THE REFLECTIVE CITIZEN

Organizational and Social Dynamics

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CHAPTER ONE

The Merchant of Venice: a tale of modern times

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> "Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey
> Where wealth accumulates and men decay"
>
> (Goldsmith, 1770)

As many will know, the title of the late Professor Tony Judt's final book about the pursuit, both individually and collectively, of material self-interest was taken from Oliver Goldsmith's poem, quoted above, *The Deserted Village*, to which I shall return.

The financial, institutional, organizational, and personal predicaments of our time are no new ones. As my own title suggests, I shall be drawing on *The Merchant of Venice* as a tale of modern times, of our particular time. At the heart of the play is a stark social and psychological polarization, that between the raw materialism and greed of Venice's Rialto, and the reflective, generous thoughtfulness of Belmont. It is, among other things, a play about two worlds: one that knows much about wealth, international trade routes, the market, profits, and usury, but lacks an internal moral compass, the other that senses what it means to learn from experience, to acquire

that moral compass, one that represents a culture of inner learning. That very distinction is also central to Bion's thinking: the contrast between knowing about things and knowing from experience.

The mercantile opportunism and decadent values of the Rialto (it is silk and spices that the merchant, Antonio, stands to lose) are, currently, all too familiar. What needs to be considered is what kind of relationships, individual and collective, support in some the development of the personality, the growth of the mind, engender in people the courage to be themselves, and, for example, combat decadence in the name of fair trade, and in others, quite the reverse. How can the modesty of the former modify or modulate the latter? I do not think it is merely fanciful to find these themes to be as central to *The Merchant of Venice* as to our own parlous times.

The themes are embedded in the perennial conflicts, differently weighted and freighted, between man as an individual and as a social animal, between the human potential for growth and development and the social and cultural vagaries and necessities that have an impact upon that. Many of these conflicts are epitomized in this much-misunderstood play of Shakespeare's. It is my reading of it that I want to share. It is a multi-layered "Opus", or "task", with an emphasis, as the word suggests, on the significance of artistic composition.

Intrinsic to many of Shakespeare's dramatic narratives is the quest to achieve sufficient self-knowledge to ensure the future of the social fabric, whether personally, in terms of integrity, humility, love, and honour (usually represented, symbolically at least, by marriage), or more publicly and historically, in terms of, say, kingship or succession. Usually, the two are inextricable. *The Merchant of Venice* is also, importantly, about the failure in some of such a quest, about the incapacity to hold out against forces of, for example, greed, perversion, power, hatred, and vengeance. It is an uncomfortable play, and in this sense I would designate it more of a Problem play than, as more usually, one of the Comedies.

In the crudest terms, *The Merchant of Venice* addresses the relationship between internal values and principles and external societal and cultural mores, rules, and conventions. It is about internal and external reality, in other words, and the relationship between the two, about harmony and dissonance, love and hate, about the process of coming to know oneself and others, and the difficulties

of so doing, about the differentiation between different kinds of knowledge: the genuinely exploratory purpose of the acquisition, on the one hand, and the questionable use to which it might be put, on the other—what Bion (1962) was to designate, respectively, K and –K. The unifying distinctions in this series of dualities are played out in the polarized cultures of Belmont and Venice.

One of my focuses will be on the shape and form of the adolescent process as represented in the play. Not that there was any conception of "adolescence", as such, among the Elizabethans, but the prerequisites for, and the nature of, the transition from parental authority to sexual and coupled maturity lies at the heart of many of Shakespeare's plays, engaging as they so often do, with the meaning of that "maturity" and with the move, at whatever age or stage, towards adulthood. This is a move, if not blighted by adverse forces from within and without, that can be described in terms of the development of inner capacities, be they for separation, for marriage, for selfhood, for, as already suggested, kingship, for succession, or, more generally, for valued contributions to the common weal.

