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DECIPHERING THE OTHER: 
IDENTIFICATION, SOCIAL MOBILITY, AND CONSTRUCTIONS 
OF FEMININITY IN SHAKE SPEARE

by

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ABSTRACT

Deciphering the Other:
Identification, Social Mobility, and Constructions of Femininity in Shakespeare

by

Marie Albertine van Elk

In response to economic and social transformations of the period, early modern authors obsessively investigated the significance of upward and downward social mobility. Identification, in the sense of determining someone’s identity, is a crucial measure of the permeability of class and gender boundaries: when it becomes impossible to tell who someone is, the mechanisms that keep individuals in their proper place have broken down. This dissertation examines Shakespearean scenes of misidentification and recognition to uncover the ramifications of a dramatic situation that draws on an early modern fear of encountering the unknown other in a rapidly changing world. The Comedy of Errors and The Winter's Tale feature thematically central examples of (mis)identification in the city and at court, which I consider in relation to representations of social identity and identification in cony-catching pamphlets and courtesy literature of the period.

Women and socially mobile characters are central to Shakespeare’s scenes of identification. Their presence poses unsettling questions about the possibility of a secure
social order and a stable subjectivity within that order. Shakespeare’s plays set up a parallel between misidentification and suspicion of female sexuality, so that ultimately questions of social instability and class are resolved through the reinstatement of the family. Recognition scenes attempt to fix, or, to use an early modern term, “decipher,” the unreliable other.

Misidentification and recognition in Shakespeare’s plays represent the social order in opposing ways. While misidentification entertains the possibility that performative acts produce identity, recognition puts forward a natural order that is merely reflected by identification. Performance is central to both, but whereas in one it is fundamental to identification and destructive of certainties, in the other it is presented as secondary and conducive to harmony. Such contradictions are marked by deliberate generic shifts that show the difficulty of resolving the questions posed in scenes of misidentification. Shakespeare’s ambiguous endings point to resolution, but fail to eliminate the instability of social position, caused by a lasting problem with interpretation of the other.
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This dissertation is dedicated to Charlotte Kelleher and Patricia Rees.
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INTRODUCTION

Cultural, Historical, and Theoretical Implications of Identification

The popularity of narratives of imposture, mistaken identity, doubling, disguise, family separation, and romantic recognition in Shakespeare’s day points to a widespread cultural fascination with identification and misidentification. Shakespeare’s work features numerous scenes of identification and misidentification, drawing on classical, medieval, and Renaissance sources that center on such moments. His use of identification ranges from minor exchanges, such as Queen Margaret’s deliberate, humiliating misidentification of the Duchess of Gloucester (“I cry you mercy, madam; was it you?”) in 2 Henry VI, to the long question-and-answer scene that is needed before Pericles can say to Marina, “Thou art my child.” What made these scenes so fascinating to early modern audiences and therefore vital elements to the producers of dramatic entertainment? My dissertation aims to suggest answers to this question, to analyze the dramatic uses of identification, to explore the significance of identification in cultural, historical, and social terms, and uncover the patterns in the representation of identification in Shakespeare’s œuvre.

1.

The term identification has widespread currency in psychoanalytic theory and criticism, based on the Freudian sense of the word, which can be traced to the first entry in the OED: “the making, regarding, or treating of a thing as identical with another.” By contrast, my use of the term is based on the second entry: “the determination of identity;
the action or process of determining what a thing is; the recognition of a thing as being what it is.” Recognition is the repetition of this process, i.e. the process “of identifying what has been known before” (OED, 7). Identification and recognition spill over into each other's definitions. Both involve not only the determination of identity but also social acts of acknowledgment and the treatment of a person as having a particular nature. The OED glosses recognition as repeated identification but also as, “The action of acknowledging as true, valid, or entitled to consideration; formal acknowledgment as conveying approval or sanction of something; hence, notice or attention accorded to a thing or person” (4). The processes of identification and recognition, the dictionary makes clear, take place on two levels: the external, physical, objective level on the one hand and the personal, psychological, and social level on the other.

Shakespeare's plays show that identification is only rarely purely a matter of determining identity on the external level only. Naming is a speech act that always involves larger issues. A direct request for identification in Shakespeare's plays frequently takes the form of the question “What are you?” This question points to a parallel between determining outward identity and assessing the other's true character. Purely external identification, therefore, tends to signify some form of recognition, the acknowledgment of a person's social and political standing or psychological claims. Likewise, misidentification, or the attachment of the wrong name to a person, and misrecognition, or the wrong assessment of a person's social standing and inwardness, are implicated in one another in Shakespeare's plays. When Othello asks Desdemona, “Why, what are thou?” (4.2.35), he shows that misidentification and misrecognition are two sides of the same coin. When Henry V tells Falstaff, “I know thee not, old man” at
the end of 2 Henry IV (5.5.45), he is using misidentification to undo his ties to the world of Falstaff and induce others to see him as a suitable king. Identification, then, performs complicated functions for both the person who is identified and the person who identifies.

The concept of subjectivity that emerges from representations of identification depends to a large extent on the role accorded to the body. Is identification a question of noticing the truth made manifest by outward signs or is it an active process of interpretation and representation? The body and its material traces are always at the heart of identification scenes in Shakespeare, and its reliability as a source of information about identity and truthfulness tends to be a real question. Shakespeare’s plays stage identification to examine the relation between outward and inward and between physical identification and psychological and social recognition. For this reason, identification is both central to subjectivity and to the social order in a larger sense.

The argument of this dissertation is that Shakespeare’s scenes of misidentification and recognition test and reconstruct the social order in specific ways. If identification does not merely reflect stable identities already in place but is prone to error, then the question becomes what the basis for identity is in the first place. King Lear’s gradual loss of a coherent sense of self takes, for this reason, the form of a call for identification: “Who is it that can tell me who I am?” (1.4.205). Such moments show that misidentification and misrecognition “denaturalize” identity. They present identification and identity not as predetermined but as achieved, capable of being subverted, and contingent on individual action and social recognition rather than being.
Recognition eliminates such social fluidity by pointing to the body as a source of transparent evidence of identity. In recognition scenes, display leads naturally to the appreciation of someone's "quality," a word used in the period to embrace both the social status and the inwardness and nature of an individual, to show that the two should be inseparable. Recognition scenes use identification for the purposes of reconciliation, harmony, and communal acknowledgment of individuals to restore a natural, divinely inspired order.

Performance is central to all identification in Shakespeare. Scenes of misidentification and recognition present subjectivity and social position as a product of performance. While the notion of performance I am employing here is closely linked to the theater, I am not arguing that such scenes always reflect self-consciously on themselves as theater. Instead, my use of the term performance is in part inspired by Judith Butler's idea of performativity. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler writes, "performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes a temporal condition for the subject." This definition is useful to my conception of identification scenes because they stage subjectivity as not a natural given, but a product of repeated acts and exchanges.

Butler's definition implies that subjectivity is a process rather than a completed state, produced in a series of acts rather than a static concept. Her argument in *Bodies That Matter* goes further in that she shows that matter itself, seemingly fixed and given, is a product of performance. In a less philosophical way, misidentification makes this
proposition tantalizing evident by staging the disruption of subjectivity by means of performance, and making the uniqueness of the body that might fix identity irrelevant. The idea of subjectivity as the product of a repeated performance means that a simple substitution of one body for another can reveal the workings of the process and the difficulty of controlling it through conscious action. Recognition, by contrast, draws on elaborate performances but represses its own performativity by making the performances seem natural and true. The communities formed and restored through recognition, do so by locating only certain social identities as a product of performance. When Hermione is recognized at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, her performance as a statue manifests the truth about her, whereas the earlier performativity of the courtly scenes obscure it, as we see in Leontes's interpretation of her contributions to the courtly dialogue. Shakespeare's endings are ambiguous in that they allow both for the ultimate denial of performance in creating identity and for an acknowledgement that this denial itself takes the form of an elaborate performance.

2.

There is as yet no sustained theoretical account of identification. The closest we get to a theoretical approach is a brief moment in Louis Althusser's famous essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Explaining interpellation as the "hailing" of the subject, Althusser illustrates the concept by comparing it to ordinary moments of identification. He mentions, "the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" to conclude that "By halting, the individual becomes a subject because he
recognizes that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him.” Althusser shows that private moments of identification are equally ideological:

when we recognize somebody of our (previous) acquaintance ((re)-
connaissance) in the street, we show him that we have recognized him (and have recognized that he has recognized us) by saying to him ‘Hello, my friend’, and shaking his hand (a material ritual practice of ideological recognition in everyday life—in France, at least; elsewhere there are other rituals). In this preliminary remark and these concrete illustrations, I only wish to point out that you and I are always already subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects.⁶

Althusser makes clear that even such seemingly insignificant social practices as everyday identification have an important impact on the individual’s sense of self. They remind the individual that he or she is a “unique” subject and in doing so, interpellate the subject into an ideology that produces subjects in order to reproduce the economic relations of production. Althusser’s examples suggest that identification may have slightly different implications depending on the position of the person being identified and the person doing the identifying. In the case of the friend, identification reassures the identified person of their relationship; in the case of the police officer it reminds the identified person of the fact that he or she is subject to the law. But Althusser’s purpose in mentioning these examples as instances of interpellation seems to be that the two
in fact similar. In both cases, identification is shown to perform a central role in maintaining order and confirming the person's status as the subject of ideology. Through being named, naming the other, and performing social rituals of recognition, the subject is given a place in the social order, an experience perhaps perceived as comforting in the second and threatening in the first example, but inevitable in both.

As many have recognized, Althusser's view of ideology does not allow for struggle or contradiction. These examples do not take into account what happens when such processes go awry. What if the police "hails" the wrong person? What if the friend you think you recognize turns out to be an impostor? What happens in such cases to Althusser's argument that "you and I are always already subjects"? Is the actual identity of the person hailed or the friend greeted irrelevant to the process by which someone becomes a subject? In other words, is the process of interpellation independent of whether identity is "guaranteed"? Following poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory, Catherine Belsey defines the subject in linguistic terms: "To be a subject is to have access to signifying practice, to identify with the 'I' of the utterance and the 'I' who speaks." Such a definition highlights the idea that subjectivity is an effect of language and a form of misrecognition. It requires the denial of the gap between the person speaking (the subject of the enunciation) and the 'I' spoken about (the subject of the utterance). In Lacanian terms, such misrecognition is a consequence of the entry from the imaginary into the symbolic; the subject comes into being with the assumption of language and the perception of difference between the self and other.

Whether one bases one's examination of the processes of identification on Foucault, Lacan, or Althusser, the conclusion must be that identification confirms the
central role of language (and naming) in producing the subject. By pointing to the
tendency of scenes of identification to problematize subjectivity, I am not suggesting
that such scenes tell us that there is an “outside” to ideology, power, or language as
defined by postmodern theory. However, they remind us that when literary (or other)
representations stage such moments, they defamiliarize the ordinary, showing the
impact of social practice and rituals on consciousness. They make clear that it is
possible to contemplate a situation in which the ‘I’ of the utterance is decidedly not the
‘I’ of the enunciation, and deliberately so, so that subjectivity itself, as it is produced in
social exchange and language, turns out to have a fragile basis.

A recent feminist collection entitled Feminist Readings of Early Modern
Culture: Emerging Subjects, offers a conception of the subject that can accommodate
such questions. Focusing on issues of historical representation, the editors, Valerie
Traub, Lindsey Kaplan, and Dympna Callaghan, assert that “it is less that the modern
subject came into being in the early modern period than that the terms of the subject’s
intelligibility were reconfigured during two hundred years of economic, political,
epistemological, and social upheaval.” Traub, Kaplan, and Callaghan employ the
phrase “emerging subject,” to show that the subject is always in process, shifting, and
unsettled, rather than complete, stable, and fixed. Their title refers to the idea of the
subject as emerging in the early modern period and the notion of the subject as always
in the process of emerging. The idea of the emerging subject makes room for a number
of theoretical approaches to subjectivity that have long been considered incompatible. If
we see subjectivity as emerging rather than always already in place, we can account for
contradictions, subtle transformations in, and disruptions of this process. It suggests that
perceptions of the self are capable of shifting and that the formation of the subject is a multiple, complex process, depending on the nature of the social, cultural, and historical situation.\textsuperscript{11}

Moreover, the idea of the emerging subject allows us to explain the performative element that Shakespeare's plays foreground in scenes of identification in general. If we agree that social exchange has a meaningful effect on subjectivity, then we need to consider both how identification as a form of exchange is socially and culturally constructed and how it may allow for agency and performance. In the simplest terms, we can think of identification as a speech act that names a person. Naming, Althusser claims, is a central part of a larger ideology that determines that individuals must be named in order to be recognized as a part of a social structure; the values attached to that name are themselves socially and culturally determined. Moreover, as Shakespeare's plays show, attaching the wrong name to someone or failing to attach a name to someone may transform that person's sense of self and make us see that naming is a form of representation that can be motivated, manipulated, and predetermined in different ways.

Shakespeare's scenes of identification put forward conflicting ideas of subjectivity. In juxtaposing fixed and "emerging" subjectivities, Shakespeare's work accommodates the idea of the subject as both "always already" and emerging. Unless we look at the endings of plays as the final word in subjectivity, the work overall seems to treat subjectivity as differently constructed in different situations, sometimes fixed and sometimes prone to usurpation, depending on the dramatic, social, and emotional circumstances. The notion of the emerging subject can help us understand why
identification is such an important theme in these plays, while Shakespeare’s scenes of identification can show us how social exchange shapes subjectivity. Each exchange contributes in a complicated manner to subjectivity, whether in terms of gender, class, sexuality, race, or other less easily classifiable elements that make up a sense of self. The effects also depend on the response of those involved. The impostor taking the place of the friend may think of himself as a “concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subject,” but he must at least appreciate the fact that the friend is not. A character may think of himself as irreplaceable, but if his brother is persistently mistaken for him, the audience knows that he is not.

This is not to say that identification is entirely random. Social exchange itself is informed at least in part by predictable social, cultural, economic, linguistic, and psychological factors. Shakespeare’s scenes of identification at times show exchange to be determined in advance by cultural constructions of others, and at times that these very constructions, if we see them not as truths but as customs or cultural fictions, open up the possibility for performativity. While we can detect larger influences at work in determining identification, the concept of the emerging subject assumes the potential for agency. If someone can manipulate his or her identification, then the individual has steered the process of being and becoming a subject in a way that affects not only the identifying party but also the social order in a larger sense. The audience watching scenes of misidentification will realize that common sense knowledge can be taken out of context and examined for what it reveals about our sense of self and the society of which we are a part. Dramatic scenes of identification, in sum, make visible those
operations of language, ideology, and power that are supposed to remain invisible in order to perform their task.

