice, like that of the Roman Portia's mother in Julius Caesar, permeates its esprit.

After Bassanio finds the portrait-ring in the lead casket, he passes it along to Portia as an exchange note. Portia then begins to carry out the expressed will of her father—that she marry at once⁶⁵—but she soon comes to realize that Bassanio is "engag'd" (3.2.261) to someone else, Antonio, and that she will have to buy off that rival. So she tells Bassanio to depart⁶⁶ and gives him the ring to keep safe. The rest of the play takes

⁶⁵"If you choose that wherein I am contain'd, / Straight shall our nuptial rites be solemniz'd" (2.9.5–6).
"Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours / Is now converted" is her spousal formula (3.2.166–67). "But now I was the lord / Of this fair mansion, master of my servants, / Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now, / This house, these servants, and this same myself / Are yours—my lord!—I give them with this ring ..." (3.2.167–171). When she learns that Bassanio is already engaged to Antonio, "It the dearest friend to me" (3.2.292), Portia still intends to marry Bassanio right away: "First go with me to church" (3.2.303).

⁶⁶Cf. 3.2.322: Portia: "O love, dispatch all business and be gone!"
place between a broken-off wedding that was to have taken place (in act 3) and a much hoped-for wedding that supposedly will take place (just beyond the end of the play).

Bassanio soon betrays Portia—and he betrays himself to Portia—when he gives the ring to Balthazar as payment for getting Antonio off the hook. (This betrayal is, as it were, “The Portrayal of Bassanio.”) When the Christians are finally ingathered back in Belmont and Portia asks Bassanio about the missing ring (5.1.184–85), marriage or remarriage for Portia and Bassanio seems all but impossible. But “luckily” for the traitor Bassanio, Balthazar (to whom Bassanio intended to give the ring) and Portia (to whom he actually gave it) are one and the same.87 (The question as to whether an intention or engagement to marry is already a marriage—Renaissance marriage

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87 From Bassanio’s giving the ring to Balthazar one might presume that Antonio has won the struggle with Portia over which of them Bassanio loves most. However, the outcome of the struggle depends on whether Bassanio should be judged by what he intended to do (give the ring to Balthazar) or by what he did do (give the ring to Portia). The trick of the play is that Balthazar and Portia are one and the same. The same device obtains in Measure for Measure: what finally counts is not what Angelo intends to do (have sexual intercourse with the novice Isabella) but what he unknowingly does (have sexual intercourse with Marianna, with whom he was already engaged by some sort of marriage pre-contract).
Fig. 40. Locket-ring with enameled busts of Elizabeth and her mother Anne Boleyn. Shown open. Owned by Queen Elizabeth I. Private Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum. V & A Picture Library.
rulebooks often suggested it was— is here taken up in terms of the parallel difference or identity between the person to whom one intends to give a ring and the person to whom one does give a ring.\footnote{See Henry Swinburne, \textit{A Treatise on Spouses} (1686; New York: Garland, 1978), and comments on the ambiguities surrounding the “fast marriage” of Juliet and Lucio in \textit{Measure for Measure} in Shell, \textit{End of Kinship}, esp. 157–58.} All that is needed now in order to accomplish a comedic remarriage is for Antonio to stand again as surety for Bassanio. And so Antonio does. He says, “I once did lend my body for his wealth . . . I dare be bound again” (5.1.249–51). Portia gives the ring to Antonio and Antonio gives the ring back to Bassanio, telling Bassanio (as once did Portia) to “swear to keep this ring” (5.1.256). It is a double marriage, and the ring seems thus to recall others like the “gimmel” (or twin) belonging to Sir Thomas Gresham (fig. 42). Gresham was the real “merchant prince” who built England’s equivalent of the Venetian Rialto: the Royal Exchange in London.

The finger-ring’s graffiti in \textit{The Merchant of Venice} is “Love me, and leave me not”\footnote{A similar convention in Renaissance drama is the bed trick. It distinguishes the person with whom one intends to have sexual intercourse from the person with whom one does have sexual intercourse. See Shell, \textit{End of Kinship}, esp. 145–48.}
(5.1.150), and in a play where Antonio has Timon-like rolled his heart in ducats, this note, with its "not," is heartfelt "cutler's poetry / Upon a knife" (5.1.149–50).