Although growing up is a life-long process, somehow what is involved in that process is intensified, perhaps even caricatured, certainly epitomized, during the adolescent years. There is a chronic and contradictory pull, both personal and cultural, between progression and regression. Yet, such "pulls" may not be as contradictory as they can seem. Individually, they are often intimately and intricately related, as Bion's (1963) two-way PS↔D formulation makes so clear (p. 102). For the catastrophic anxiety that attends any development in the personality is inevitably also related to the painful relinquishment of aspects of the self that need to be given up in order for the person to move forward. This regression, then, is not a simple matter of *reculer pour mieux sauter*. It involves the capacity to explore, or to get to know, aspects of the self which may hitherto have been felt to characterize other people, the capacity to recognize them as belonging to the self, and to find a way of accommodating them in the increasingly, though perhaps resistantly, "known" personality. This process of "getting to know" is as much a challenge for organizations as it is for the individual, though in the former, collective dragging of feet may pose problems that can be even more complex than those of the consulting room.

In Bion's terms, the group and organizational consultant has to work both with each and every individual's disturbance, and also with the collective manifestations of the group setting—the "work" being forever undermined by forces famously described by him (1962)—the unconscious "basic assumption" mentality of any group setting.

What organizational consultants, as well as one-on-one clinicians, forever encounter is the fundamental institutional and personal resistance to change, however awful the status quo may be felt to be. No wonder that Bion called such change "catastrophic". I am exploring the interplay of factors that both promote and prevent change. I am seeking to link the action of *The Merchant of Venice* to all ordinary attempts to hold out for what might be termed one's "best self", attempts which are based in coming to know oneself (Bion's K), under the guidance of what I would describe in terms of Keats' "thinking principle", here represented by Portia: a thinking principle that is neither perfect, nor static, but willing, as we shall see, to "work and to be wrought upon" (Keats, "Ode to Psyche"). The setting for this is crucial. It is, as so often in the "Comedies", in a world apart: Belmont, aptly named, for as the play draws to a close we see, in full, the moonlight on the bank and we hear the music, the harmony of the spheres; Belmont, the fount of aesthetic beauty.

The Merchant of Venice is a narrative of love and hate, of gain and loss, from a literary and social as well as a psychoanalytic point of view. What, of the enormous number of issues that are raised in the play, are of special interest to my central question, that of the relationship between psychoanalysis and the nature of political, economic, and cultural reality, of group functioning and collective and organizational thinking and practice? My own point of view is not, of course, that psychoanalysis can bring anything to Shakespeare and his extraordinary insight into the "way the world wags", but, rather, that the aesthetic of the play, in finding form for hidden or as yet unknown aspects of human life and feeling, enables such things to be thought about, and, in being thought about, to be learned from. Psychoanalytic theory gathers up, and draws on, insights that have found poetic form and have been expressed in literary terms over the centuries, as is so clear in *The Deserted Village*. So, the issue is, what can we learn from this play?

A central aspect of the Comedies, and one much commented upon, is that they are about exploring issues that need to be sorted out before the kind of marriage that betokens growth and development, one that symbolically offers some sense, albeit imperfect, of birth and renewal, before such a "marriage" can come about. Can the necessary conditions for faith in the future, the ongoing march of society, be established, or, in the current climate, be re-found and promoted?

The Merchant of Venice has much to say on these issues: with integration and self-knowledge as common goals, psychoanalytic practice and poetic dramatization of the process of "growing up" on the inside, as well as on the outside, share a number of congruencies. One aim of the psychoanalytic and consultative processes could be described as seeking to make available to the patient, client, or organization more and more aspects of the self, whether in group or in individual terms; so, too, the artist, the parent, the sociologist, or the moral philosopher. In this sense, the parental task of helping someone to grow up and the imaginative versions of these struggles to grow and to know have similarities with what one tries to do in many different work settings. Yet, any such task occurs in a particular culture and in a particular climate of thought, external as well as internal. The effort, for example, to establish true values, as opposed to counterfeit ones, is especially hard in a setting where external appearance, the trappings of wealth, of luxury, and of power, and currently of celebrity and "success", have influence, and their domination holds sway. This is all too evident in social terms, but privately, too, the sway is over internal values of truth, of meaning, and the capacity to think for oneself. Today, there seems to be a distinct dominance of "personalities" over person, clearly to the detriment of the latter.

Here are the opening lines of the play:

> ANTONIO: In sooth I know not why I am so sad,
> It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
> I am to learn:
> And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
> That I have much to do to know myself.