Dramatic and non-dramatic representations of identification entertain possibilities that allow us to consider the varying ways in which "the subject" is emerging and as such is open to improvisation. Even the recognition scenes that end up positing the fixity of the subject and decisively "interpelling" subjects cannot help but retain an ambiguity about identity. They invariably run the risk of showing in the mere fact of staging such lengthy scenes that subjectivity is in need of confirmation. The audience may read recognition as clear evidence of the "always already" of identity and return home assured in the knowledge that disruption was merely temporary and never serious. But they may also consider that the subject has been made to look precarious in light of the events that make such scenes necessary.

3.

The early modern period saw a concerted effort on the part of the state to identify those who were not readily identifiable. Historians have traced the importance of the period's population growth, urbanization, emerging capitalism, economic depression, and the concomitant changes in the social structure of England. After the reformation, English society saw an unprecedented degree of social mobility, both in terms of class and geography. Elizabethans and Jacobeans moved more than their predecessors, particularly to London. The exponential growth of the capital has been primarily explained through migration rather than population growth, although the population did grow quickly in the course of the period. In class terms, mobility is more difficult to
assess. According to Penry Williams, "distinctions between gentlemen and commons were generally fixed and recognized as desirable" although "Differences of rank at the upper end were less clearly marked and harder to preserve." Yet, according to Wallace MacCaffrey, "there was an unceasing scramble to cross the dividing line which separated the gentlemen ... from the mere yeoman or freeholder." It is clear that upward social mobility was more widespread than it had been, enhanced by the spread of wealth after the reformation and reached new heights under James I, who sold a relatively large number of offices and titles. Meanwhile, as the presence of masterless men and women in city and countryside shows, economic depression, agricultural developments, inflation, and unemployment led to downward social mobility and widespread poverty.

Early modern authors disagreed on the question of the resilience of the social order in the face of such changes. Contemporary social historians have brought out the importance of issues of social stability to sixteenth-century audiences, but they have not reached a consensus with regard to the stability of early modern England, and London in particular. Some, like Peter Clark and Paul Slack, point to political and social inequality, unemployment, and poverty as sources for unrest; revisionists, such as Steven Rappaport, emphasize the decentralized, participatory nature of government to argue that London was, unlike its continental counterparts, a relatively peaceful community. In a well-known essay on gender relations, D. E. Underdown has asserted that "It could no longer be safely assumed that all Englishmen and women were bound together in that interlocking network of households and communities on which, according to the prevailing orthodoxy, stability depended." Martin Ingram, on the other
hand, has argued that this depiction of a "crisis" in gender relations does not match the available evidence from court records. While these questions will undoubtedly continue to divide historians, urbanization, religious reformation, economic instability, and social mobility have made their mark on documents of the early modern period. Underdown's words, whether they accurately describe historical realities or not, may at least be taken to characterize the perception of numerous early moderns.

In *English Society 1580-1680*, Keith Wrightson arrives at a complex conclusion with regard to English society that explains the opposing ways in which the historical evidence has been evaluated. He sees a simultaneous development towards integration of local communities into the nation and towards more complex social differentiation within those communities. While these communities were still small-scale and held together by close ties of patronage and respect, he argues that they had been "penetrated by forces which weakened their localism and gave sharper edge to social stratification."

English society was marked by "Sharper distinctions of education, religion, attitudes, beliefs and manner ... to reinforce the polarizing effects of demographic and economic development." Rank and status had become highly complicated. Wrightson describes them as "compounds of several elements of social estimation in varying proportions, including (in no particular order of significance) birth, conferred title, wealth and the nature of that wealth, life-style, occupation, form of land tenure, tenure of positions of authority and legal status." Such complications explain the general interest in exploring questions of social position and the dramatic use of scenes of identification and misidentification for this very purpose. Moments of identification involve not a simple discovery of name, status, and rank, but a complicated process of understanding
and assessing an identity consisting of a large number of aspects of personality and social place.

As much writing of the period testifies, many early moderns felt that social position was less fixed than it had been, which in turn meant that identity more generally was considered less secure. The pamphlets and tracts on vagrancy, cross-dressing, playgoing, and dress-codes reveal a desire to assign fixed identities to those who seem difficult to place in terms of class, gender, and profession. There was a fear that vagrants, counterfeit messengers, cony-catchers and others capitalized on the gullibility of a population that still believed in readily identifiable others. An aside in the popular pamphlet on cross-dressing, *Haec Vir*, mentions the customary approach to geographically mobile strangers:

> even at this day it is a general received custom amongst our English that when we meet or overtake any man in our travel or journeying, to examine him whither he rides, how far, to what purpose, and where he lodgeth. Nay, and with that unmannerly boldness of inquisition that it is a certain ground of a most insufficient quarrel not to receive a full satisfaction of those demands which go far astray from good manners or comely civility.

The pamphlet presents the desire for clear identification as so strong that it may even lead to violence if the stranger refuses to submit to an “inquisition.” *Haec Vir* mentions this example in order to devalue custom and to show that prescriptions for gendered apparel are equally unnatural and “most fantastic.” That this description of everyday
practice occurs in the midst of an argument on cross-dressing shows the connection between identification in general and examining figures whose position in the social structure is unclear.

State policy showed a similar desire for stability and control through social differentiation. Lee Beier has argued that the masterless man was a threat to the state because he “represented mutability, when those in power longed for stability.”²⁴ He describes how the state attempted to control masterless men primarily by tracing the movement of wandering groups and requiring from the poor and migrants rudimentary forms of identification. The strategies used by the state to counter a general social fluidity included the requirement of licenses, passports, briefs, and badges of various kinds to legitimize the presence of wandering individuals. As punishment for repeated unwarranted wandering, vagrants and rogues could be branded with letters or bored a hole in the ear to ensure effective identification in the future.²⁵

A number of Elizabethan proclamations address the difficulty and necessity of identification in alarmist terms, including traveling players without license in the larger category of rogues and vagabonds. Much of 38 Elizabeth I, a 1596 proclamation entitled “Ordering Punishment of Persons with Forged Credentials,” is about counterfeit messengers from her Majesty’s chamber who used the Queen’s name to profit from unsuspecting citizens. The text also dwells on the larger problem of “vagabond persons that either themselves do make or cause counterfeit passports to be made and licenses to beg and gather alms.” There is a special consideration of those who pretend to have served the Queen as soldiers. To eliminate the problem, the pamphlets asks the people to “consider well of the said licenses and finding cause to suspect the same they shall
bring them before the next justice of the peace." The Elizabethan subject, in other words, is told to be perpetually on guard when encountering individuals who are difficult to place and identify, as the state attempts to set up an informal system of local policing. 

Readers of rogue literature were given the same advice. Works like Gilbert Walker's *A Manifest Detection of Dice-Play* (1552), John Aweley's *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561), Thomas Harman's *A Caveat for Common Cursitors* (1567), and especially Robert Greene's highly popular cony-catching pamphlets of the 1590s and beyond, capitalize on the problem of identification and the city-dwellers' fears of an unreliable, increasingly alien urban environment. The rogue books invoke these fears in a complex manner: they tell highly entertaining narratives of imposture and trickery of gullible, wealthy citizens, by intelligent, amusing tricksters and warn the citizens of the commonwealth to avoid these morally depraved, devilish individuals. In the endless variation of tricks employed by cony-catchers and the intricate system by which these tricksters operate, the books create a representation of identification as an intricate process that involves so many different aspects that it becomes impossible to control. Signs of identity turn out to be material and immaterial, ranging from apparel to gestures that normally signal familiarity or social equality. The vagrants have an uncanny ability to manipulate every aspect of this process and insert themselves into the social sphere of every member of the commonwealth, from a simple maidservant to a wealthy courtier. For this reason, rogues and cony-catchers are shown to have an mysterious influence on others, associated with the supernatural powers of witches, devils, mountebanks, and jugglers.
The rogue pamphlets explain this ability by pointing to the trickster’s position of marginality, from which he may analyze the workings of social exchange. Other texts account for the problem of identification in more strictly religious terms. In a 1615 treatise, *The vanitie of the eye*, George Hakewill assembles a range of conventional arguments about the eye that would have been commonplace for Shakespeare in the 1590s. Hakewill highlights the pitfalls of the eye as an instrument for the assessment of the other, calling it instead “an immediat instrument, not only of wantonnes, theft, idolatry, jealousie, pride, contempt, curiosity, envy, witchcraft, & in a manner of the whole rebellion, & apostasie, as well of the body, as the minde.” He cites ancient and biblical authorities to show the eye to be vulnerable to all kinds of devious influence and emotion. The eye is, he claims, a well-spring of sinful behavior, prone to temptation by sorcerers, witches, conjurers, Catholic priests, and the devil. Therefore, Hakewill argues that “the eye is not usefull for the gathering of knowledge as is pretended; whether we consider it absolutely in it selfe, or respectively in regard of hearing.” This is true because, he argues, the eye is only capable of taking in externals of things, “their crust, and surface” (E5-E5v).

Michael O’Connell has analyzed such mistrust of the eye as part of a larger post-reformation discourse that devalues the visual as part of a larger anti-Catholicism. This is evident in Hakewill’s work, which contains much invective against Catholicism as well as a chapter entitled, “That the popish religion consists more in eie service then the reformed.” Such arguments on the vulnerability of the eye can be found equally, O’Connell shows, in the anti-theatrical literature of the period. Hakewill himself explains “how the generall rebellion of the body is occasioned by eye” and mentions not
only "lewde masking" and "women marching through the open streetes in mans apparrrell, and the men in womens" but also "our common Mercenarie interludes here at home, wherat the greatest part, would surely otherwise rather blush, then laugh; but that they holde that place in a manner priviledged" (B9v-B11v). This treatment of the eye directly conflicts with the idea conveyed in cony-catching pamphlets that expertise, an understanding of the classes of rogues and their language, and a close inspection of body parts may reveal the truth about the rogue's identity. In Hakewill's treatise and the pamphlets, then, we find two conflicting approaches to the issue of identification, both based on a perception of identification as subject to manipulation. While Hakewill voices a puritan mistrust of the eye in general, the cony-catching texts try, in a more legalistic manner, to highlight the eye as an instrument of knowledge, so long as it is capable of focusing on minute detail.

The eye, if not used with the expertise of the narrator of the cony-catching pamphlets, becomes a dangerous "opening" in the body. The rogue pamphlets show that the ear is equally central to identification. The trickster's assumption of another's identity is always based on his ability to speak the language that accompanies different social positions. While this suggests that language may perform on a similar level as material evidence of identity, it may also manipulate perception. We see this in Much Ado About Nothing in the necessity for Don John to prepare Claudio and Don Pedro with rhetorically effective language for the spectacle of Hero's adultery. This emphasis on the importance of language to identification reveals, both in the trickster pamphlets and in Shakespeare's scenes of identification, that performance is crucial to the process of identity construction. A talented performer is able to muster the language that he
needs to accompany the clothes he wears and the gestures he makes to persuade his
audience of the truth of his identity and to ensure that his audience will automatically
identify him in accordance with his plan.31

The many narratives of misidentification known to and consumed by early
modern readers and playgoers are countered by English and continental romance
stories, found in popular works such as William Painter’s *The Palace of Pleasure*
(1575), Barnaby Riche’s *Farewell to Military Profession* (1581), and Greene’s own
*Pandosto* (1588). In such narratives, misidentification fulfills a very different role.
Rather than questioning the basis for identity, misidentification causes a temporary
suspension of identity in order to come eventually to a deeper, more forceful realization
of selfhood. As Susan Baker notes of romance disguises, such misidentification
moments function “as techniques of deferral, tactics that delay recognition in order to
intensify the strategic power of recognition.”32 Recognition is presented as the only
authoritative reading of individuals, who by virtue of their bodies and manner reveal
that their place in society is uniquely theirs. There may be confusion, switching of roles,
and loss of identity, but nobility, loyalty, and truth always ensure ultimate recognition
of the protagonists. Such characteristics provide no guarantee for a happy outcome in
cony-catching pamphlets and other stories of trickery, where, indeed, they tend to have
the opposite effect. Shakespeare’s plays bring together these two types of representation
of identification, the disruptive stories of misidentification and the escapist narratives of
recognition. In doing so, they combine two culturally significant approaches to the
question of identification, subjectivity, and the importance of the body to both.
This dissertation proposes that imposture, mistaken identity, disguise, correct initial identification, and recognition should all be studied in combination because they are all moments of examining the other and determining inwardness and truth through outward, physical presence and manner. Work on “mistaken identity” and recognition in Renaissance drama and Shakespeare has largely failed to explore the connections between these thematically related phenomena. Recognition has been given far less attention than mistaken identity, especially in recent criticism, perhaps because of the degree to which it is viewed as mere convention. Terence Cave writes, in his groundbreaking study Recognitions, that “Recognition is reputed to be an implausible contrivance, a shoddy way of resolving a plot the author can no longer control.” His study is a historical survey of philosophical and literary treatments of the subject, counterbalancing the work of Northrop Frye in which recognition is discussed for its universal significance. Both treat recognition not purely in terms of re-identification, but in the larger (Aristotelian) sense of a shift in knowledge that takes place at the end of texts. This means that their analysis of recognition is only marginally about re-identification in the sense discussed here. Because of their much wider use of the term recognition, or anagnorisis, the importance of re-identification in a specific cultural and historical context remains unexamined.

Much work on mistaken identity in Shakespeare has been subsumed under the heading of “role playing,” where it is usually discussed along with theatricality more generally, or limited to “disguise.” Muriel Bradbrook defines disguise broadly as “the substitution, overlaying or metamorphosis of dramatic identity, whereby one character
sustains two roles.” She argues for the importance of material appearance in revealing "the truth of identity," so that Shakespeare’s disguises paradoxically reveal truth rather than hiding it. A poststructuralist approach, such as can be seen in the work of Lloyd Davis, builds on this idea. However, where in Bradbrook the distinction between disguise and truth is maintained, this distinction is denied in Davis’s work. Rather than seeing disguise as revealing a “truth,” he highlights the extent to which it constructs character, itself a material term (used to denote writing in the early modern period). Davis expands his definition of disguise, then, to include all subjectivity. Both accounts are useful in discussing the ways in which “character” is produced in interpersonal encounters and through outward appearance. Yet, none of the work on either mistaken identity or disguise explores the connections between misidentification and recognition, the ways in which both construct subjectivity and the social order in a larger sense, and their centrality to the period’s discussions of class, gender, and identity.

