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## Collective Unconsciousness In '*The Merchant of Venice*'

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### Abstract

The paper throws the light on collective unconsciousness in '*The merchant of Venice*'. '*The Merchant of Venice*' is a comedy by Shakespeare. On reading the comedies of Shakespeare, John Ruskin makes a comment that Shakespeare has no heroes but only heroines. But he does not say that Shakespeare has no villain. Taking revenge may not be said to be an undesirable quality of a villain (in most of the movies we have watched, the heroes either take revenge or avenge on other's behalf and that is why we celebrate them as heroes). In the 'Trial Scene', when Shylock loses the case, except for Shylock all the others present there want Shylock to be punished. Bassanio wants to marry Portia because she is "richly left". The love between them is just an infatuation because both of them have hardly met and understood each other. It was only when Bassanio accompanied Marquis of Montferrat to Belmont when Portia's father was alive that both of them had a chance to look at each other and started to develop a liking towards each other. Love at first sight? This is an intentional and calculated marriage, at least, on the part of Bassanio. Shakespeare seems to have, deliberately, projected Shylock as a villain, because basically Shakespeare himself was a

Christian and we find the 'racial memory' present in him which has driven him to hate a Jew. The racial memory or the collective unconscious is the root cause of every important character in the play to hate a Jew. Ever since the rift between the Jews and the Christians, there has been a strong dislike to each other. From their fore-parents they have inherited this idea of dislike and that is what we witness in the play.

**Keywords:** Collective, Unconsciousness, comedies, racial memory, dislike etc.

**Collective unconscious**, term introduced by psychiatrist Carl Jung to represent a form of the unconscious (that part of the mind containing memories and impulses of which the individual is not aware) common to mankind as a whole and originating in the inherited structure of the brain. It is distinct from the personal unconscious, which arises from the experience of the individual. According to Jung, the collective unconscious contains archetypes, or universal primordial images and ideas. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/collective-unconscious>)

Human beings are said to be 'social animals' because they have evolved from animals and that is the reason why sometimes they behave like animals. This animal behaviour is technically known as 'animal instinct'. The fact is that we, the human beings, have inherited some of the qualities of animals since we are believed to have been evolved from animals. Inheritance is indispensable. Sometimes we come across a creed or a group of people sharing the same idea; either the group will, collectively, like or dislike something. When we analyse the issue, we will be able to understand that the creed has inherited the idea of liking or disliking collectively. It is hereditary transmission through genes. Just as we inherit from our fore-parents the internal and external properties-- the genes, characters and the wealth, we inherit from them the 'racial memory.' Children are scared of darkness even though they have not been taught anything fearful about darkness by their family members. The fear is 'an inherited memory' from their fore-parents. In the same way children are scared of snakes even if they happen to see it for the first time. They have inherited the fear of darkness and the fear of snakes from their fore parents. The fear is there in their memory even when they are growing and developing at their wombs and one cannot think that the children are born with empty minds. Our racial memory decides our fear, likes and dislikes.

“According to Jung the human mind has innate characteristics “imprinted” on it as a result of evolution. These universal predispositions stem from our ancestral past. Fear of the dark or of snakes and

spiders might be examples.”

(<https://www.simplypsychology.org/carl-jung.html>)

'*The Merchant of Venice*' is a comedy by Shakespeare. Let's, first of all, look at the story of the play in a nutshell. The story of the play is that Antonio, a merchant of Venice, wants to help his friend Bassanio financially. Since, at that time of need, Antonio does not have the amount of money that Bassanio needs, he has no other alternative but to borrow the required amount of money from Shylock, a Jewish money-lender. After a little bit of hesitation Shylock is willing to lend the amount of money that Bassanio is in need of. The deal is that Antonio has to repay the principal amount along with the interest within a period of three months, failing which Shylock will take some amount of flesh from the body of Antonio. This Shylock calls "a merry sport." Antonio readily accepts the deal. They go to a notary in order to prepare a bond accordingly. Antonio believes that he will be able to repay the debt within the stipulated time because the vessels that carry the goods of Antonio will reach Venice very well before the day of repayment. But something goes wrong that it is reported that the vessels that carried the cargo of Antonio got wrecked and that all the goods had gone into ocean. Unable to repay the borrowed amount of money on the stipulated date, Antonio is taken to court for a trial. In spite of the requests of every noble man in Venice to show mercy on Antonio, Shylock pays no heed to them even when the duke himself asks him to show mercy. Almost all the men of Venice try their level best to

convince Shylock but they miserably fail in their attempts. Finally it is Portia, disguised as a lawyer, is able to solve the case by her sheer intelligence. She makes Shylock beg for his property not to be confiscated by the government. This is the story of the play 'The Merchant of Venice.'