**Medal**

The illustrator for one edition of *The Merchant of Venice* that was widely distributed in the United States in the late nineteenth century thought "Portia's counterfeit" was a medal (fig. 43). If he was right, Portia's portrait would be one of those medals that aristocrats wore as evidence of their social status in Renaissance Italy or seventeenth-century Holland and Belgium. A more or less contemporary example of such would be the medal depicted in the sixteenth-century Italian Jacopo da Trezzo's medal (fig. 44). A twentieth-century American illustration would be *Dutch Treat* (fig. 45); its distinctive "Lady Liberty" (fig. 46) was made by an artist, Oris Kaye, who was schooled in this edition of *The Merchant of Venice*.

In some gold medals of high relief, the person depicted seems to rise Loreto-like from the picture (fig. 47)—here Elizabeth I. Incidentally, the "form" of "carriion Death" (2.7.61, 63) that the Prince of Morocco finds in the gold casket would likewise be a medal, perhaps like Jan de Vos's *Allegory of Vanitas*.91

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90 The *Merchant of Venice* refers to the story figured in the painting *An Unknown Woman: The Judgment of Susanna*. The tablet hanging from the chain in this painting has the inscription, *The Rightful God Set on Its Foot* or *In the Name of God*. See M.4.1.221.

91 The engraved legend on this medal is "MEMOR – ESTO – QUONIAM MORS NON – TARDAT" [Be mindful that death does not delay]. It is in the Breitau Collection of the Institut für Numismatik, Vienna.
Fig. 44. Jacopo da Trezzo. Medal. Italy, sixteenth century. Depicts Mary Tudor. Gold, cast and chased. Diameter 69 mm., weight 183.5 g. The British Museum. (© The British Museum) Below the bust is the signature IAC TEREZ. The jewel is "a great diamond, with a large pearl pendant, one of the most beautiful pieces ever seen in the world" (M. A. S. Hume, Two English Queens, 1908).

Fig. 45. Ots Kays. Dutch Treat. Oil on canvas on wood panel, 17 1/2 x 13 3/4 in. Collection Selchonek.
Coin

Suppose the "counterfeit" that Bassanio finds in the casket is a coin (instead of a medal). It would resemble something like the obverse of Queen Elizabeth's gold halfpound with its regal portrait (fig. 48). Why a coin? For one thing, Portia has said that one of the caskets "contains my picture" (2.7.11) and picture can mean coin. For

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93Not all depictions of monarchs on coins are portraits. For example, in Venice, which wanted to limit the power and appeal of its doges, the Venetian zecchino (mint) almost always produced the sequin (ducat) with a figurehead that had no individual features. (The one exception is a coin made under the Doge Niccolò in 1471.)

another thing, "more denominations of coins were struck in Elizabeth's reign than in any other period," and concern about their authenticity or counterfeitness was widespread.  

In the context of the iconological relationship between money and art that pervades The Merchant of Venice, what is the difference between a medal and a coin? Some people say that a medal is aesthetic (an end in itself, like marriage, interpreted as a fully reciprocal "estate") and that a coin is economic (a means of exchange). Yet this distinction between medal and coins, for all its apparently Kantian characteristics, smacks of the same quasi-religious distinction between Mammon and God that The Merchant of Venice scrutinizes in terms of the opposition between manterity and mercy. Moreover, the distinction is often logically impossible to maintain when discussing particular numismatic objects. Among these "exceptional" objects would be the impressed ingot showing respectively the young Marguerite de Foix (fig. 49) and Elisabeth, duchess of Braunschweig-Calenberg. There is also the aforementioned "Amazon" ingot of

Josser, Money in Great Britain, 95.

Rings were among the most common sort of tokens before the introduction of coinage (Charles Seelmann, Greek Coins: A History of Metallic Currency and Coinage Down to the Fall of the Hellenistic Kingdoms, 2d ed. [London: Methuen, 1955], 4–5). They were often associated with seizures of power based on economic or monetary events: the term "ringleader" is Anglo-Saxon for "king who rules by virtue of a ring"—such as Alberich in The Ring of the Nibelung, say, or Gyges in Plato's Republic (William F.S.A. Jones, Finger-Ring Lore [London: Chatto and Windus, 1877], and Carl H. Klosterhalfen, Ringe und Kreise, Macht und Magie: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung eines dramatischen Requisits [Emden: Lechte, 1967]).