New historicist criticism, which has shown little interest in recognition, takes on a perspective on disguise and mistaken identity that is similar to Davis’s. Mistaken identity is seen as a paradigm for subjectivity more generally because it reveals the material underpinnings of selfhood. Douglas Lanier discusses The Comedy of Errors in these terms in his “‘Stigmatical in making’: The Material Character of The Comedy of Errors,” one of the most significant readings of misidentification in The Comedy of Errors to have come out of new historicism. He provides a broad historical context for the play’s uses of misidentification. Dismissing those who focus on a private self in the play, Lanier explains the play’s use of misidentification by referring to the period’s
“larger cultural drive to determine identities by determining the range and meanings of their material manifestations.” This drive, he argues, has led to a fear of social mobility and an early modern “crisis of self-representation.” But precisely because of his failure to consider the importance of recognition at the end of the play, he ignores the ways in which the ending re-orders this community and fixes identity. For that reason, his treatment of subjectivity, as is the case in much new historicist work on disguise, overemphasizes the material aspects of selfhood.

Lanier bases this idea both on poststructuralist notions of subjectivity as the effect of materiality and on the idea of the early modern subject as a transitional figure. The most influential contribution to the history of the subject in recent years has been the new historicist and cultural materialist narrative of the historical development from a medieval, outward-based sense of self to the emergence of (bourgeois) interiority and individualism in the seventeenth century. This narrative follows in broad lines Jacob Burckhardt’s argument that the period saw the birth of the individual, though later critics do not value this development in his optimistic terms. Important theoretical explorations of early modern subjectivity such as Francis Barker’s The Tremulous Private Body and Catherine Belsey’s The Subject of Tragedy treat the transition from an outwardly defined, collective subjectivity towards an interior concept of self as a narrative of loss and increased, because internalized, oppression. Moreover, they explain the period’s new constructions of inwardness as a product of economic change, social transformation, and religious reformation. David Aers and other critics of this argument have stressed that such an account a-historically unifies the medieval period and disregards the “inwardness” in much medieval self-expression. These revisions
warn us of the danger of overemphasizing historical difference, which may lead to stereotyping and a careless treatment of texts that predate the early modern period.

In spite of the awareness on the part of important new historicists that "history" is composed of texts, much of this work on the subject loses its sense of the distinction between text and real. 42 Elizabeth Hanson, for instance, states in her introduction to her 1998 work on the early modern subject that our aim is to "recount the very real changes in what it meant to be a subject which took place in this period." 43 It is important to continue calling attention to the possibility and significance of tensions between the historical real and representations in texts. Our object of study should be the ways in which the subject is understood, discussed, and represented, and the effects of historical and cultural change on discursive understandings of the subject, without making any claims for the real, lived experience of early moderns. An appreciation of genre and the problematic status of textual evidence can help prevent such easy shifts from the text to the real.

The revisionist work on the early modern subject has provided some useful correctives to what has perhaps become too straightforward a narrative of the inception of the bourgeois subject. While acknowledging the validity of a broad view of historical change in perceptions of self and a shift towards a new concentration on interiority, I feel that we should look for ways to refine our perspective on discursive expressions of subjectivity in the period, without setting prior limitations on what the individual text may say. I aim to show that Shakespeare’s contribution to debates on identity is contradictory, a deliberate juxtaposing of different approaches to the subject to stage the problem without providing a secure answer. In other words, I present Shakespeare’s
plays as theoretical explorations of possibilities rather than orthodox or radical arguments about the social order or mimetic reflections of the early modern self. Shakespeare presents us with many different subjectivities. Assigning a representative status to one of the major tragic characters such as Hamlet ignores the spectrum of positions we find in the canon, let alone in the “real” world outside it.44

5.

The climax of the confusion in The Comedy of Errors comes when the two sets of twins appear on stage together, and the Duke declares, “One of these men is genius to the other: / And so of these, which is the natural man, / And which the spirit? Who deciphers them?” (5.1.333-35). If the audience expects an instantaneous resolution with the simultaneous appearance of the twins on stage, they are disappointed. Instead, the confusion seems to intensify as the Duke expresses his wonder at the spectacle of identical bodies. He voices the ancient belief that humans are accompanied by an attendant spirit. Like everyone else in the play so far, Solinus insists on the idea that only one of the two bodies can be the “natural” (i.e. human) body, and so he concludes that the other must be a supernatural presence. The binary opposition between natural and supernatural is intended to do away with this disturbing indistinguishability. The suggestion only adds to the general sense of bewilderment because the Duke provides the wrong terms with which to decipher the twins. He is answered by the twins themselves: the two Dromios each claim their own name (“I, sir, am Dromio,” 5.1.336 and 337), and the two travelers identify Egeon without explaining the mystery of their
own twinship. The problem is not solved until Emilia's recognition of her husband begins the collective process of retelling the events of the day. The mother's strong role in reassigning proper identities and the need for reinstatement of the parents' marriage before the errors are understood suggest that the family, not the law, provides the interpretive framework within which the twins' presence can be deciphered.45

According to the OED, "decipher" had a range of meanings in the 1590s, covering different processes of signification. *The Riverside Shakespeare* glosses the word as "distinguishes," but in doing so loses the sense of "conversion" into language, the reliance on the outward to determine what is within, and the association with writing that is present in the Elizabethan usage. Its primary meaning, "to convert into ordinary writing," combines translation into what can be conventionally understood with interpretation. Other meanings that were current according to the OED include detection and discovery, and the process by which outward signs themselves indicate or give the key to "a person's character." Building on this, a final early modern meaning for deciphering is representation ("by some kind of character, cipher, or figure," 7). The word, in sum, combines different ways of attributing meaning and sets up parallels between different forms of representation and interpretation.

The Duke's use of the term in relation to identification is highly pertinent. We may think of identification as a clear-cut procedure in which outward signs indicate or "reveal" the identity of an individual. But identification can also be a more arduous process of detection and discovery. The act of identification always involves language; its purpose is to attach the correct name and linguistic description to what is outside the realm of language. The primary sense of deciphering highlights this aspect of
identification. It is the reading of outward signs to assign a name to a body, in order to make it “legible.” Yet, as the dictionary entry makes clear, we can also see identification as a form of representation, attributing a meaning that is no less a “cipher, character, or figure” than the body itself. Such a radical possibility suggests that through identification we only get closer to another representation or a fictional idea of the real, without eliminating the mystery of the body.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, deciphering is linked with identification and with writing as a means to turn the body into a legible sign of identity. Only moments before the Duke asks his question, Egeon explains his son’s failure to identify him by saying that, “careful hours with time’s deformed hand / Have written strange defeatures in my face.” The presentation of his body as a sheet on which time has written its deformations is an attempt to make others, and Antipholus in particular, reread his body, seeing his true identity in its outward signs. Egeon’s attempt to decipher his own body aims to familiarize the unfamiliar and to make what is obscure seem legible. In the case of the twins, deciphering is also intended to render the mysterious understandable. Emilia’s identification of Egeon initiates the deciphering of the twins by the community as a whole, so that “error” becomes a shared, temporary aberration, rather than a permanent condition.

Deciphering in the form of identification is a claim to interpretive authority and control over a body. Because deciphering is frequently associated with identification in the period and because the word’s meanings bring together different processes of attributing meaning to material signs of identity, the Duke’s line in *The Comedy of Errors* is central to my dissertation. Deciphering the other is a major concern in
Shakespeare's plays and, I argue, of the early modern period. At the risk of uncovering yet another Renaissance "obsession," my argument is that the drama's recurrent staging of identification scenes should be seen as part of a larger cultural dynamic. It is used in literary and non-literary texts to think about what it means to encounter another person and what such encounters can tell us about the nature of identity.

In this dissertation, I place Shakespeare's scenes of identification in the context of larger cultural debates in the Renaissance about identity, class, and the social order. I concentrate on The Comedy of Errors and The Winter's Tale because they show Shakespeare working with identification at very different stages in his career, and they reflect on the subject from the different perspectives of the city and the court. In order to provide the necessary contexts for an appreciation of the importance of identification in these settings, I examine the cony-catching pamphlets, with their endless stories of misidentification in the early modern city, and courtly conduct literature, which contains cultural constructions of class and gender that help us understand what identification may mean at court.

In the first two chapters, I analyze the dramatic uses of identification in The Comedy of Errors. Chapter one places misidentification in this early comedy in the context of Robert Greene's cony-catching pamphlets of the 1590s. Rather than treating these pamphlets as sources for Shakespeare, I argue that their concentration on identification and misidentification reveals the importance of misidentification as a gauge of social stability. The rogue books expose the urban social scene as a mutable network within which identification can be manipulated. The Comedy of Errors presents us with a social order that is unstable even in the absence of intentional imposture. The
misunderstandings in the play result not only from the presence of identical bodies, but more importantly from the treatment they receive, which locates the consequences of misidentification in social exchange rather than in the materiality the bodies themselves. The misunderstandings originate in cultural expectations that govern relationships, preventing the source of the confusion from being uncovered.

The second chapter studies the ways in which the resolution to the confusion in *The Comedy of Errors* is achieved. I argue that the final scene fails to solve the problem of identity, agency, and voice raised in the main plot. The play's frame constructs an idealized, small-scale community in which individuals assume positions based on their place within the family. Thus, recognition counters the possibility of imposture and usurpation of place entertained in the farcical events that preceded the final scene. Yet, it can only do so by shifting into a generically different mode of representation, consonant with romance narratives rather than trickster stories. The same physical evidence that was cause for disruption in the main plot now becomes the basis for recognition. The body is converted into a transparent source of knowledge about the other. Social exchange becomes a ritual, and language is treated as transparent, no longer a rhetorical means to manipulate social position, but a repetition of factual truths. The questions raised about relationships early on are avoided. In the context of these shifts in representation, this chapter examines the role of women. The play uncovers a parallel between misidentification and suspicions of female sexuality, so that ultimately questions of social instability are resolved along with and through the reinstatement of the family and the confirmation of female chastity, rather than by interrogating the cultural assumptions that make orderly exchange impossible.
The third chapter focuses on *The Winter's Tale* and its scenes of misidentification and recognition, particularly in the treatment of Perdita, Hermione, and Autolycus, the slippery character who is both rogue and ex-courtier. An analysis of the courtesy theory of the period reveals that social mobility at court is made possible by the court's emphasis on rhetorical, verbal performance. This has a destructive effect when the playful freedom afforded in courtly exchange is extended to include women. The misidentification and rejection of Perdita as a royal princess shows that such a performative arena undermines security about social position. The recognition of Perdita and Hermione serve an important ideological purpose, making possible a reformation of the social order as based on birth and eliminating the possibility of further misidentification. Similarly, Autolycus's playful manipulations of identification are done away with at the end, when he makes recognition possible yet is unable to reinsert himself into the courtly structure. Here too, deciphering the other through the body effects reconciliation. As in other plays by Shakespeare, the (female) body is ultimately placed center stage as a means to ground identity and prevent mobility, while the linguistic aspects of social disruption are left unaccounted for. Nonetheless, the body's presence is accompanied by an elaborate performance that suggests the court cannot escape performativity, even if it is presented as "natural."

In the coda, I turn to the famous case of Martin Guerre, a case of misidentification that has been used to make various arguments about the nature of the early modern subject. Martin Guerre's fate shows the cultural importance of the representation of identification to early modern culture and our own evaluations of such texts. It is also a narrative of potential adultery and upward mobility. The very parallel
at the heart of Shakespeare's use of identification is central to Martin Guerre's story, which reveals the need for deciphering both the bodies of impostor and victim, but also for determining the interiority of the wife, whose conflicted behavior leaves our estimation of her forever flawed.

This dissertation began with the question why women and socially mobile figures are so often at the center of dramatic scenes of identification. I argue that this is the case because identification is a crucial measure of stability in general. As is so often true in Shakespeare's plays, those who seem to be marginal are in fact central to authority because their obedience and their willingness to maintain their place of marginality is required for authority to function at all. The aim of this dissertation is to uncover the ramifications of a dramatic situation that is part of a larger cultural dynamic and that draws on a fear of encountering the unknown other at home, in the city, and on the road. The rapid transformation of early modern society due to urbanization, social mobility, and new forms of material and social exchange made such representations of interest to early modern playgoers and readers. Shakespeare's scenes of misidentification point to a dangerous instability at the heart of social position, caused by a lasting problem with interpretation of the other and the impossibility of unhindered linguistic exchange—issues that are not, and perhaps cannot, be addressed within the format of the recognition scene.
Notes

1 2 Henry VI, 1.3.143 and Pericles, 21.199. This and subsequent citations of Shakespeare, unless otherwise noted, are from The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 1997).

2 In Freudian analysis, Diana Fuss explains, identification is more specifically the recognition of the self in the other, a “psychical mechanism that produces self-recognition” and proceeds by means of “incorporation” of the love object. Cf. the slightly misleadingly entitled, Identification Papers (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1-2.

3 Recent technological developments in matters of identification, such as the use of DNA evidence, may suggest that identification as a process is rapidly becoming infallible as it is increasingly a matter of the body. But inside and outside the courtroom, identification evidence remains nonetheless subject to interpretation. That even such seemingly “fixed” evidence as DNA depends on an active process of selection and interpretation can be seen in such cases as the O.J. trial. Other cases frequently still have to proceed in the absence of forensic evidence and rely on less tangible and less reliable forms of identification. Cf. Willem A. Wagenaar, Identifying Ivan : A Case Study in Legal Psychology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988).

4 In King Lear, for instance, Gloucester uses “quality” to mean temperament or disposition, when he warns Lear of Cornwall’s “fiery quality” (2.4.86). The Herald asks Edgar to identify himself before he does battle with Edmund in these terms: “What are you? / Your name, your quality?” (5.3.117-18). Desdemona’s public declaration of love for Othello in the Folio version seems to combine both these senses: “My heart’s subdued / Even to the very quality of my lord” (1.3.249-50; the 1622 Quarto has “utmost pleasure” for “very quality”).