Thus speaks the eponymous Merchant of Venice—"I am to learn: . . . I have much to do to know myself". What we learn in the course of the play is something about the complacent, primitive, vengeful, infantile, and increasingly reactive aspects of human nature that Shakespeare describes, and that we encounter on a daily basis, whether personally or institutionally. We learn about the propensity to disown and find in others attitudes, thoughts, and feelings which do not sit comfortably with preferred self-conceptions. To start with, Antonio seems to believe himself (we might venture, omnipotently) to be totally "insured" against any experience of loss, as expressed by his friends, also denizens of the Rialto, Solanio and Salario's suggestion that he is anxious about the trading vessels, or, perhaps, anxious about love. He just finds himself mysteriously depressed. The threatening allusion is to how a wealthy, proud ship—laden with the luxury goods of the dominant mercantile world—can become "worth nothing". "All his fortunes are at sea", but it is his emotions, too, that are imperilled: the potential wreck or wrack is also a personal issue of being completely "at sea". Yet, as W. H. Auden (1963), looking back on the whole play, puts it:

> It occurs to us that we have seen two characters do this, [hazard all he hath], Shylock, however unintentionally, did, in fact, hazard all for the sake of destroying the enemy he hated, and Antonio, however unthinkingly he signed the bond, hazarded all to secure the happiness of the friend he loved. Yet it is precisely these two who cannot enter Belmont. Belmont would like us to believe that men and women are either good or bad by nature, but Shylock and Antonio remind us that this is an illusion: in the real world, no hatred is totally without justification, no love totally innocent . . . [p. 154]

And this is a lesson that Portia has yet to learn.

Commenting on usury, Auden points out that

> Like prostitution, usury may corrupt the character, but those who borrow upon usury, like those who visit brothels, have their share of responsibility for this corruption and aggravate their guilt by showing contempt for those whose services they make use of. As he says, the commodities with which the Venetian merchant deals are not necessities, but luxury goods, governed by social prestige—there is no question of a Just Price. [*ibid.*, p. 152]

In the world of pyramid lending, hedge funds, and the rest, the question of a "Just Price" has not, until recently, been on the agenda. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the nature of such deals is essentially the main axis of the Christian–Jew theme, in which, as the play proceeds, the similarities between the Christian, Antonio, and the Jew, Shylock, become increasingly striking. This highly emotive and apparently polarized racist issue represents matters of internal conflict quite as much as external political and religious controversy. Painful feelings—for example, of jealousy, of hatred, and of desire for revenge—are shown to be much more easily locatable in others, and they stir in the individual the impulse to persecute them there, rather than to learn about them in the self. This is the stuff, the daily bread, of organizational consultation, so clearly laid out in the play, in terms of what mediating and temporizing forces are needed. Here, we come to know the wise-crack and the bully mentality; we come to learn about the need to find scapegoats; about the difficulty of acknowledging and tolerating these unacceptable characteristics, and about the necessity of so doing. We learn a lot about the sadomasochistic bind; we also learn a lot about those who would always rather mock and persecute someone else than take in, or take on, the true measure of their own anxiety and sense of social exclusion (Solanio and Salerio); about those who would rather "talk dirty" than engage with genuine pain (Gratiano); about those who feel so wronged and persecuted, abused, and bereft, that all they can do, in an attempt to assuage such humiliation, is to inflict it on others (Shylock), and this only eventually after, in his case, the unspeakably bitter loss of his daughter, Jessica, who has eloped with the Christian, Lorenzo, taking with her not just considerable amounts of money, but the precious ring given to Shylock by his beloved late wife, Leah. It is this concatenation of losses that converts the "principle" of the bond into a deadly serious actuality: a life and death issue of what amounts to ritual murder.

We learn, too, about those who need to enact their adolescent rebellions before they are, belatedly, able to take in something of an adult sense of responsibility and an awareness of truth and beauty (Lorenzo and Jessica). This couple, in Portia's absence, are left in charge of Belmont, being entrusted to care for it, even to "husband" it, and to learn from the experience of so doing. That is, in the

course of the play, the couple learn to discriminate between their adolescent/infantile, prodigal, and cruel selves and some much deeper and more harmonious capacity to acknowledge the wonder and modesty of genuine love, so far from that which is carried on the "strumpet wind", that of the chancer mentality of Antonio's limited knowledge of himself, or, at this point, of the world. This is what is meant by an "opus". It is a way of addressing, and finding expression for, the relationship between social and cultural processes on the one hand, and the necessity of taking into consideration the nature, put simply, of what people are like on the other. The two are obviously inseparable.