One student of Renaissance medals writes: "Medals have usually been studied in a numismatic context because of their obvious similarity to coins and because they have often been issued by the same authorities, but there are certain fundamental differences. Coins are an official means of exchange, and are therefore controlled and issued by a central authority according to established weights, denominations, and materials" (Stephen K. Scher, The Currency of Fame: Portrait Medals of the Renaissance [New York: Abrams, 1994], 13).

The "Marguerite de Foix" coin/medal is sometimes considered a coin, sometimes a medal (George F. Hill, A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance before Cellini, 2 vols. [London: British Museum, 1930], 2.71), sometimes a "medal-coin" with the name tallero. The "Elisabeth, duchess of Braunschweig-Calenberg" coin/medal is known in two weights corresponding to those of the thaler (Günter Brockmann, Die Medaillen der
Cyme, which some scholars assert must "have been made for the [medallic] purposes of prestige only."\textsuperscript{98} Finally, there are coins that have somehow left the money realm.\textsuperscript{99} Among these would be the sixteenth-century "angels" pierced so as to become necklace pendants. The talismanic designs of angel-coins—the archangel killing the monster—encouraged Tudor and Stuart monarchs to distribute them as restorative "touch pieces."\textsuperscript{100} Shylock and Morocco could hardly have understood such pieces except as "fetishes."

Both coins and medals are, of course, valuable. A coin has both substantial value as metal and legitimate value by virtue of the authority of the state or ruler whose seal or medallic impression the coin bears; in just the same way, a medal has material value as metal and ideal value by virtue, say, of some artist's design or prestige. What makes a coin (nomisma) essentially different from a medal is that coins of the same impression and denomination trade as the same by law (nomas). This legalistic distinction between coin and medal performs only in the domestic marketplace. It does not perform in the ambiguously extralegal and hazardous marine forum that binds together Venice with the Neverland that is Belmont.

\textsuperscript{98}"The individuals whose names appear so prominently on such issues may have been so honored because they had paid the expense of minting and perhaps given the bullion required, as gift to their fellow citizens" (Max Hirmer and Colin M. Kraay, \textit{Greek Coins} [New York: Abrams, 1966], 370; cf. \textit{A Guide to the Principal Coins of the Greeks}, based on the work of Barclay V. Head [London: British Museum, 1932], 39, 9, and \textit{British Museum Catalogue}, 75).

\textsuperscript{99}On all such coins generally, see Shell, "Pretty Money," \textit{AM}, 60–63.

Piracy

Gratiano: We are the Jasons, we have won the fleece.
Salerio: I would you had won the fleece that be hath lost!

PRO GRATIA GRATIS

—Common Christian coin motto

Mercharity is a hazardous business. As Shylock says, “there is the peril of waters, winds, and rocks” (1.3.24–25) and “ships are but boards, sailors but men” (1.3.22). So The Merchant of Venice is full of allusions to the need for sureness and surety. It makes sense in this context to ask why Antonio does not purchase marine insurance. Does Antonio regard insurance as a kind of usury? Does he want to fail utterly in order to prove his love for Bassanio? Does he believe in the need to hazard everything in order to gain everything? Or is Antonio’s “What me worry?” attitude part of a traditional view that purchasing insurance amounts to challenging the beneficence, omniscience, and omnipotence of God? After all, the lilies of the field do not purchase insurance, do they?

No one human would need marine insurance if he could bank on Christ, or an army of English angels, to defeat the monster and redeem all debt. On the English angel-coin, a Christian ship bears the cross home (fig. 50). The inscription on many English

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angels (though not the one pictured here) is *PER CRUCEM TUAM SALVA NOS CHRISTE REDEMPTOR* [By thy cross save us, O Christ, our Redeemer].

The cross crosses out all debt. So Antonio’s fleets seemed altogether lost, yet they are found as surely as Bassanio’s fleece. The term *cross* indicates any coin bearing the stamp of the cross, as well as the Christian cross itself; it suggests an agency of universal, or catholic, conversion in the religious and in the monarchical realms. Amazing grace.