11 This conception of the subject owes, as many recent critical approaches do, much to Paul Smith’s work. In an attempt to combine Althusserian, Lacanian, Derridean, and feminist thought, he arrives at the notion that resistance and social action is possible when interpellation, a multiple process, results in multiple, conflicting subject positions. This gives the subject a perspective on ideology that can be radical, acknowledging the ways in which it is constructed and pointing in directions for social change. Cf. *Discerning the Subject*, Theory and History of Literature 55 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988).

36-42; 78-90. Sharpe claims that the capital was “seen as the symbol of upward social mobility” (84).


15 Still the most detailed account of social mobility in the period is Lawrence Stone, “Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700,” Past and Present 33 (1966): 16-55.


18 D.E. Underdown, “The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal
Authority in Early Modern England,” *Order and Disorder*, 116-36. 116. Martin Ingram, 


20 Wrightson, 22.


23 “Haec Vir,” 283.


27 Cf. my discussion of a moment in Harman’s *Caveat for Common Cursitors*, where
this former Justice of the Peace examines the seal on a license (p. 44).

28 A8r (10) of the third edition of The vanitie of the eye. First beganne for the Comfort of a Gentlewoman bereaved of her sight, and since upon occasion enlarged & published for the Common good (Oxford, 1615).


32 Baker, 306. Baker usefully distinguishes between four different types of disguises: cloaks and mask to hide one’s own identity, impersonation of another, the invention of a new identity, and the adoption of a role for a lengthy period of time and in front of different people (305). Distinctions between the four may of course not always be as neatly maintained as the classification suggests. Here, I am more concerned with the thematic and cultural meanings of moments at which disguised or undisguised characters are misidentified or recognized.

33 For important work on mistaken identity and disguise in Shakespeare, see Muriel Bradbrook, “Shakespeare and the Use of Disguise in Elizabethan Drama,” Essays in Criticism 2 (1952): 159-68; Anthony B. Dawson, Indirections: Shakespeare and the Art of Illusion (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1978), Thomas F. Van Laan, Role Playing


35 Bradbrook, 160.

36 Davis, 4. Davis claims that the period viewed character “as a discursive phenomenon, as a sign of personal identity, and as a bridge between individual existence and social surrounds that reveal fundamental connections between them despite their apparent separation (3).


38 Lanier in Miola, 302.

39 Cf. for a useful discussion, Elizabeth Hanson’s introduction to Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 24 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), esp. 7-16. If my discussion engages primarily with new historicism as a critical mode, it is because of its continuing
dominance in current criticism as well as what I see as its potential in offering fruitful readings of literary works, particularly if it is opened up to other ways of reading texts deriving from psycho-analysis and cultural materialism.

40 See for instance Catherine Belsey's discussion of Arden of Faversham. She sees consensual marriage (and therefore a type of marriage that allows for the interiority of the wife) as "a form of power more deadly still, and less visible" than older, more openly hierarchical constructions of marriage. Belsey, Subject, 129-145, esp. 144. Also, Francis Barker, The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995), in which Barker highlights what he sees as modernity's denial and objectification of the body. The question, rightly posed in such work as Katherine Eisaman Maus's Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1995), is why the concept of interiority cannot be understood in the terms offered by the period, rather than as mere intimations of the bourgeois humanist subject of the seventeenth century. The new historicist view, espoused by Belsey and Barker suggests that interiority can only be read in one way, as evidence of liberal humanism. This seems both to simplify the concept of interiority itself and to underestimate the complexity of the later representations of "bourgeois" subjectivity.


43 Hanson, 8-9. Cf. also Belsey's assertion that texts are a "possible place from which to begin an analysis of what it means to be a person, a man or a woman, at a specific historical moment" (*Subject*, 5).

44 This, of course, is not to say that we cannot and should not look for trends in representation either in Shakespeare or in the period in a larger sense. My claim is, after all, that there is a wider cultural fascination with the topic of identification. But this fascination, I argue, does not reveal a single concept of subjectivity, a general cultural crisis, or a even necessarily a larger narrative of transition. Identification and misidentification are popular tools used to ask questions of the self, class, and gender. It is the task of this dissertation to explore Shakespeare's scenes of identification for their specific, sometimes remarkably similar, and sometimes contradictory or ambiguous answers to these questions.

45 In her work on Mark Twain, Susan Gillman points out that identification is crucial so social order: "Without [social] differentiation, social order, predicated as it is on division—of class, race, gender—is threatened. Mark Twain championed the law as one agent of control that resolves confusions about identity, restoring and enforcing the fundamental distinctions of society.” Susan Kay Gillman, *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), 5.

46 5.1.299-300. Cf. chapter two for a discussion of the word "defeatures" (p. 129).
CHAPTER ONE

“They say this town is full of cozenage”:

Misidentification in The Comedy of Errors, the Cony-Catching Pamphlets, and Jack Juggler

In Plautus’s Menaechmi, the slave Messeniowarns his master, the traveling twin who has just arrived in Epidamnus, about the dangerous slanderers, flatterers, whores, “voluptuaries,” and drinkers who live in the city.¹ In his 1595 translation, William Warner makes Messeniowarning more pertinent to the interests of his early modern audience by adding a cony-catcher to this group. Elsewhere he even replaces Plautus’s “sycophanta” with “cony-catching villaines.”² By repeatedly translating the more general notions of slander and flattery into the historically and culturally specific idea of cony-catching, associated with early modern city life, Warner establishes a contemporary context for this Roman comedy. The translation was written in the early 1590s when the cony-catching pamphlets and rogue books by Robert Greene and others were widely read, going through numerous reprints.

It was also at the height of the popularity of rogue literature, that Shakespeare chose Menaechmi as his source for The Comedy of Errors. He was not the first to turn to Plautus when rogue literature was being widely read. Jack Juggler, the anonymous adaptation of Amphitruo, was composed not long after the publication of Gilbert Walker’s famous A Manifest Detection of Dice-Play (1552) and entered in the Stationers Register in 1562, the year after the publication of John Awdeley’s The
*Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561). With a trickster-rogue in the title role, the interlude is a successful example of the adaptation of a Plautine plot to an English setting—"Englishing" the Roman comedy—by blending classical material with rogue literature. *Jack Juggler* and Warner's translation make clear that an early modern audience, familiar with rogue texts and cony-catching narratives, could see a close link between unintentional misidentification and the possibility of cony-catching. While *The Comedy of Errors* features no intentional deception (as do *Jack Juggler* and *Amphitruo*), it is important that Shakespeare selected the Plautine plays at a time when stories of trickery were in the spotlight.

This chapter argues that *The Comedy of Errors* enters into a dialogue with contemporary cony-catching pamphlets. I am not suggesting that the pamphlets constitute a hitherto ignored source for Shakespeare's play. Instead, I aim to establish an intertextual relationship between the play and the pamphlets because Shakespeare's reworking of Plautus's comedies of misidentification and the popularity of the cony-catching books point to the importance of misidentification as a cultural fascination. Shakespeare was almost certainly familiar with these pamphlets; we know that he turned them for source material later on in his career to create the character of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*. *The Comedy of Errors* interacts with the pamphlets in a less direct way, by using misidentification to speak to the same social issues. I propose that reading the scenes of misidentification in *The Comedy of Errors* in conjunction with the rogue literature enables a more historically informed assessment of the play, which places it within the context of the larger cultural interest of the 1590s in
misidentification. A study of the uses of misidentification in *Jack Juggler*, which bases itself more explicitly on the rogue books, allows us to examine in a wider context the relations between English adaptations of Plautus and trickster stories. By drawing a comparison between these plays and the pamphlet literature, we can further our understanding of the early modern fascination with processes of identification and see how scenes of misidentification work as complex, creative, and entertaining contributions to early modern thinking about the social order.

The accuracy of identification is a measure of the social order and the permeability of class and gender boundaries. When it becomes impossible to tell who someone is, the mechanisms that keep individuals in their rightful place have clearly broken down. Like Greene, Shakespeare offers a spectrum of social positions from which misidentification is experienced. His additions to the basic plot of *Menaechmi* include the servant twins as well as scenes from the adultery plot in *Amphitruo* and a much more elaborate account of the wife’s experience of misidentification. Moreover, Shakespeare’s comedy examines not only the effect of misidentification on the individual, but also the expectations and assumptions that make all misidentification possible and thus undermine the social order more generally. These early modern texts show misidentification to be rooted in the nature of social exchange and in the social constructions of identity, gender, and class that come into play in encounters with fellow city-dwellers.

In widening his scope to include these larger questions, Shakespeare departs from his classical source to appeal to the concerns of his audience. Like the cony-
catching pamphlets, the play addresses a basic anxiety about meeting fellow city-dwellers that had a specific resonance in the theater, as many contemporary warnings on the presence of cutpurses, pickpockets, and cony-catchers in the theater testify. For instance, the Lord Mayor wrote to Lord Burghley in 1594 that the plays were “the ordinary places of meeting for all vagrant persons & maisterles men that hang about the Citie, theeves, horsestealers, whoremoongers, coozeners, connycatching persones, practizers of treason, & other such lyke.” The subject must have struck a chord with playgoers and readers who lived in a city that was growing at an unprecedented rate and who experienced the effects of the vast historical and economic changes such as urban growth, unemployment, inflation, and new forms of trade on their daily lives.

*Jack Juggler, The Comedy of Errors*, and the cony-catching pamphlets suggest that subjectivity may be the product rather than the source of everyday exchange. They make social exchange look conventional, artificial, and alien. These works demonstrate that social position is neither fixed, divinely ordained, nor natural, but open to manipulation, loss, theft, or exchange. The misidentification that is pervasive in these texts locates a problem in the social order. By substituting one man for another, they show that identity is determined by socially constructed ideas over which the individual has no control. While such a perspective might seem to suggest a rigid social order in which identity is fixed and predetermined, instead it generates the idea that all aspects of identity are in fact a product of some kind of performance. This perspective entails not only the deliberate performance by the trickster-rogue, but also a more pervasive performativity, in the sense that social exchange and dialogue are seen to *produce*
identities at every moment. Identity is permanently insecure. This means for the well-respected citizen and his wife that there is a perpetual need for the confirmation of their position; for the trickster it opens up a host of possibilities. Subjectivity becomes a slippery concept, capable of being imposed from without or assumed intentionally. In creating a sense of ambiguity about life in the city, these texts reveal that the social order, always open to disruption, relies on verbal exchange that is impeded and made suspect by cultural expectations. The rules of social exchange prevent misidentification from being detected and create opportunities for trickery.

1.

While rogue literature was long seen primarily as sensationalist hackwork, useful only as a source for historical information about the London underworld, it has in recent years become the subject of serious critical attention. Craig Dionne places these pamphlets at the heart of the historical transitions of the period, discussing their ideological function in relation to the emergence of capitalism and the social mobility of the rising merchant class. According to Dionne, the task of the rogue books was to objectify the rogue in order to “solidify a consensus among readers who were starting to feel what might be called the weight of historical transition.” At the same time, he argues, the books bring to light a disturbing similarity between the trickster-rogue and the self-made gentleman: “Ironically, the otherness of underworld villainy gives voice to the anxieties of a social disruption brought about by the very practices that empowered London’s new corporate class: self-advancement through histrionic manipulation of the
social and linguistic registers of court and state." In that sense, the trickster books can be treated as the darker version of the courtesy literature of the period, inadvertently offering how-to manuals for the ambitious underworld character even as they project a general feeling of disorder onto an individual other. The trickster’s acting talent, then, problematizes the notion of social position, making social mobility a product of performance and a permanent threat to the respectable members of the commonwealth.

The rogue books present the trickster’s mutability as a consequence of his capacity to orchestrate “chance” encounters in the streets of London. In the simplest version of the trickster story, the sturdy vagabond simply pretends to be a licensed beggar, making a mockery of the Elizabethan legal system of licenses, passports, briefs, and badges, which was supposed to distinguish the deserving from the undeserving poor. Many rogues in these books carry false papers, which have to be scrutinized as carefully as the beggar’s appearance before they can be taken as evidence of identity. In A Caveat for Common Cursitors (1566), Thomas Harman recounts a meeting with a “dummerer,” a vagabond who pretends to be incapable of speech. On being given the beggar’s license, Harman subjects it to close observation and finds one of the seals, “like unto a seal I had about me, which seal I bought besides Charing Cross, that I was out of doubt it was none of those gentlemen’s seals that had subscribed; and, having understanding before of their peevish practices, made me to conceive that all was forged and nought.” The material nature of legal proof of identity has made it commercially available, for sale at Charing Cross. But the cony-catchers’ defiance of the law is not simply based on the usurpation of its material strategies of containment. It goes much
further than that. Tricksters are even able to enlist the representatives of the law in their elaborate schemes. In one of Greene's pamphlets, *A Disputation Between a Hee Conny-catcher and a Shee Conny-catcher* (1592), the male trickster tells a story of a group of cony-catchers who start a lawsuit against a farmer they aim to rob of his purse. Bringing a number of sergeants into St. Paul's Cathedral to arrest the victim, an accomplice pretends to protect the cony and starts a brawl, calling on the apprentices for help. Once the fight is over and there has been ample opportunity for cutting the purse, the trickster who started the suit simply claims to have misidentified the cony and drops the case.\textsuperscript{10}

In *The Comedy of Errors*, the law is shown to be equally inept at controlling and identifying its subjects. Antipholus of Syracuse is told, upon entering Ephesus, that he will escape the death penalty ordered for Syracusians if he will "give out" that he is from Epidamnum (1.2.1). The mechanisms that should protect the city's trade and prevent alien intrusion into the city are being undermined from within; the advice comes from an anonymous merchant, the very person whose interests are supposedly protected by the Ephesian law. When the chaos intensifies, the ineffective sergeant, who is not in the source texts, represents the law in Ephesus. His actions are so fully determined by the exchange of money that Adriana is able to take legal control over her husband. As in the case of the cony-catchers, the gullible representative of the law furthers the confusion by assisting Adriana as she tries to rob the respectable citizen-twin of his place in society. Where in Plautus it is the father of the wife who attempts to have his son-in-law committed, in *The Comedy of Errors*, Adriana is in charge of a motley crew of assailants, which includes her sister, Pinch, and the courtesan. This helps create the
impression of a general turmoil, which, as in the pamphlets, implicates those who should uphold the law. The treatment that Antipholus of Ephesus receives at the hands of the sergeant shows, as one of Greene's notorious villains, Cuthbert Cony-Catcher, puts it, that "men are valued by their wealth, not by their virtues" in an urban, mercantile environment.11

This assessment is confirmed when Antipholus of Syracuse encounters the city at large. Innocently walking the streets of Ephesus, he discovers what it means to be a well-established merchant:

There's not a man I meet but doth salute me
As if I were their well-acquainted friend,
And everyone doth call me by my name.
Some tender money to me, some invite me,
Some other give me thanks for kindnesses.
Some offer me commodities to buy.
Even now a tailor called me in his shop,
And showed me silks that he had bought for me,
And therewithal took measure of my body. (4.3.1-9)

Without realizing it, Antipholus of Syracuse gives a concise image of the daily enactment of social recognition within the urban space. The speech denaturalizes social recognition, making clear that the citizen's place in the social hierarchy is based on the
circulation of money and objects, either in the form of trade or through hospitality.