In the trial scene, as the complexities and the questionable devices of Portia (now disguised as a young male advocate) make clear, it becomes evident that the road to wisdom is in no sense a straight one. Even she has to encounter in herself, as well as in the cut and thrust of real-politik, unexpected emotional realities: those of the ugliness of jealousy, the fear of loss of face as well as of goods, and the possibility of anticipated betrayal. She had not expected the pain and harshness of such feelings, ones that confronted her with the necessity of "thinking under fire" (in Bion's terminology). Having been brought up in the harmonious setting of Belmont, far from the tough realities of the Rialto, she had not encountered these feelings in herself before, nor had she had to draw on methods—the silver-tongued sophistry of the clever lawyer—which, hitherto, she had neither registered nor needed.

But more, to the internal considerations had to be added serious external ones, those of the maintenance of the economic and social fabric of the city-state. An odd and often missed detail is that of where Portia spends the time between the trial scene and her return from Venice to Belmont. She strays with Nerissa, we are told, among holy crosses where she kneels and prays, accompanied by a hermit, perhaps attesting to her private need to reflect on the relationship between the public events of the cross-dressed Balthazar version of herself and the private reality of her deeply feminine, devoted relationship with Bassanio. As so often in Shakespeare, despite formal marriage, this relationship is still unconsummated because there remain elements, in terms of trust and commitment, as yet unresolved on either side. Before any such commitment can be made, Portia needs to let Bassanio go to Antonio in order to sort

out the meaning of their relationship, just as she needs to commune with herself about the significance of the internal and external events of the world in which she now finds herself. One wonders, too, in the light of the leaden casket signifying death, whether the facing of that ultimate dimension of things is also a necessary component of maturity, not so much in line with the current denial of ageing as of the acceptance of death as part of the life-cycle. Portia's father's will had stipulated that her future husband be he who rightly chooses, among the three caskets, the one that contains her portrait—neither the golden, nor the silver, but the leaden.

But that said, there is a certain "something" which underlies Portia's role in the play and which finds expression in her relationship with her "waiting woman" Nerissa, and that is a something which psychoanalysts find very difficult to pin down, one which also pervades a true analytic relationship and is certainly evident in the group relations setting. It is this: it may slowly become possible for one person to take in and to think about those very issues or contradictions which have hitherto been felt to be impossible to engage with, or, indeed, may not even have been known about. The process was designated by Meltzer (1978) "the most important and most mysterious concept in psychoanalysis": introjective identification (p. 459). For example, it is possible with one part of the self to betray that to which, with another part, one feels oneself to be utterly committed. Bassanio and Gratiano are tricked/persuaded by Balthazar/Portia and Nerissa to give away the rings that the young women had entrusted to their new husbands. But Portia and Nerissa come to see the wisdom of Portia's father's will. In the process, they grow up from being boisterous girls into married women, from being able to understand not just flirtation and infatuation, but passion. After all, they go through a great deal together in the course of the play, and much can be learnt about their mutual development as the swift repartee of the early prose blossoms into the beauty of the poetry of their respectively deepened perceptions towards the end.

What may, this being comedy, look like some kind of merely manipulative testing of Bassanio and Gratiano (the issue of giving away the rings) can, in fact, represent a deeply serious test of commitment, which, at this point, both young men fail. Shakespeare seems to be suggesting something of the awesome nature of

the true, internal commitment that needs to be made, and how hard it is to develop such a capacity, and, in turn, what an impact it might have on the public weal, the values of Belmont possibly moderating those of the Rialto—group relations on a societal level, indeed!

The allusion made earlier to a narrative of love and hate, of gain and loss, engages with something that is repeatedly found at the heart of the psychoanalytic relationship, and is enshrined in its practice. Yet, Bion's early work notwithstanding, the thinking has tended to be limited by being held within the consulting room and its "internal world" focus. It needs to be widened further to embrace the social, political, and cultural setting—something that Bion himself always wanted to return to and which seems so pressing, indeed crucial, in current times.