What find I here? The final *trouvaille* in *The Merchant of Venice* is the recovery of Antonio’s ships. This economic horn of plenty (cornucopia), greater than any Jewish “manna” in the desert (5.1.294), is announced by a musical horn, a posthorn. (It is as in Claxton’s *The Lost Sheep Found*, or as in the sheep-shearing festival in *The Winter’s Tale* where Perdita—“she who once was lost”—is found.) In *The Merchant of Venice*, non-Christians supposedly cannot quite grasp the distinctive way that Christians confute God with Mammon while at the same time claiming that one cannot serve both Mammon and God. One example of the non-Christians’ inability to comprehend is suggested in the person of the Muslim Launcelot. Launcelot leaves Jewish Shylock’s service for Christian Bassanio’s, but he is able to understand Christian grace only as a “horn full of good news” (5.1.47), and he ludicrously imitates it in his “Sola, sola! wo ha, ho! sola, sola!” (5.1.39). Launcelot becomes only a Morisco, or would-be Muslim convert to Christianity. Another example of likely inability to convert is Jessica. Jessica, who betrayed her Jewish father to the accompaniment of the carnival music that he detested, cannot hear the music of the spheres on “such a night as this” (5.1.1–22). After all, in this play the really “good news” —the gospel—comes from Belmont.

Was the recovery of Antonio’s fleets a “sure bet” all along? The punster Shylock might think so. It is he who reminded us that “there be land-rats and water-rats, water-thieves and land-thieves—I mean pirates” (1.3.22–24). What sort of *rats* are *pirates?*

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103 In the mid-sixteenth-century icon *Saint George Killing the Desiush Beast* (fig. 10 above) the artist presents the hand of God blessing the murder of the beast by an angelic George (upper right).

104 On the link here between *cross* and *crossing cast*, see Fischer, *Ecology*, 62. Cf. Jessica’s multivalent hope that her “fortune be not cross’d” (2.3.56).

105 Antonio loses his fleets even as Bassanio finds his fleece. In *The Merchant of Venice* report has it that Antonio’s ships have failed. A rumor has it that one ship has “miscarried” (2.8.29); “my gossip Report” then communicates that another has been ill lost at the “Goodwins” (3.1.4); and Tubal, whose financial potency is never challenged by any of the events in this play, subsequently says that he spoke with sailors from an “argosy cast away.” Finally, a letter has it that “my ships have all miscarried” (3.2.315–16). Bassanio asks: “[N]ot one vessel scape the dreadful touch / Of merchant-marring rocks?” (3.2.270–71), and Salerio assures him that none escaped.

106 “Gossip Report” is not always “an honest woman of her word” (3.1.7), and the lost fleets are eventually found. So Antonio learns, from the letter that the ewe-wish Portia gives him, that his golden fleets were not destroyed, “For here I read for certain that my ships / Are safely come to road” (5.1.287–88).
A pirate operates outside the regular jurisdiction of political states like Venice.\(^{107}\) Pirates are not so much legal or illegal, legitimate or illegitimate, as both legal and illegal, or neither. In Shakespeare’s plots, pirates are crucial: in \textit{Hamlet} they save the protagonist’s life on his way to England and in \textit{Measure for Measure} a pirate’s severed head makes for the comedic ending that razes the law, “Thou shalt not steal,”\(^{108}\) from Mount Sinai, and then raises it to become the \textit{bel} sermon on the Mount (Belmont).

In \textit{The Merchant of Venice}, the general process of apportionment is by means of just such a piratical rationing. Portia is the Greek Moira, goddess of apportionment, adjusted to secular Christian ends. When Portia hands Antonio the note about his ships’ restoration, we are no longer in the liberal commercial republic of Venice. We are on the high seas, or in Belmont, with a goddess or god\(^{109}\) who is Mammon incarnate.


\(^{108}\) It is fitting to the internal logic of the plot machinery that a pirate should provide the head, the \textit{caput in machina}, that establishes the series of bodily substitutions that provide \textit{Measure for Measure} with its end. In this, the pirate is like the purely divine Jesus, who is partly above the law he says that he came to fulfill. As I discuss in \textit{The End of Kinship} (esp. 131–32), \textit{Measure for Measure} moves beyond the solution—universal duplicity in exchange—represented by the role of Ragozin’s head and toward that expressed in Lucio’s tale of the “sanctimonious pirate,” who went to sea with the Ten Commandments, but scrap’d one out of the table:

\begin{quote}
2 Gentleman: “Thou shalt not steal”?
Lucio: Ay, that he rec’d. (1.2.7–11)
\end{quote}

\textit{Measure for Measure} razes the commandment against thieving (taking without giving), not by enjoining men to commit theft but by raising or transforming the commandment against theft into a call for pardon, for giving without taking or expecting to take.

\(^{109}\) Portia has already said, “But now I was the lord . . .” (3.2.167, cited in full above).