The physicality of the citizen's engagement with the city and the need for constant confirmation through proper identification suggest that his reputation and position are undermined on the basis of the material aspects of social being. His domestic and social relationships are all given tangible presence in the play (in the form of food, the chain, the purse, and the rope), so that much like other objects, mercantile identity is capable of being stolen. Many readers of *The Comedy of Errors* have been struck by the material nature of mercantile exchange in the play and the extent to which individuals depend on the proper circulation of goods and objects to maintain their position and identity. Douglas Lanier, for instance, points to early modern sumptuary laws, conduct books, and anti-theatrical literature to argue for a "larger cultural drive to determine identities by determining the range and meanings of their material manifestations" and even a crisis of self-representation.\(^{12}\)

What makes this mode of contextualization—present in much new historicist work—problematic is that a simple mention of conduct theory, anti-theatrical tracts, and sumptuary laws suffices as evidence for the assertion of a general crisis, which is posited as "real" and crucial to the Elizabethan's self-presentation in actual life. New historicist work has frequently been criticized for its tendency to make sweeping generalization on the basis of anecdotal and limited evidence.\(^{13}\) Here, the play is contextualized by referring to three sets of generically specific texts, meant for particular audiences and mostly related to rank rather than identity. They certainly have a bearing on the play, but Lanier fails to consider their place in the culture of the period.
Sumptuary laws need to be read in their legal context as evidence of specific concerns of institutions and individuals within those institutions. Historians have found that these laws were neither strictly followed nor enforced by local officials—even within the institution of the law itself they gave rise to contradiction. Frank Whigham locates this particular effort at control of ostentation and hence of social mobility with the Queen personally and stresses the resistance to the laws in Parliamentary circles. The claim that the sumptuary laws are evidence of the materiality of identity in Elizabethan culture may, therefore, amount to a limited identification of “culture” with the monarch. The use of sumptuary laws as evidence for argument that “character” (the term Lanier uses to highlight the materiality of subjectivity) is identified on the basis of externals points to a conception of history that does not allow for the complex contradictions and tensions that may exist between the rules put forward by institutions and the responses by individuals or between official doctrine and local practice.

The use of a dramatic text for access to early modern subjectivity must take context, genre, and the conditions of artistic production, into account before attributing a mimetic significance to the text. Sumptuary laws, conduct manuals, and anti-theatrical tracts are important contexts for the drama, not because they uncover a “real” early modern subjectivity, but because these are cultural productions that circulated and reflected on each other. They give us access to early modern constructions of gender and class validated in particular social spheres. Similarly, Shakespeare’s plays themselves are partly individual and partly collaborative creations that provide insight into what must have been interesting, entertaining, or even captivating narratives for audiences.
composed of different social groups.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite Lanier's claim, material goods in themselves are not enough to produce identity; what matters is what is done with and to them. The Ephesian reliance on materiality is problematic because it is combined with a performative notion of social position. The tangible evidence of the merchant's position, the silk, the commodities, the money, is paralleled with invitations, thanks, and other gestures and acts that confirm his respectability. The very dependence on physicality, in other words, opens up the space for performance. The sumptuary laws mentioned by Lanier are relevant, but mainly to this particular passage. The traveler's measures are taken for the purpose of providing the merchant with the silk clothing that represents his rank and wealth. Silk was supposedly limited to the nobility. The tailor's gesture, therefore, reminds us that the merchant's own position is a product of social mobility. After all, Antipholus of Ephesus, himself a stranger at one time, has become a wealthy citizen in spite of his vague origin. Even worse, his place his taken by his brother, who is not only a stranger, but also an "enemy" to Ephesus. Materiality is important to this moment of usurpation, but it is the performative idea of class already in place that makes it an unreliable measure of social identity.

As a matter of course, rogue books tell us, material signs of identity must be treated with a great deal of suspicion. The tricksters' unexplained access to different types of clothes, for instance, means that they can take on any type of social position. Like players on the stage, they can choose to present themselves as gentlemen or country rustics, upwardly and downwardly mobile at will. Even their appearance as
beggars is forged, requiring elaborate dressing up, as in the case of Harman's favorite
trickster, the counterfeit crank Nicholas Jennings, alias Blunt. Exposure happens in the
case of Jennings by stripping him naked to reveal his sturdy body, eliminating the
costume that has fooled the eyes of his victims.

Only the most expert observation makes it possible to discover the true nature of
the rogue. In a more complicated falsification of material evidence, a trickster in The
Third and Last Part of Cony-Catching introduces himself as a cousin of a maidservant
who moved to London at a young age, in order to burgle the house of her master. As a
masterstroke, he earns the family's trust by sending a gift of bacon and cheese, "with the
inscription accordingly on it, that it could not be discerned but that some unskilful
writer in the country had done it, both by the gross proportion of the letters, as also the
bad orthography, which amongst plain husbandmen is very common, in that they have
no better instruction." In hiding his writing skills behind the "bad orthography" of the
countryman, the cony-catcher evokes immediate recognition of his supposed origins on
the part of his victims. Cony-catchers forge the material and social signifiers of identity,
based on their knowledge of the evidence that serves to establish and confirm identity,
class, and geographic origin. In highlighting this aspect of their deceit, the cony-
catching pamphlets reveal, as does The Comedy of Errors, that ordinary social exchange
relies on all kinds of performances that use material objects and evidence that can be
falsified.

The Comedy of Errors and the trickster narratives combine an interest in
materiality with an exploration of the performative nature of social exchange more
generally. In the case of the play, the question of apparel, which would make the
sumptuary laws more pertinent to the play as a whole, is relevant to the merchant’s
position, but not to the confusion of the twins. Anne Barton has remarked that the
absence of an explanation for the identical dress of the two sets of twins is typical of
"that cloud-cuckoo-land of farce," which allows playwrights to leave threads hanging in
the interest of comedy.¹⁹ Yet, in the more farcical Jack Juggler the question of duplicate
clothing is explicitly addressed. When Jack decides to take the servant Jenkin
Careaway’s place, he announces to the audience, “This garments—cape and all other
gear / That now you see apone me here—I have doon oon all like unto his.”²⁰ The
evidence of identity that causes confusion in Shakespeare is the material evidence of the
twin body, but the process of sustained misidentification is more complex than a
concentration on the materiality of identity would suggest. This is also the case in the
cony-catching pamphlets—the rogue’s ability to trick his victims is only partly based on
his access to the material signs of social position. In both plays, the performative aspects
of social exchange are shown to be the cause for the disruption of order.²¹

More threatening than his ability to manipulate his appearance, is the trickster’s
counterfeit familiarity. The cony-catcher may compel misidentification of himself by
correctly identifying the cony. Cony-catchers frequently present themselves as a relative
or a friend of a friend to gain the trust of the cony, often an unsuspecting newcomer to
the city. The cony, who expects no such treatment in London, is falsely comforted on
finding social relations in the city seeming to be what they are in the country. As
Katherine Maus has remarked, “Greene’s coseners self-consciously exploit rustic modes
of identity formation based upon kinship relations, reputation among one’s neighbors, and reciprocal acts of hospitality. They counterfeit social intimacy with one for whom that intimacy involves obligations." In the elaborate form of cony-catching known in beggar’s cant as “Barnard Law,” the cony is deliberately misidentified so that the cony-catcher can begin a brief conversation in which the aim is to find out the cony’s identity. The cony-catcher passes the information gathered thus on to an accomplice who accosts the cony and addresses him by name, to present himself as an acquaintance.

Maus discusses only the cheating of travelers from the country, but city-dwellers are equally prone to this type of deception. Greene tells his readers of a particularly spectacular case of deceit of a lawyer in St. Paul’s Cathedral, so remarkable that the trickster, the title tells us, thereafter “Scorned the Name of a Cony-Catcher and would Needs be Terned a Fool-Taker, as Master and Beginner of that New-Found Art.” The cony-catcher and his female friend have their sights set on the lawyer’s large purse. The “drab” has cheated the man before, but this does not mean she is found out. Instead, it enables her to greet him by name, to pretend to have been sent to him for legal counsel by a mutual friend. While the victim is talking to her, her friend makes it possible for her to cut the purse:

The time serving fit for the fellow’s purpose, he came behind the gentleman, and, as many times one friend will familiarly with another, clap his hands over his eyes to make him guess who he is, so did this companion, holding his hands fast over the gentleman’s eyes, said, ‘Who am I?’ twice or thrice, in which time
the drab had gotten the purse and put it up. The gentleman, thinking it had been some merry friend of his, reckoned the names of three or four, when, letting him go, the crafty knave, dissembling a bashful shame of what he had done, said, 'By my troth, sir, I cry ye mercy. As I came in the church door, I took ye for such a one (naming a man), a very friend of mine, whom you very much resemble.'

The moment enacts literally the blinding that is essential to cony-catching. Inevitably, cony-catchers succeed not merely because of their appearance but because their familiar gestures and phrases blind the cony to their unfamiliar appearance. The trickster’s question “Who am I?” is a crucial one. Rather than realizing that he has no answer for it, the cony believes that question itself proves that this has to be a friend. As is the case with appearance and outward evidence of identity, words become untrustworthy signifiers of familiarity.

The rogues and vagabonds are experts at improvising and controlling the impression they make on others and at the same time keeping the cony tied to his own social position. The cony cannot observe the other as the cony-catcher does, and, because he is himself identified correctly, fails to question the signs of identity with which the cony-catcher presents him. The basic difference that enables the deception is that the cony takes convention for granted and sees it as a natural, transparent sign of inward truth, whereas the cony-catcher sees convention as artificial, a construction that can be twisted for the purpose of making a profit. The rogue sees familial and social relationships as capable of being performed.
The narrators of these pamphlets testify that the underworld has its own hierarchies and structures mirroring the world of legality. The rogues live by their own set of conventions and have their own class system. The “upright man,” for instance, is held in higher esteem than the common “rogue.” They also have their own methods of examination and identification. Discussing the nature of the “upright man,” Harman writes:

If he meet any beggar, whether he be sturdy or important, he will demand of him, whether ever he was stalled [ordained] to the rogue or no. If he say he was, he will know of whom, and his name that stalled him. And if he be not learnedly able to show him the whole circumstance thereof, he will spoil him of his money, either of his best garment, if it be worth any money, and have him to the boozing ken [alehouse] which is to some tippling house next adjoining, and layeth there to gage the best thing that he hath for twenty pence or two shillings.26

While the rogue world thus mimics the ordinary world, the order maintained among the vagrants is presented as sham, because its only purpose is personal gain, and its instrument is violence. Similarly, the personal relationships of the rogue are presented as transient and purely sexual. The vagabonds pose a threat to the respectable world because they use their outsider’s knowledge of social relations and convention only for the purpose of subverting them.27 As they reveal each rogue’s strategies, Greene,
Harman, and Walker invite their readers to think about the process by which their own identities are produced and to examine the nature of their own relationships, conventions, and expectations. Such awareness is in part what must have made reading these pamphlets a pleasurable as well as frightening experience. It allows the reader to contemplate the possibility that normality is not natural and fixed but a simple set of codes that can be divorced from their correct context and are prone to subversion and performance.

This subject, the disruption of rules of social exchange, is central to *The Comedy of Errors*. The play begins with the unlikely premise of the undetected presence of twins, a feature that requires the audience’s suspension of disbelief and is only important insofar as it allows for sustained confusion. Lynn Enterline has described the significance of misidentification in relation to the doubled name in the terms of speech act theory:

When the proper name "Antipholus" loses its referential function because the bearer of the name finds himself in a community with not enough information by which to secure his identity accurately, the signification remaining to that name foregrounds the arbitrary, general, and impersonal aspects of the social and linguistic system in which identities are produced. ... The name now seems to have no relation to the person, a disturbing dissociation. This disturbing dissociation between language and the world is precisely the one Shakespeare bestows on the twins’ situation since birth. And it is through this dissociation
that he explores what identity, or "the self," might mean.  

Juxtaposing moments of misidentification, *The Comedy of Errors* depicts each of the four twins in exchanges that make up social identity and reputation. These exchanges should help maintain a stable sense of identity based on the congruity between communal and personal perceptions of self, or, in Enterline's terms, between name and self and between language and world. In presenting the uprooting of social position and linguistic exchange, the play dramatizes the alienation of the subject from what Enterline calls "the social and linguistic system within which identities are produced."

This suggests that this system can turn from a natural order within which one is recognized and at home into an imposition founded upon what come to seem arbitrary misconceptions. Enterline discusses the moment in terms of its effect on the individual subject, who experiences the entry into the Lacanian symbolic as alienating. For Enterline, Antipholus's experience is a universal aspect of what it means to have a self. Yet, the cony-catchers pamphlets suggest that such disjunction need not only be read in terms of psychological crisis. The rogues and cony-catchers distance themselves from normative processes by which identities are created. In doing so, they turn the potential disjunction between world and language into a source of profit. Shakespeare's staging of this disjunction in form of identification can also be treated in terms of its effect on exchange and the social order in a larger sense. The mere possibility of a discrepancy between language and world produces an environment in which one name may be attached to different bodies, in which language is performative rather than reflective,
and in which social position is the effect of language rather than birth.