The Merchant of Venice explores, powerfully and inescapably, different kinds of loss and the nature of their impact, both personally and societally. Among these losses are the wreck of Antonio's ships, of Bassanio and Antonio's special relationship, of Jessica to her father Shylock, and, ultimately and drastically, the threat of the loss of the Merchant Antonio's life. In the internal world, then, this play does present a life and death issue: the conflict of those elements which are on the side of personal and collective psychic life, or, by contrast, of death. In the play, these become actually life and death issues, but, in Shakespeare, they also metaphorically represent the life of the mind and its all too possible slow and incremental demise, and the life of a society, too, one that might manage to be prosperous without becoming decadent. Its demise, here, lies in the danger of succumbing to the values of the Rialto, a culture, as already noted, dedicated to outward show where, indeed, "wealth accumulates and men decay"; a culture also dedicated to an investment in economic risk, one that, as becomes clear in the trial scene, is willing to collude with whatever is deemed necessary to uphold trading relations with the rest of the mercantile world. This is by contrast with the empire of the "soul", one that is dedicated to those inner principles that Portia seeks to uphold, despite finding herself in so complex and compromising a position, a position of which the trial scene is so powerful an emblem. Initially, it was Antonio's body that was forfeit; in the end, as he so clearly states, it is his soul:

> . . . I once did lend my body for his wealth . . .
> I dare be bound again
> My soul upon the forfeit.

This contrast between the merchant at the beginning and at the end of the play is a central theme: some of the characters, through their contact with what is represented by Portia and Belmont, do, like Portia herself, learn about themselves; a shift does occur from a predominantly −K frame of mind to a K one. For Belmont favours those states in which emotions, genuinely undergone, can, despite resistance, be known and thought about truthfully, especially those of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Some characters become truly capable of gratitude and sincerity, if only in the last Act. The play engages, then, with the possibilities of putting a cycle of competition and revenge to rest. If this is to be done at all, it was to be through internal changes of a kind that bears on external relationships. Interestingly, as in other comedies, that capacity to change tends to be found in the women rather than the men. We could, for example, look in detail at Portia and Nerissa's banter the first time we meet them, and then again at their enhanced aesthetic capacities on the return to Belmont, the last time we encounter them alone.

The play is, as always with Shakespeare, about internal and external realities simultaneously, and this is what I mean by the perennial conflict between "man as an individual" and as a "political animal". It is about social, political, cultural, and religious issues in the form of very contemporary debates and conflicts which would all have been as familiar to Elizabethan audiences as those portrayed in, for example, Enron, are today. But these issues also represent complex dynamics between the self and others, as between social systems, dynamics of which the manifestations are timeless, despite belonging to very different phases of social history. The notion of marriage is, again recognizably, underpinned by the actions in the play which have led to the marriage, or marriages, being possible at all. What is it really that contributes to the internal capacity for the kind of marriage, both personal and political, which will strengthen the individual and the social fabric, the bearing of children, the ongoing march of the generations?

In this play, Shakespeare is taking on something very difficult (evidenced in the controversy which has surrounded it, and still

does surround it), something more challenging, in some ways, than we are used to in the other Comedies. In terms of gender identity, for example, we engage here, too, with cross-dressing, as part of an adolescent bisexual "sort out" (*As You Like It, Twelfth Night*), and also with the generational struggles between individuality and parental authority (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*). In such plays we become involved in the processes prerequisite for maturity, for the kind of engagements with, say, the painful conflicts around establishing gender identity, the general range of youthful conflicts that are a necessary part of the transition towards the capacity to take responsibility for the future. Here, then, we are in relatively familiar territory. We know, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or from The Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, or from the dramas on the shores of Illyria or of Bohemia, and now, of Belmont, that a deep processing of emotional experience can only occur in areas of the mind which are apart from the day-to-day settings where people pursue their ordinary, casual and contractual lives. In Shakespeare, these are, more generally, in the "Green Worlds" of the Festive Comedies. *The Merchant of Venice* is a bit different, but here, too, one can see a parallel between the world of Belmont and of the consulting room, or of family or institutional consultation, or group relations events.

The local predicaments enacted in such settings often very precisely echo, or re-present, those of contemporary Elizabethan, or, indeed, twenty-first century England (for "Rialto" read investment banks or stock exchange, for example), but they are also not merely narrowly locatable or pin-downable. For they belong, too, to inner vision, to the meaning of internal reality, a reality which has only recently found a groping, and often rather dissonant, expression in theoretical psychoanalytic formulations.