On reading the comedies of Shakespeare, John Ruskin makes a comment that Shakespeare has no heroes but only heroines. But he does not say that Shakespeare has no villain. Who is the villain of the play? Is he the villain in the real sense of the word or is he projected as a man with villainy qualities? Why he is alone cornered when other characters in the play also have the 'so called' villainy qualities. Why does a particular crowd of people, collectively, hate him to the core? These are the questions which can best be answered if we approach the play with the concept of 'collective unconscious'. For the question who is the villain in the play, the usual answer is Shylock. He is considered to be the villain in the play for two important reasons. One is that he is money-minded. He is a money-lender who collects a huge amount of interest for the money that he lends. He is after money and will go to the extent of doing any dishonest deed to make and multiply money. The second one is his intention to take revenge upon Antonio by preparing a deadly bond. The idea of Shylock to take revenge upon Antonio can be justified if we take into account the impudent behaviour of Antonio towards Shylock in the past and even when he goes to Shylock seeking financial assistance on Bassanio's behalf. Antonio has insulted Shylock on many occasions in

front of the important merchants of Venice and that the preparation of the bond is to retaliate the humiliations he was subjected to by Antonio in the past. Taking revenge cannot be said to be a bad quality. Bacon calls it 'a wild justice' in his Essay "Of Revenge." One does not have to think of taking revenge if one has not been hurt by others in the past. Antonio's revenge may be justified if we take into consideration the abuses he was subjected to by Antonio in the past.

Taking revenge may not be said to be an undesirable quality of a villain (in most of the movies we have watched, the heroes either take revenge or avenge on other's behalf and that is why we celebrate them as heroes). In the 'Trial Scene', when Shylock loses the case, except for Shylock all the others present there want Shylock to be punished. Technically speaking, the friends of Antonio wanting to punish Shylock may be said to be a kind of revenge taken on him for the wrong deeds of him in the past.

Now let us discuss another flaw of Shylock: the money-mindedness. If money-mindedness is an unpardonable short coming or crime and that any character that is in possession of this flaw deserves to be called a villain, Shylock is not the only character in the play that deserves to be called a 'villain.' Most of the characters in the play are money-minded. Why cannot they be called villains too? Let us discuss the important characters in the play.

Let us begin with Bassanio, the bosom friend of Antonio. He does not seem to possess any of the qualities that a hero is supposed to be in possession of. As Ruskin

rightly puts it, this play of Shakespeare has no heroes. If at all he is to be called a hero of the play it is not because he has the heroic qualities to be called so but because he happens to be the husband of the heroine of the play, Portia. In some stories, the lovers or the wives of heroes become heroines even though they do not deserve to be called so but because they happen either to be wives or lovers to heroes. In this way Bassanio may be called a hero because he is Mr Portia or 'Portia pathi' ('pathi' is an Indian term one of the meanings of which is 'husband' for example 'Sitapathi', 'Umapathi', 'Lakshmi pathi', etc. From these names it is evident that the 'pathis' or the husbands are known not by their own names but by the names of their wives). Of all the suitors to 'fair' Portia, Bassanio is the only suitor who is 'prodigal'. He calls himself a 'prodigal'. A spendthrift that he is, he squanders away all his wealth lavishly.

“ 'Tis not unknown to you, Antonio,  
How much I have disabled mine estate,  
By something showing.....  
How to get clear of all the debts I owe.”  
(Act I Scene i)

Such an irresponsible and a reckless spendthrift is not considered to be a villain in the play.

Why does Bassanio want to marry Portia? Is the marriage between them the result of love? Or is the marriage a calculated and money-intended one on the part of him?