Capitalizing on the substitution of one body for another, the play turns its focus to what allows misidentification and confusion to persist, what Joel Altman calls, “the conjectures and affirmations upon which people act.”\(^29\) The cony-catching pamphlets give careful accounts of how the tricksters proceed in order to give the reader the distance from these “conjectures and affirmations” to reflect on the mechanics of everyday exchange.\(^30\) Defamiliarization happens in *The Comedy of Errors* by having the audience be aware of the source of confusion throughout, so that it is capable of reading every utterance in two ways: in accordance with the speaker’s intention and with the hearer’s interpretation. Playgoers are always conscious of the fact that no one is deceitful, but the play suggests that obedience, loyalty, and honesty may not be enough to maintain social stability. Normal utterances are taken out of context by having them spoken to or by the wrong twin. This means that the audience can begin to think of the mechanisms of exchange as artificial and prone to disruption and usurpation. Simple, customary gestures, from placing your hands over a friend’s eyes as a joke to telling your husband to come in for dinner, are perverted in these narratives and instead of confirming and enhancing social relationships begin to destroy them. In short, misdirection leads to the unsettling of social position and has, in all these texts, a larger, disruptive effect.

Shakespeare’s emphasis on unintentional misidentification rather than intentional cony-catching (or the intentional deceit in *Amphitruo*) complicates the issue. Now everyone appears to be both cony-catcher and cony depending on one’s
perspective. Adriana, for instance, is both an alluring temptress, who tries to trick a traveler, and a loyal wife, who mistakenly invites an impostor into her house. In order to explain the strange words of the other, all fall back on a set of easy assumptions about the other that are inherently flawed. They create the conditions in which imposture can happen even without any devious intention. This suggests that generally accepted, conventional modes of understanding the other cause a “blindness” to the other’s true identity, just as normal expectations about social relationships make the cony blind to trickery. In this way, Shakespeare builds on the cony-catching pamphlets and reveals the inevitability of misidentification even in the absence of trickery.

2.

The unconscious manner in which innocent individuals are turned into tricksters in this play is most obvious in the case Antipholus of Syracuse. Even though he has no idea of how his presence affects others, he causes just as much disruption as the cony-catching intruder into households and social relationships does. At the same time, his confusion shows him to be the victim of misidentification. Entering the city as a Syracusan, he is in immediate danger, and it remains unclear whether he will follow up on the anonymous merchant’s suggestion to pretend to be from Epidamnum. His intention becomes irrelevant as he is already identified as familiar. The Ephesian response to his presence puts him in the role of trickster. His physical resemblance to one of Ephesus’s most respected citizens provides him with a watertight disguise from which he unintentionally makes a profit. Becoming what seems to be a contradiction in terms,
an unintentional trickster, Antipholus loses his grip on the world around him. He wavers between questioning himself and opening up the possibility of becoming a trickster on the one hand, and, like the reader of the cony-catching pamphlets, condemning the devious city on the other. Immediately after the merchant has advised him to hide his true identity, the traveler expresses his loss of self in the famous “drop of water” speech. The need to keep his true identity a secret and the nature of the role he has to adopt accounts for his sadness:

I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself. (1.2.35-40)

Commentators have offered an array of explanations for the self-loss expressed by Antipholus of Syracuse. Gail Paster claims that this and other early speeches by the traveler signal a melancholy, “so overpowering that it displaces social identity.” But his formulation of self is highly social. Antipholus’s alienation from his surroundings is specifically caught up with his civic status as enemy to Ephesus, the mysterious city that demands that he become anonymous. Lanier rightly stresses the importance of the word “unseen” in the passage, which tells us that social recognition is crucial to subjectivity.
Being “unseen” and “inquisitive” brings on a shift in perspective on the self. Antipholus now sees himself with the eyes of a “world” that fails to recognize him and to which he is merely a nameless drop of water. The word “confound” had in this period a double meaning according to the OED, denoting both indistinguishability and destruction, as if being indistinguishable is synonymous with self-destruction. Becoming identical to others is the consequence of a “quest” for the family that will ultimately result in renewed recognition. Traveling into the city, then, Antipholus of Syracuse is bereft of the relationships that anchor identity and finds himself, due to the legal limitations imposed on those who enter, in a state of fluidity, the type of social position from which tricksters generally operate.

As psychoanalytic readings of the speech have shown, Antipholus’ words have a double meaning. Coppélia Kahn and Lynn Enterline, from different vantage points, attribute universal significance to the speech as a reflection on a psychological stage we must all go through when we enter into the “world” and encounter the “other.” They help us to see that it is not apparent whether he “confounds himself” in falling into the ocean of the indistinguishable drops of water or in finding his “fellow.” In maintaining this dual significance, the speech sets up a parallel between the experience of being the other (unseen to the world) and the experience of encountering the other (as a result of being inquisitive). The passage highlights the ways in which misidentification causes a movement between a multiplicity of social positions: from self to other, familiar to stranger, and cony to cony-catcher. Expecting to be undifferentiated from other drops of water in the ocean, Antipholus of Syracuse turns out to be indistinguishable from one
specific individual, which makes him an unintentional cony-catcher. This form of “inadvertent cony-catching,” as we might call it, is even more difficult to control than conventional cony-catching because it is the result of the innocent responses of others rather than the devious intention of the trickster.

The first moment of misidentification makes Antipholus of Syracuse both unintentional trickster and innocent victim of the alien city. Dromio of Ephesus tells him that he has to be on time for lunch:

The capon burns, the pig falls from the spit.  
The clock hath strucken twelve upon the bell; 
My mistress made it one upon my cheek. 
The meat is cold because you come not home. 
You come not home because you have no stomach 
You have no stomach, having broke your fast; 
But we that know what 'tis to fast and pray 
Are penitent for your default today. (1.2.44-52)

Dromio’s speech comically constructs an image of a social world that works like a machine, in which punishment is inevitably handed down from master to servant. Like the unsuspecting countryman who enters London, ripe for gulling by devious urban rogues, Antipholus finds himself subject to unanticipated obligations: without his cooperation an entire household is in disarray.
Social historians of the period have described the many changes undergone by those who passed from the single to the married state. David Cressy has stressed the extent of the transformation involved: "Marriage assigned new privileges, advantages, and obligations. It redefined social and sexual roles, rearranged patriarchal obligations, and conferred new duties of status, authority, and dependency." Antipholus of Syracuse undergoes this transformation in a matter of minutes by means of misidentification. In his essay on time in the play, Gámini Salgádo remarks of moments such as these that "It is in his apparent failure to recognise the 'right time' that Antipholus's identity becomes a puzzle to his wife, and the servants." A sense of time as a logical progression, he shows, is intricately tied up with identity and a secure sense of self. More pragmatically, we may also remark that keeping the "right time" is to the citizen a sign of his willingness to perform his part, fulfill his duties and live up to the obligations that are at the heart of his respectability. The first scene of misidentification creates an unfamiliar sense of time as familial responsibility by granting Antipholus a radically new status of responsibility in strange social territory. Barbara Freedman aptly describes the experience as "uncanny." Antipholus is offered the place of another, who refuses to perform his role as head of the household and thus threatens to forfeit his place, leaving it open to his impostor-brother.

Antipholus's first response to his misidentification by Dromio of Ephesus contradicts his later sense of self-loss; it articulates his self-representation as victim rather than trickster. Bewildered, he remembers the city's reputation:
They say this town is full of cozenage,
As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such-like liberties of sin. (1.2.97-102)

The lines recall Messenio’s warnings about the “Ribaulds, Parasites, Drunkards, Catchpoles, Cony-catchers, and Sycophants” in Warner’s translation, mentioned at the outset of this chapter. Antipholus’s speech lists different dissemblers, all performers of some sort, and brings to mind the catalogues of types of tricksters in the rogue pamphlets, referring to the liberties, where many of these figures were said to reside.

As Alexander Leggatt has noted, Shakespeare adds the supernatural to Plautus’s (and Warner’s) version of the speech. Antipholus’s hostility towards the city is part of the play’s examination of various types of social constructions of others that prevent effective exchange between different people. In drawing this conclusion, Antipholus sets up boundaries around the fluid self of his earlier drop-of-water speech and redefines his position in the corrupt urban environment, but it also keeps him from detecting the source of the confusion. In other words, the suspicion of tricksters and their performances does not help him. Instead, his attempts to identify evil and marginalize it, by making it a part of an alien city, are doomed to cause more confusion because he fails to see the extent to which normal exchange itself is based on effective
performance. The false familiarity created by the cony-catcher in Greene becomes the
imposed familiarity of servant, wife, and sister-in-law, made threatening and
supernatural. In both cases, a perverted familiarity destroys social relationships rather
than validating and confirming them.

The confrontation with Adriana and Luciana emphasizes the destabilizing effect
of misidentification on all the parties involved. Almost immediately, Antipholus
famously hears his own simile echoed back at him by Adriana:

For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take unmingled thence that drop again
Without addition or diminishing,
As take from me thyself, and not me too. (2.2.125-29)

The image complexly positions husband and wife. While one may suspect the two to be
compared to two drops of water mingling in the ocean (the wife being the “fellow”
sought by the falling drop in the earlier image), there is also the suggestion that Adriana
is the sea from which Antipholus cannot extract himself. As in the earlier speech, the
simile hints at engulfment by the other. Now, the search for the other is replaced by a
fall into the ocean of marriage. At the same time, Adriana does not employ this image,
as many have presented it, simply as a positive assertion of marital love. It is a part of a
larger argument on the contaminating effect of male adultery on the female body: “if we
two be one, and thou play false, / I do digest the poison of thy flesh” (142-43). Rather than signifying the stranger’s indistinguishability from all others, Antipholus’s analogy is turned into an image of contagion and corruption. His search for completion of the family has implicated him in a marital relationship, and the suggestion is made that he is guilty of causing the destruction of familial harmony. This frightening liability for (sexual) acts that are not his own leaves Antipholus with a sense of a loss of control over his identity. He wonders about the causes of this self-loss: “Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell? / Sleeping or waking? Mad or well advised? / Known unto these, and to myself disguised!” (2.2.212-14). Along with a sense of place and firmness of mind, he can no longer predict the physical impression he is making on others or understand the relations into which he is inserted on the basis of his appearance. He projects this insecurity inward, at first at least, intensifying the feeling of self-loss he already had before his encounter with the inhabitants of the city.

Throughout the scenes with Adriana and Luciana, Antipholus edges closer to an awareness of the advantages to being a cony-catcher. As with the anonymous merchant, his responses to the possibility of being a trickster are complex. They range from a curious willingness to enter and dine with the unknown women (reminding us of his lack of response to the merchant’s advice early on) to a sense of self-loss and a rejection of the other. He openly contemplates becoming a trickster when he is invited to do so, he thinks, by Luciana. On the edge of accepting his new identity, he retreats when he realizes that her invitation to betray himself is a threat to his “soul’s pure truth” (3.2.37). Faced with the self-loss that is a consequence of the imposition of the trickster role,
Antipholus reconstructs his sense of self by claiming the opposite role of victim to the evil temptations of the female other. For Antipholus, the speeches of the women are adulterous, as he tries to probe the "folded meaning of your words' deceit." The traveler's fears of the city and its "prating" mountebanks and the witches who "deform the body" seem to have come true: misdirected talk leads to a "deformation" of his body in the sense that another's name, and therefore another set of obligations, is attached to it.

Coney-catching pamphlets prominently feature female prostitutes and lovers of cony-catchers who use devious language to trick their victims. *A Disputation Between a Hee Conny-catcher and a Shee Conny-catcher* is supposed to determine, according to the full title, "whether a Theefe or a Whoore is most hurtfull in Cousonage, to the Commonwealth." Robert Greene leaves us with little doubt as to the outcome of the debate. Female cony-catchers are clearly more dangerous, as even the male cony-catcher admits: "you do it with more art than we men do, because of your painted flatteries and sugared words that you flourish rhetorically like nets to catch fools." The female cony-catcher presents her language as supernatural, on a par with the fears of Antipholus of Syracuse. She points out that from a male cony-catcher, the cony only needs to fear the loss of his purse, but in the case of a female cony-catcher much more is at stake:

if he fall into the company of a whore, she flatters him, she inveigles him, she bewitcheth him, that he spareth neither goods nor lands to content her, that is only in love with his coin. If he be married, he forsakes his wife, leaves his
children, despiseth his friends, only to satisfy his lust with the love of a base whore, who, when he hath spent all upon her and he brought to beggary, beateth him out like the prodigal child, and for a small reward, brings him, if to the fairest end, to beg, if to the second, to the gallows, or at the last and worst, to the pox, or as prejudicial diseases.45

Beggary, usually the cony’s ultimate fate, is only the least of the terrible outcomes of an encounter with a female trickster; punishment or, the worst case, venereal disease are likely results, so that the effect of female trickery is not only social, financial, and spiritual, but also physical downfall. Bewitching happens through sexual attraction, but also, importantly, through language. The women’s speeches to Antipholus of Syracuse are from the perspective of the traveler marked by inexplicable, dark, violent language, containing the threat to his “pure soul’s truth” (3.2.37) that results from exchange with these “Soul-killing witches” (1.2.100). Without knowing it, the women do what the female cony-catcher describes as a common practice: “we straight insinuate into his company, and claim acquaintance of him by some means or other.”46 That Antipholus of Syracuse is bewitched is clear. He asks Luciana to transform him and invites the complete loss of self in the other that he feared when first misidentified. Because intention is made irrelevant to the significance of the spoken word, order is lost in a world in which behavior inadvertently comes to conform to the trickster ethic.

Rather than perceiving a progressive narrative of discovering the self, as Coppélia Kahn and Lynn Enterline do, I feel that it is in the encounter with the female
other that Antipholus of Syracuse finds his stable self prematurely. He falsely redefines his relationship to the world in terms of the hostile confrontation with the supernatural and evil. Once the encounter with Luciana and her sister is past, Antipholus of Syracuse never questions his sense of self again. Enterline reads the play as a narrative of individual normalization, in which “Antipholus of Syracuse must refine a self that is coincident with itself.” This reading attributes too much significance to the “drop of water” speech, without taking the importance of the other type of response to the alien city, that of prejudice and suspicion, into account and without acknowledging that the traveler is not at a loss throughout. From the end of Act 3 on, he no longer listens to anyone—language, tainted by misidentification, has become as full of deceit as enchanting women. Dromio of Syracuse’s misidentification parallels that of his master. Where Antipholus is summoned to live up to the obligations of a respectable householder, Dromio is called on to obey to the sexual demands of Nell. Her seemingly supernatural knowledge of the servant’s body suggests a trickster-like access to private detail. It confirms the travelers’ prejudice about the city and the women in it, allowing them to conclude, “none but witches do inhabit here” (3.2.154). By means of projecting his fears of losing the self outward, Antipholus maintains his own sense of self, but also prevents communication with the women, which could bring about a resolution to the confusion.