The Merchant of Venice takes on some of the ugliest aspects of human nature—the most primitive, bestial, prejudiced, and vengeful—and makes it clear that those very aspects have to be recognized and are, on some level, present and active in even the most apparently acceptable aspects of human nature and discourse more generally. They have to be faced, recognized and owned if there is to be any fruitful integration of a constructive, rather than a destructive, kind. What appears to be so polarized—the values of notional Belmont *vs.* those of, all too real, Venice; what the Jew *vs.* the Christian stands for—becomes, as the play proceeds, but different aspects of one and the same and, as Auden (1963) points out, the attraction to Belmont is also questionable. The apparent polarizations do not stand up to scrutiny. They can slide into a kind of reflexivity, the one of the other.

There is a sense that those internally repudiated and split-off parts of the self have to be faced for what they are before any honest union can occur, and this is true for almost every character in the play. Indeed, the play can, as so often, be thought of in terms of a collection of parts (the characters) of the whole (the drama). The action challenges and regroups the parts towards, or in the name of (this being comedy), a reasonably good outcome. But for some the cost is very high. In psychoanalytic terms, it could be argued that the form of the play itself "contains" (in the sense of having the capacity to hold multifold heightened emotional states) a collective and symbolic representation of deep and enduringly conflictual and contradictory states of mind: those embodied by the various characters.

It could also be argued that the plot encompasses an extreme version of "splitting" between good and bad and the "projection" of that good or bad into cultural, religious, or personal representatives. Yet it is, at the same time, about introjection—introjection of a specific kind: what is the nature of the legacy of the older generation to the younger? What, in the end, does Portia's father bequeath to her, internally, rather than externally? What does Antonio, in the end, bequeath to the lovers, to Jessica and Lorenzo, in such contrast to his original, unthinking, even compulsive and misguided generosity to Bassanio? Belmont takes him to his uttermost. When the text is perused with some care, the goodies-and-baddies divide collapses and something much more subtle, in terms of the difficulty of coming to know oneself, slowly becomes established. This is precisely, as I have said, where the play begins. As we saw, the eponymous Merchant states that he neither knows nor understands himself:

> In sooth I know not why I am so sad,
> It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught, found it, or came by it,
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,

> I am to learn:
> And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
> That I have much to do to know myself.

There could be no clearer a statement of the main theme of the play: it is that of self-knowledge, of links in K of a kind which have to take account of the most infantile and destructive aspects of the personality in order to establish any basis for a social and political future which is founded on principles and values rather than on outward show, in however subtle, but also crude, terms, legally and theologically, that show is represented.

We know that the issue of growing up, at every age and stage, and of the symbolic significance of marriage, involves growth in the parent, too: the kind of growth which allows parents to let their child suffer; to "grow and to go", on their own terms and not as the bearer of the parents' projected needs, fears, desires, or aspirations. Among such mixed feelings may be the belief that they, the parents, can protect the child from the consequences of their own behaviour; that they can encourage him/her forward while really holding them back; that they can, despite all, let them become themselves and make their own choices and mistakes.

As Shakespeare so often makes clear, much rests, personally and socially, on the nature of the parental example, and of their legacy to the younger generation. The contrast may be between the authoritarian or repressive on the one hand, or, on the other, the authoritative and the growth promoting. It may be between mindless indulgence and the necessity of keeping reasonable boundaries. Such dualities pervade *The Merchant of Venice*. I shall touch on but one. It could certainly be argued, for example, that the legacy of Portia's father does not necessarily represent the dead hand of tyrannical control beyond the grave, as initially seems to be the case. It represents, rather, some process whereby Portia slowly takes on, or takes in, values which, in terms of the play as a whole, would be those of genuine love, rather than of show; the struggle for truthfulness in the internal world rather than the taste for glitz in the external; of humility rather than the phallic swagger of male arrogance.

Let us dwell on the last scenes of Act II and the first of Act III. It is well known that this play greatly interested Freud (1913f). Not only did he write a short paper on "The Theme of the three

caskets", but he also drew, specifically, on Portia's verbal slip as an illustration of the "psychopathology of everyday life" (1901b).