The answers to all these questions are these: Bassanio wants to marry Portia because she is "richly left". The love between them is just an infatuation because

both of them have hardly met and understood each other. It was only when Bassanio accompanied Marquis of Montferrat to Belmont when Portia's father was alive that both of them had a chance to look at each other and started to develop a liking towards each other. Love at first sight? This is an intentional and calculated marriage, at least, on the part of Bassanio. He wants to marry her because she is rich and that he can repay all his debts and lead a luxurious life once he becomes the husband of the rich Portia. We learn this when there is a conversation between him and Antonio in Act I scene i. He wants to borrow money from Antonio to go to Belmont with the intention of marrying Portia so that he will be entitled to receive the wealth of Portia and that he will be able to repay all his debts that he borrowed from Antonio.

### **BASSANIO**

In Belmont is a lady richly left;  
And she is fair, and, fairer than that word,  
Of wondrous virtues: sometimes from her eyes  
I did receive fair speechless messages:  
Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued  
To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia:  
Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,  
For the four winds blow in from every coast  
Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks  
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece;  
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos'  
strand,  
And many Jasons come in quest of her.  
O my Antonio, had I but the means  
To hold a rival place with one of them,  
I have a mind presages me such thrift,

That I should questionless be fortunate!

**(Act I Scene i)**

Bassanio wants to take possession of the wealth of Portia in the name of marriage. Can't this be called money-mindedness? If Shylock multiplies his money by levying huge amount interest on the money he lends, it is money-mindedness, what could be the term to denote the desire of Bassanio to enjoy the wealth of Portia? Shylock, at least, invests his own money for multiplication. What is the investment of Bassanio to lead a luxurious life? Of course, it is at the cast of Portia that it becomes possible for him to repay the debt that Antonio borrowed from Shylock on his behalf. It is very sure that he is a spend thrift and that a spendthrift can be money-minded. The pressing question is that when Shylock is hated for being money-mindedness why is it that Bassanio is not hated for the same reason: being money-minded?

The next important character in the play is Lorenzo, the lover of Jessica who is the daughter of Shylock. Lorenzo is in love with Jessica. Both of them want to get married secretly because both of them belong to different religion and their religious status will not permit them to do so. Not only that, Lorenzo does not seem to be a rich youth fit to be an eligible bachelor to become the husband of the rich Jew's daughter. The reason for their falling in love is not clear. But one thing is very clear that Lorenzo's intension is to marry a girl who is rich. He knows pretty well that she is the daughter of Shylock and that she is a Jew. The whole team of friends of Antonio, Lorenzo is also a member of the team, does

not have a high regard for Shylock. Shylock is hated by all of them including Lorenzo. But Lorenzo falls in love with the daughter of the Jew. There is a maxim in Tamil "aadu pagai kutty uravu." The meaning of the maxim is "the parent goat is treated like an enemy but its billy/kid of the goat is given a good treatment." The parent is disliked whereas the heir is liked. 'There is method in the liking.'

When we analyse the speeches of Lorenzo, we learn that he is interested not only in Jessica but also in the wealth that she possesses. Lorenzo receives a letter from Jessica about how to elope when Shylock leaves his home for a dinner party arranged by Bassanio. When he talks to his friends about the plan of elopement, he tells his friends as to how he has been instructed by Jessica to take her away from her home. He also makes a mention of the gold and jewels that she is going to bring with her at the time of elopement.

### **LORENZO**

I must needs tell thee all. She hath directed  
How I shall take her from her father's  
house,

What gold and jewels she is furnish'd with,  
What page's suit she hath in readiness.

If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven,  
It will be for his gentle daughter's sake:

And never dare misfortune cross her foot,  
Unless she do it under this excuse,

That she is issue to a faithless Jew.

Come, go with me; peruse this as thou  
goest:

Fair Jessica shall be my torch-bearer.

**(Act II Scene iv)**

“Fair Jessica shall be my torch-bearer” clearly indicates that she is going to be the guiding star to him, implying that the darkness from the life of Lorenzo will go away if Jessica enters his life “gold and jewels she is furnish'd with.”

Let us look at these lines of Lorenzo:

‘If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven,  
It will be for his gentle daughter's sake’  
(Act II Scene iv)

The idea of Lorenzo from these lines is that Shylock, who is a Jew, will hardly have a chance to get an entry into Heaven. What is the crime or unpardonable sin that he has committed to be denied permission to enter Heaven? Lending money to those who are in need of money and imposing a huge amount of interest on the amount of money that he lends!!! If at all he gets a chance ‘to come to heaven’, it will be because of his daughter. Is Jessica so influential that she will be able to get her father an entry into heaven? If collecting interest on the lent-money is a crime, can't allowing one's self to enjoy the hard-earned wealth of others be a criminal activity?