3.

Critics have not always recognized the extent to which the play offers a range of
possible positions from which misidentification is experienced, exploring different positions in the social hierarchy. Shakespeare makes clear that the material nature of identity is specifically tied up with trade relationships. The encounters between the merchants in Ephesus confirm that the merchant’s position is based on the proper exchange of objects and money and the proper performances that confirm his standing in the mercantile world. Antipholus of Syracuse’s entry into Ephesus is signaled by the return of his money by the Ephesian merchant—the circulation of money serves not so much a financial purpose as a social one since it marks the establishment of relationships with an inhabitant of the city. By representing the loss of the citizen’s credit and standing as a respected member of the mercantile community due to misidentification, the play reveals the precariousness of his position in the social structure. His loss of status is marked by the interference of the law.\textsuperscript{49} The reason for the law’s ability to function as a guarantor of financial credit is its indifference to reputation. Its limited view of the subject means that the officer is willing to let the citizen go as soon as he has paid his debt and Adriana is simply able to “buy” back control over her husband from the officer when she encounters the two in the street.

The mercantile reliance on money and objects fails to provide a solid foundation for identity. It brings about a situation that is conducive to imposture and switching of positions. Examining the precarious nature of the merchant’s position in an early-capitalist environment, the play stages the breakdown of the public and private identity that results from economic change. Antipholus of Ephesus is so concerned with offering profitable hospitality that he threatens to attack his wife when he is locked out. He sees
public recognition, based on the ability to live up to business contracts and providing entertainment, as more significant than familial relationships. And he is not the only one to do so. Angelo admits that a failure to recognize a business contract would destroy even the closest familial relationships: “I would not spare my brother in this case / If he should scorn me so apparently” (4.1.77-78). Even the most fixed relationships, then, are subject to transformation on the basis of behavior. A failure to recognize one’s fellow merchant is a violation of the necessary performance of specified acts that maintain relationships. Preconceived notions about others structure and harm social exchange. In the merchant’s case, the desire for profit is presumed to motivate all inexplicable behavior, an expectation that shows the inherent instability of mercantile relationships and the constant need for their performative confirmation (the type of rituals Antipholus of Syracuse experiences, in 4.3.1-9).

The stern Balthasar gives solution to the instability at the heart of the merchant’s position. He offers a competing behavioral ethic rooted in Christian beliefs. His warnings to the citizen indicate that reputation should not consist in financial credit alone—merchants should be concerned with their standing as Christian householders, the chastity of their wives, and their reputation after death. As householders, men were held legally and morally accountable for the behavior of their wives, servants, and children. *The Comedy of Errors* makes family crucial to male identity. As Ann Christensen has argued, the domestic and the commercial sphere are closely tied and “the interdependence of the ‘separate spheres’ everywhere inflects the action.”

Antipholus of Ephesus’s oblivion to the nature of his own position may be explained by
his blind assumption that his relationship to his wife is not prone to the type of
fluctuations seen in business relations. The idea of his wife’s shrewishness is used as a
conventional excuse to Balthasar, but in fact forms one of the main stumbling blocks to
communication. His attempt to find a way of performing the role of host overrides his
marital concerns to such an extent that he simply moves to the courtesan’s residence
instead. The result is a blurring of the distinctions between courtesan and wife.
Antipholus’s treatment of Adriana in Act Four suggests a conflation of the two; he calls
her a “Dissembling harlot” (4.4.96) and her friends her “customers” (4.4.55). Much like
trickster and victim, the positions of the two women have been switched, whereas a firm
attachment to the Christian ethic described by Balthasar would have fixed their
positions and thus Antipholus’s own.

The fact that ordinary exchange is capable of generating chaos accounts for what
happens in all of the relationships between social superiors and inferiors in the play. As
is the case for other types of relationships between different members of the
commonwealth, the relationship between master and servant is performance-driven and
itself complicated by a specific set of assumptions. Dromio of Syracuse is allowed to
joke with his master in conversations in which the display of linguistic virtuosity opens
up a small space for a measure of social equality. Eamon Grennan has argued that the
use of puns by both Dromios is a means to “compensate for their social bondage by their
linguistic freedom.” But, as Antipholus of Syracuse points out, Dromio’s
performances need to be geared to their audience to maintain a harmonious relationship:
“If you will jest with me, know my aspect, / And fashion your demeanour to my looks, /
Or I will beat this method in your sconce” (2.2.32-34). The extent to which Antipholus allows his servant to perform for him, creates a need for a heightened awareness of his audience in Dromio.

The nature of this relationship also means that the words of the servant, so important to the traveler who depends on him for safekeeping of his money, can be deprived of their ostensible meaning. Dromio of Ephesus is misunderstood for less complex reasons. His master simply believes him to be incapable of understanding and following his orders. In other words, the expectations attached to the servant destabilize exchange because they place limitations on what the words of the servant can mean. This problem works both ways: the Dromios themselves always suppose that their masters are either joking or testing them, and so they never question their incomprehensible responses. If so, this does not lead to any significant social shift. Misidentification undermines the assumptions that normally structure relationships and help maintain order, preventing effective exchange. The pervasive effect of misidentification on how the individuals involved see themselves uncovers the instability of subjectivity.

A similar relationship between master and servant is at the heart of the comic confusion in Jack Juggler. Careaway, who appeals to his master Bongrace for help when he has been tricked by Juggler, is incapable of conveying what has happened to him because everything he says is interpreted by Bongrace as an excuse, a drunken tale, or madness. In spite of the farcical tone and avowed purpose of offering mere entertainment, the interlude gives a complex view of the social significance of correct
identification. For those in positions of social inferiority, the play suggests, identity depends on verification by powerful others, creating a need for particular performative acts to confirm their sense of self. If these acts are performed differently, a loss of self is the result.

The anonymous playwright has made Plautus’s Mercury an English trickster-rogue, who successfully usurps the position of the servant by putting on his clothes and claiming his name. The situation is reminiscent of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which the tinker-beggar Christopher Sly is all too willing to give up his identity for a new, better one. Both the Induction and *Jack Juggler* are about the comic power of persuasion over the unsuspecting lower classes, and in both, the deceived character is never enlightened as to the playmaking that has been going on. However, while Sly is cheated by the tempting theatrics of a lord and his entourage, Jenkin is fooled by the performative power of Jack. This trickster is not only a Vice figure, but also, Douglas Peterson has pointed out, “a recognizable contemporary type, that of the homeless entertainer who is forced to live by his wits and sleight-of-hand tricks.” The play stages the intrusion of the trickster into the urban household, reflecting, much like *The Comedy of Errors* and the rogue books, on the social conventions that make the confusion possible.

In the lock-out scene, shared by all three plays, Dromio of Ephesus calls out to the “Dromio” who has taken his place, “O villain, thou hast stol’n both mine office and my name; / The one ne’er got me credit, the other mickle blame” (3.1.44-45). The lines testify to the ambivalence of the servant’s relation to his identity, which leaves him
throughout the play with physical hardship and mockery. The terms—office, name, and credit—are markers of social position for servant and master alike, but the servant values them less than his master does. The scene is inflected differently here than in the early interlude, because, unlike in Amphitruo or Jack Juggler, Dromio’s master is by his side. The presence of Antipholus of Ephesus suggests that both servant and master depend on access to the house for their position and that neither has a firmly fixed social position. Dromio’s speech offers comic relief in a potentially explosive situation because he is comparatively unconcerned with maintaining his position. The servant is more willing to leave his position behind for a better one and accept a world in which people gain a position through performance.

In The Taming of the Shrew, Shakespeare uses a similar situation though with a different edge. This time the authority figure, Vincentio, is barred from the house where his son resides by a pedant who, in an earlier scene, has been asked by Tranio to “undertake” the “name and credit” of Vincentio (4.2.108). Again, social identity is linked with name, credit, and access to a place of residence. Here too, the more powerful figure is in the house already, while the seeming intruder is threatened with reprisals by the law and accused of madness. Vincentio, who believes that this confusion is caused by Tranio’s deception, is outraged by his discovery of Tranio’s usurpation of masterly apparel. Tranio maintains his impersonation of Lucentio by telling Vincentio: “you seem a sober, ancient gentleman by your habit, but your words show you a madman” (5.1.61-62). He cleverly attributes significance to the outward appearance to claim that the words of Vincentio should be discounted, implicitly
attaching truth-value to his own apparel and words. Gremio enters the scene to warn
Baptista, “Take heed, Signior Baptist, lest you be cony-caught in this business”
(5.1.82-83), but Vincentio is on the verge of being removed by the officer when the true
Lucentio arrives with his bride to set matters right. Once more, the law turns out to be
ineffective in distinguishing victim from impersonator. While the situation echoes the
fate of the Ephesian twins, the scene alludes more explicitly to Amphitruo, Jack Juggler,
and, as Gremio’s warning tells us, the cony-catching pamphlets: this is theft of identity
rather than unintentional misidentification. This particular example of “cony-catching”
is not for financial gain, illicit intercourse, or social mobility, but for the purposes of
marriage. The romantic and respectable aim makes this imposture less alarming than the
closed door that keeps Antipholus of Ephesus and his servant from entering their house
though the fact that Shakespeare uses the same source for both scenes shows the close
connection between the effects of intentional trickery and misidentification.

More elaborately, Jack Juggler connects the servant’s position with his ability
physically to enter his master’s house. Jenkin insists repeatedly on his identity as
connected to the house (“I am of the house,” l. 408). His sense of self is so much tied up
with it, that, when he meets a strange servant in his place, he momentarily wonders
whether the house itself has been replaced by another. Faced with the possibility of
being permanently turned out of doors, Jenkin begs, “give me a new maister, and
another name, / For it wold greve my hart, soo helpe me God, / To runne about the
stretes like a maisterlis dog” (ll. 477-79). The domain of the master offers him
protection from a harmful, insecure, urban world. In the domestic space, Careaway
supposes his identity stable, even if it means being on the receiving end of beatings and scolding. Jack exposes Careaway to cruel treatment when he tells him that nothing about him definitely links him to the house, a reminder of the lack of security in the servant’s position and the potential for devious performance. *The Comedy of Errors* also emphasizes the downward social mobility with which servants are threatened though Shakespeare highlights the servant’s physical suffering. In a lengthy lament, Dromio of Ephesus complains that his master’s beating will cause his downfall: “I am waked with it when I sleep, raised with it when I sit, driven out of doors with it when I go home, welcomed home with it when I return. Nay, I bear it on my shoulders, as a beggar wont her brat, and I think when he hath lamed me, I shall beg with it from door to door” (4.4.31-35). The blows of the master become an inextricable part of the servant’s body and a certain cause of descent into beggary.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, the predicament of the servant goes hand in hand with his master’s. Dromio asks him for verification of his identity once he has been confronted with the frightening maidservant, and Antipholus of Ephesus’s repeated descriptions of his slave as an “ass” are echoed by Luciana and by the servants themselves.55 But whereas the Dromios voice only passive complaints about their masters’ failure to acknowledge their obedience, Jenkin’s awareness of the dangerous world outside leads to a concerted effort to maintain his sense of self in the face of Jack’s persuasive opposition. He responds to Juggler’s assault by appealing to different types of evidence for his correct self-identification, that is his memory of what he has done during the day, potential witnesses, and his perception of his own body:
Doo not I speake now? Is this not my hande?

Be not these my feat that on this ground stande?

Did not this other knave her knoke me about the hede?

And beat me tyll I was almost dede?

How may it then bee, that he should bee I?

Or I not myselfe?—it is a shamfull lye!

I woll home to our house whosoever say naye,

For surelye my name is Jenkin Careaway. (ll. 514-21)

The realization that his body is his own helps him to hold on to his sense of self.

Although the Epilogue claims that Juggler’s power derives partly from physical force, Careaway is not convinced on the basis of beating that he has lost himself. His servant status explains why physical force has no real power over him. The knocks on his head merely remind him of his social status.

The real blow to Jenkin’s sense of self comes when Juggler recounts in detail what Jenkin has been up to in the course of the day. As we see in Jenkin’s first soliloquy, he has the habit of straying on the road home and making up false stories to account for his whereabouts. His excuses are accepted, presumably, because they capitalize on the sexual indiscretions of Bongrace and his wife. Confronted with the other’s detailed knowledge of his acts that day and even the proof of the apples he has stolen in Juggler’s sleeve, Jenkin is deeply confused, and his secure sense of self will
not be restored. It is not until this appropriation of his memory has occurred that, being
told to look closely at Juggler, Careaway sees a resemblance between himself and the
impostor:

Whosoo in England lokethe on hym stedelye
Sall perceive plainelye that he is I:
I have sene myselfe a thousand times in a glasse
But soo lyke myselfe as he is never was:
He hath in everye poynt my clothing and my geare—
My hed, my cape, my shirt and notted heare,
And of the same coloure, my yes, nose, and lypps,
My chekes, chyne, neake, fyte, leges, and hyppes;
Of the same stature, and hyght and age,
And is in every poynt Maister Bougrace page
That if he have a hole in his tayle,
He is even I myne owne selfe without any faile! (ll. 570-81)

The speech is striking for a number of reasons, but especially for Jenkin’s recognition of
Jack’s material identity. In a recent examination of the significance of clothes and cloth
in the Renaissance theater, Peter Stallybrass proposes that with the transmission of
clothes, a transmission of identity occurs. He describes clothes as “carriers” of memory
that could “carry the absent body, memory, genealogy, as well as literal material
value.”57 Jack Juggler provides a different perspective on this relationship. Jenkin fails even to notice that Juggler is wearing similar clothes until he finds out that the imposter has his memory. A simple change of clothes does not produce instant misidentification. Instead, the scene of false recognition has to be achieved by performance and persuasion. As we have already seen, clothing is largely irrelevant to the confusion in The Comedy of Errors, which focuses on the nature of linguistic and social exchange and assumes that the identical bodies are enough to confuse all concerned. Jack Juggler presents persuasion as prior to perception of physical resemblance, the reverse order of what one would expect on the basis of Stallybrass’s account. The interlude suggests that memory is prone to usurpation and that he who controls it, controls the perception of material evidence of identity. This usurpation is effected, as we have seen in the case of the rogue books, through the rhetorical power of the cony-catcher.