He describes how Portia is wracked (a resonant image here) in conflict by the fact that she wishes Bassanio to know that she loves him but is bound by her loyalty to her dead father to abide by his will in accepting whichever lover chooses the right casket. She actually inadvertently gives the game away. Despite herself, she does say which suitor it is whom she favours. Freud quotes the following lines:

> I pray you tarry; pause a day or two,
> Before you hazard: for, in choosing wrong,
> I lose your company; therefore, forbear awhile:
> There's something tells me (but it is not love)
> I would not lose you . . .
> . . . I could teach you
> How to choose right, but then I am foresworn;
> So will I never be; so may you miss me;
> But if you do you'll make me wish a sin,
> That I had been foresworn. Beshrew your eyes,
> They have o'looked me, and divided me;
> One half of me is yours, the other half yours—
> Mine own, I would say; but if mine, then yours,
> And so all yours.

I quote Freud:

> The thing of which she wanted to give him only a subtle hint, because she should really have concealed it from him altogether, namely, that even before he made his choice she was wholly his and loved him—it is precisely this that the poet, with a wonderful psychological sensitivity, causes to break through openly in her slip of the tongue; and by this artistic device he succeeds in relieving both the lovers' unbearable uncertainty and the suspense of the sympathetic audience over the outcome of the choice. [pp. 97–98]

In the second of his *Introductory Lectures*, Freud (1915–1916) adds a further comment:

> Observe too, how skilfully Portia in the end reconciles the two statements contained in her slip of the tongue, how she solves the contradiction between them and yet finally shows that it was the slip that was in the right:

But if mine, then yours,
And so all yours." [p. 38]

In relation to the casket scene, Empson (1947) describes Portia's father's "devastating scheme". I would think of it somewhat differently—by no means devastating. The third casket is the right one—third time lucky. The implication could be, as suggested, that something has to be learned from the first two. In *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Empson states (p. 128), as does Freud in his discussion of the three caskets, that lead represents a fundamental aspect of humanity. Eventual death must be accepted, must be chosen, before one can get what one wants and can go on with the creative possibilities and poetry of the play.

So, parental legacy is of utmost significance. But I want, in conclusion, to touch again on the interesting delay in the consummation of the final marriages. Portia and Bassanio are effectively only legally married. A further learning process has to occur before the couple can properly get together. Is it that Portia herself needs to engage with the questionable, contradictory, and far from salubrious dealings of the "real" world of Venice? In other words, has she briefly to leave the exclusive harmonies of Belmont and, as it were, dirty her hands, before she is internally ready to marry Bassanio? My sense is that it is only on their return from Venice that Portia and Nerissa are able to appreciate what Belmont and Portia's father's will really stand for. The high moral ground is not Portia's exclusive territory, as she learns in the trial scene. She, like everyone else, has to learn.

To return, in conclusion, to *The Deserted Village* and the unspeakable current, though differently sourced, burden on the poor of a crushing fiscal legacy; the loss, for so many, of the wherewithal to support a decent life: Goldsmith, towards the end of the poem, picks up a now altered theme, "Thus fares the land, by luxury betrayed . . .".

The parental role of good government and governance has failed its subjects. We need to return, too, to Judt's concluding words in this, his last book, a kind of rallying cry, so clearly articulating his objection to what is going on in these modern times and urging all to look critically at our world and how we live. He quotes Tolstoy, so aptly expressing the passivity that characterizes the status quo: "[t]here are no conditions of life to which a man cannot

get accustomed, especially if he sees them accepted by everyone around him" (p. 237). What a challenge to organizational consultancy, whether that of families or wider institutions. As Judt, echoing Marx, so rightly stated, philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.

Finally, I want to return to the task of "Opus": that we need those who can think, the "philosophers", and, crucially, those who will act. Most will be trying to combine the two, will know about the hazards of the developmental path, about the uneven balance between progression and regression, whether personally or institutionally, between social and political advance or collapse. It is in this sense that *The Merchant of Venice* is a tale of modern times.

So, just as Oliver Goldsmith knew the power of poetry to reach the depths of what, propositionally, can be very hard to think about, the last words must be Portia's. For it is she who delivers one of the most compelling speeches about human values ever uttered or penned.

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,
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
The throned monarch better than his Crown.
. . .
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer, doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

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