Money-mindedness cannot be a bad quality. Thiruvalluvar has rightly stated about the importance of wealth. He says ‘porul illarkku ivvulagam illagi yangu.’ (Kural: 247) ‘There is no place on earth for those without money.’ When that is the practicality and reality of existence, why is it that Shylock alone is hated and considered to an obnoxious person for loving money, when other important characters of the play are proved to be money-minded too? The answer is very simple if we understand the

term ‘collective unconscious’ introduced by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung.

Let us approach the play “the Merchant of Venice” with the theory of Carl Jung’s ‘collective unconscious.’ Shylock is a Jew. He is a prosperous merchant in Venice. Just because he is a Jew, he is hated by all other characters that do not belong to Judaism. It is a kind of ‘racial hatredness’ that drives them to detest Shylock. As we read the harsh words of Antonio, when he meets Shylock seeking financial assistance, we understand how angry he is with Shylock for no valid and reasonable reason. He goes to Shylock to borrow money from him to help his ‘prodigal’ friend Bassanio. A borrower is supposed to politely request a money-lender but Antonio does not show any sign of politeness and civility instead he is rude, authoritative and arrogant.

#### ANTONIO

I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.  
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not  
As to thy friends; for when did friendship  
take  
A breed for barren metal of his friend?  
But lend it rather to thine enemy,  
Who, if he break, thou mayst with better  
face  
Exact the penalty.

#### (Act I Scene iii)

On many occasions, Shylock is being subjected to despicable humiliations and abuses by Antonio for being money-minded. But he never ever utters a foul word to his ‘spendthrift’ friend, Bassanio. Being a spendthrift is as condemnable as being a money-minded. Bassanio is also

equally money-minded. In spite of knowing pretty well that Bassanio goes to Belmont with the sole and determined intension of marrying the 'richly left' Portia and that it is the sheer money-mindedness on the part of Bassanio that drives him to do so, Antonio is not at all angry with him as he is with Shylock for the same reason. Antonio neither dislikes it nor minds it. Basically it is the racial memory that Antonio has inherited from his predecessors that is responsible for his hatred towards Shylock, who happens to be a Jew. Not only Antonio, almost all the important characters of the play hate him. There has been discomfiture between the two races ever since the spilt: the Jews and the Christianity. The Christians in the play 'collectively' dislike Shylock and subject him to humiliation because they have inherited the racial memory to hate a Jew. Even when he is anguished as his daughter runs away, completely against his will, with Lorenzo to get secretly married, the friends of Lorenzo make fun of his unfortunate state. They enjoy the state of adversity of Shylock.

Another important term introduced by Carl Jung is 'Electra complex.' A daughter at her early stage of her growth starts to develop a kind of hatred towards her mother because she considers her mother as an adversary for her dad's consideration. Almost all daughters suffer from the psychological problem called 'father-fixation.' Every daughter is very close to her father or even closer than to the mother. Naturally, the daughters love their fathers. Sylvia Plath is said to have suffered from the "Electra complex." It is the

"father fixation" that Jane Austen must have suffered from and that should be the reason why the heroines of all her novels happen to be the favourites of their fathers.

Shakespeare seems to have, deliberately, projected Shylock as a villain, because basically Shakespeare himself was a Christian and we find the 'racial memory' present in him which has driven him to hate a Jew. When every daughter likes her father so much, Shakespeare, in the play, has made Jessica, the daughter, to hate her father Shylock. It is a deliberate attempt on the part of Shakespeare: an 'expression of personality' in the words of T.S.Eliot. There seems to be no valid reason for Jessica to hate her father. She considers the home as a hell because she considers Shylock as a devil or a Satan.

### **JESSICA**

Alack, what heinous sin is it in me  
To be ashamed to be my father's child!  
But though I am a daughter to his blood,  
I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,  
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,  
Become a Christian and thy loving wife.

### **(Act II Scene iii)**

The racial memory or the collective unconscious is the root cause of every important character in the play to hate a Jew. Ever since the rift between the Jews and the Christians, there has been a strong dislike to each other. From their fore-parents they have inherited this idea of dislike and that is what we witness in the play.

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