In The Comedy of Errors, the predicament of the servants is worsened as a consequence of their masters’ responses to the confusion. The sense of self of the servants is always a comic complement to the loss of control of their masters, while the confusion of the masters is aggravated by the loss of security on the part of the servants. One performance influences another, and all are tied to each other in an intricate network of relationships. Jack Juggler gives a more complex perspective on the internal effects of misidentification on the servant. Careaway comes to redefine his identity in the light of the existence of the “other I” (divided into a he-I and an I-me). Fully convinced that he has lost himself, he wonders how this could have come about:
Yf I had my name played awaye at dyce,
Or had sold myselfe too any man at a pryce,
Or had made a fray and had lost it in fightyng,
Or it had byne stolne from me sleapyng,
It had byne a matter and I wold have kept pacience—
But it spiteth my hart to have lost it by suche open negligence!
Ah, thou horesone drousie drunken sote,
It were an almes dyde too walke thy cote!
And I shrew him that wold for thee be sorye
Too see thee well curryed by and by,
And by Chryst, if any man wold it doo,
I myselfe wold helpe theretoo—
For a man may see, thou horeson goose,
Thou woldest lysse thyne arse yf it were loose!
Albeit I wold never the dyde beleve
But that the thyng itselfe dothe shewe and pride;
There was never ape so lyke unto an ape
As he is to me in feature and shape. (ll. 606-23)

He realizes that there are many ways to lose the self through gambling, theft, fighting, selling oneself, all acts leading to downward mobility in the cony-catching pamphlets.

The wider potential for loss of self persuades Jenkin that his is not an exceptional case,
and so he accepts the trickster's view of identity as open to manipulation. He enacts his split identity by addressing and rebuking himself, becoming his own persuader and pointing to the physical evidence for the loss of his identity to a double. Like Sly in *The Taming of the Shrew*, however, he tries to make the most out of this new situation, which offers him the means to escape the pitfalls of the servant's life. Although he still cannot avoid the blows of his master and mistress, he is able to defy them, telling Dame Coy, "That other I is now your page / And I am no longer in your bondage!" (l. 744-45), as he longs for the he-I to be present to share the blows that will surely be his lot.

Unlike in the *Amphitruo* and other adaptations of Plautus, the gulled servant is never told that he has been deceived even though Jack formally relinquishes his disguise for the audience ("And now let Careaway be Careawaye agayne," l. 770). Careaway, who has redefined his identity in the light of the existence of an "other I" and learned to distinguish between he-I and I-me, remains fully convinced that he has lost himself. In a final chaotic speech, he tells the audience that he has had the habit of running away for months on end in times when food can be found on the trees. He turns out to have always had the vagabond qualities of Jack Juggler. In the categorization of servants at the end of Awdeley's *The Fraternity of Vagabonds*, Jenkin is the "proctor": "he that will tarry long and bring a lie, when his master sendeth him on his errand. This is a stubber-gibber knave that doth feign tales."58 Like the characters in Shakespeare's comedy, Jenkin combines cony and cony-catcher roles, but perceives himself only as the former. The experience of almost losing his place in the household leaves Jenkin thoroughly domesticated because of his new awareness of the instability of his position.
Comically creating his own punishment, he advises the audience to send his other I home if they find him outside his master’s domain, announcing a reward for those who beat up the straying Jenkin. Finally, he decides to wait for the other I to come home, until which time he will continue to live as himself. The speech gives the impression that Jenkin’s “wilder” tendencies have been abandoned now that he has learned to denounce his vagabond self (the other I) and accept only his domesticated self. The threat to social harmony posed by the trickster-rogue in the rogue books becomes a beneficial transformation of the household in *Jack Juggler*.\(^{59}\)

Awdleley’s list of servants at the end of *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* points to a close connection between vagabonds and servants, disobedient “knaves” who may easily turn out to be tricksters. *Jack Juggler* depicts the two as so close that they are potentially interchangeable. While the play itself ends up “containing” the servant by revealing to him the insecurity of his position, the much-condemned Epilogue, for all its hints at religious persecution and anti-Catholicism, draws a more explicit political moral from the story.\(^{60}\) It argues that the weak are oppressed by the powerful, who define knowledge so that the weak are,

> By suttle and craftye meanes shamefullie abused,

> And by stren[g]th force, and vyolence oft tymes compelled,

> To beleve and saye the moune is made of a grene chese

> Or ells have gret harme, and percace their life lese. (II. 1003-06)
In class terms, the accusation does not appear directly relevant to the interlude itself, unless one sees the masterless entertainer as a forceful oppressor. The obvious allusion to religious persecution should not blind us to the ways in which the Epilogue also highlights more generally that the validation of knowledge, including the knowledge of identity, is in the hands of the powerful. The interlude departs in this analysis from the cony-catching pamphlets, which show that power does not belong with specific social groups, but is located in performative trickery that breaks down social community.

4.

In each of these texts, misidentification is associated with exchange between men and women, travelers and city-dwellers, servants and masters. Generally acceptable modes of understanding the other obscure the other’s true identity and create a situation in which disruption of relationships becomes a permanent possibility. The effect on the social order at large is a general social mobility of which the source goes undetected by those who feel themselves secure. The downward mobility of the citizen, accused of greed, madness, and adultery, provides a mirror image of the traveler’s unintended and misunderstood upward mobility. Significantly, the characters threatened most with downward mobility are the seemingly established inhabitants of Ephesus. The traveler is repeatedly offered the rewards associated with upward mobility. His entrance into the city, as deceptive outsider mistaken for insider, shows that social position lacks firm grounding, for the citizen but also for Adriana.

The outcome of the trickster’s intrusion into settled relationships is similar. The
rogue pamphlets reveal the position of the most respectable citizens to be unstable, and those at opposite ends of the spectrum become interchangeable. The rogue texts go to great lengths to demonstrate that by means of deception, the vagabond threatens to turn his gullible victim, whether gentleman, yeoman, apprentice, farmer, or practitioner of any other profession, into a beggar. Most of the authors of these works present their writings as a warning to those who might be brought to ruin by tricksters and are in danger of losing their jobs, inheritance, and accumulated wealth. In A Notable Discovery of Cozenage (1591), Robert Greene tells his readers of numerous cases in which young gentlemen are eventually “versed to the beggar’s estate.”\textsuperscript{6} The effect of misidentification is, as in The Comedy of Errors, a swapping of position between outsider and insider: the trickster’s victims ultimately descend into vagrancy by being impoverished while he achieves social respectability.

More importantly, both the cony-catching pamphlets and Shakespeare’s play highlight the extent to which the social order is already unstable, enabling the trickery and confusion to generate such (near-) disastrous results so easily. They remind the reader and playgoer that the sources of instability are more pervasive than might seem at first sight. In The Comedy of Errors, the assumptions and expectations that are a part of everyday engagement with others destabilize social positions, preventing the correct assessment of the identity of the other, as they do in the cony-catching pamphlets. In other words, The Comedy of Errors, with its lack of intentional deceit, and the pamphlets, with their deliberate trickery, derive their comic effects from the extent to which the individual is subject to social constructions of self and other. Such a situation,
the play shows, makes social position subject to performance and in constant need of confirmation. Whereas these assumptions work by themselves to harm communication in the play, they are strategically deployed in the pamphlets to catch the unsuspecting citizens off-guard. The possibility of social disruption is in each a consequence of the beliefs and codes that organize exchange.

The authors of these texts show social disorder to be an inevitable part of city-life. Theoretically, they instruct the reader on how to identify the rogue and understand his speech, and the narrator, always a figure who knows the underworld inside out, translates and mediates between the underworld and the world of respectability.\textsuperscript{62} Robert Greene, perhaps the most colorful narrator of all, presents himself as under threat from the underworld, heroically unmasking villains for the benefit of his readers. Yet, he tells the reader in \textit{The Third and Last Part of Cony-Catching} (1592), "this famous City is pestered with the like or rather worse kind of people, that bear outward show of civil, honest, and gentlemanlike disposition, but in very deed their behaviour is most infamous to be spoken of."\textsuperscript{63} England’s peace, Greene asserts, is only a surface matter. This claim alienates the Londoner (or Londoner-to-be) from his social environment, instead of being made to feel a part of it. It is the opposite result of what Dionne sees as the task of these pamphlets, which is to create a social consensus in the face of change.

One of the cheaters in Walker’s \textit{A Manifest Detection of Dice-Play} emphasizes the similarities between himself and more respectable members of the commonwealth.

no man is able to live an honest man unless he have some privy way to help
himself withal, more than the world is witness of. Think you the noblemen could do as they do, if in this hard world they should maintain so great a port only upon their rent? Think you the lawyers could be such purchasers if their pleas were short, and all their judgements, justice and conscience? Suppose ye that offices would be so dearly bought, and the buyers so soon enriched, if they counted not pillage an honest point of purchase? Could merchants, without lies, false making their wares, and selling them by a crooked light, to deceive the chapman in the thread or colour, grow so soon rich and to a baron’s possessions, and make all their posterity gentlemen? What will ye more? Whose hath not some anchorward way to help himself, but followeth his nose, as they say, always straight forward, may well hold up the head for a year or two, but the third he must needs sink and gather the wind into beggar’s haven.⁶⁴

The opinion is echoed, in the same plagiarized words, by a cony-catcher in Greene’s A Notable Discovery of Cozenage.⁶⁵ Greene’s commercial acumen must have told him that this sentiment was a popular one, for his honest and dishonest characters would stress it repeatedly. His Quip for an Upstart Courtier (1592) has honest Cloth-breeches reject many of the representatives of England’s different professions as jury members for his trial because of their tendency to cheat innocent citizens to make money. The last of his pamphlets, written under the nickname of ‘Cuthbert Cony-Catcher’ and entitled The Defence of Cony-Catching (1592), argues at length for the pervasiveness of cony-catching. Cuthbert faults “R.G.” because “you decipher poor cony-catchers, that perhaps
with a trick at cards win forty shillings from a churl that can spare it, and never talk of those caterpillars that undo the poor, ruin whole lordships, infect the commonwealth, and delight in nothing but in wrongful extorting and purloining of pelf.” Deciphering the other, Cuthbert claims, is merely a cover for one’s own sins. The logical conclusion, that Greene himself is guilty of cony-catching, is not avoided. In “Invisible Bullets,” Stephen Greenblatt argues that passages such as these are not intended to be subversive, but instead are an example of the use of subversion in texts, which serves only to contain disorder further. He asserts of this quote and rogue literature in general, “The subversive voices are produced by and within the affirmations of order; they are powerfully registered, but they do not undermine that order.” The case for containment, to my mind, underestimates the extent to which passages such as these are ambiguous in their effect on the readers. They may feel a complex mixture of attraction to the wit of the trickster, admiration for his intelligence, fear of what this means in terms of everyday encounters on the street, and anxiety about the consequences of this for the commonwealth at large.

Whatever the intention behind these passages, the authorial voice cannot fully contain the subversive notion of cony-catching as a general condition rather than an isolated problem. These tricksters imply that all other professions are equally tainted by dishonest dealing and that respectability itself is the result of trickster-like performances, giving the impression that London is, like Ephesus, “full of cozenage” (1.2.97). Besides, the logical conclusion has to be that the only honest men are those who become beggars. The rogue narratives all suggest this possibility, hinting at
additional complications in assessing the true identity of the beggar one might encounter in the street. Harman ends his book with the wish that London’s rogues may be discovered: “That all estates most plainly may see, / As in a glass well polished to look, / Their double demeanour in each degree.”69 Walker’s trickster makes an alternative reading of these words possible. All estates may see themselves in the “glass” that Harman has created, and the pronoun “their” may turn out to refer not to the rogues but to “all estates,” including the respectable readers of the pamphlet.

*The Comedy of Errors* also holds up a “glass well polished” to all estates. The absence of intention in the confusion shows misidentification to be deep-rooted in social exchange. The cony-catchers pamphlets and *Jack Juggler* base their stories on the strategic, performative deployment of the same social constructions of the subject and the same misguided expectations of citizens who are caught off-guard. In each case, the possibility of cony-catchers and the instability of social position are a consequence of the nature of social exchange. All of these texts examine the plight of those who are not in control of the effects of their identification by others. The result is invariably a loss of position, whether pictured as a loss of marital harmony, financial profit, trade relations, property, or even spiritual salvation.

Neither the comedies nor the pamphlets ultimately offer solutions to this problem—instead these texts simply present it and employ a set of rhetorical strategies to ease the reader’s resulting sense of alienation from the city. *Jack Juggler* ends up showing that misidentification can serve to control the rebellious servant, contributing to, rather than preventing familial harmony. But this conclusion is contradicted by the
epilogue's complaint that those in power control the identities of their inferiors. We witness Jenkin's confusion even after Jack Juggler has left the stage, making his self-loss a permanent condition, not a temporary trick.

The rogue literature demonizes the rogue-trickster. These books suggest that the disruption caused by the problem of misidentification can be avoided by isolating, naming, and punishing the rogue. They alleviate concern about city life by pretending to instruct their readers on how to identify the rogue and understand his speech, using different tactics to "fix" the mobile trickster. Awdeley classifies types of rogues and tricksters in The Fraternity of Vagabonds. Greene produces detailed descriptions of the apparel of certain types of rogues and, like his predecessors, lists phrases in beggars' cant. Harman surveys the different types and gives a large number of names at the end of A Caveat for Common Cursitors. His own status as Justice of the Peace suggests that in personal encounters between the law's representative and the counterfeit beggar, the legal system is capable of making up for the abuse of licensing procedures. However, the more the narrator exaggerates about his own status as an expert on the matter of roguery, the more difficult it will be for the reader to imagine him- or herself capable of encountering the rogue with the same powers of observation. As Linda Woodbridge has remarked, "The promise of disclosure animates the whole genre," but it is a promise that is impossible to fulfill. The rogue books make the mechanics of the underworld look so intricate and its practices so widespread that the reader can hardly feel secure about his or her own ability to recognize the rogue on the street.

In The Comedy of Errors, the confusion arises from the anomaly of the twin
body rather than from the trickster's intentions. This basic premise prepares us for a conclusion in which everyone will return to his or her rightful place. And yet, in spite of the good intentions of all involved and in spite of the absence of trickery, excuses, adultery, or greed, there is a need for a highly noticeable generic shift to dispel the unease caused by the main plot. Shakespeare concludes his play by transforming the farcical, hectic, and confused urban space into a Christian, morally controlled, stable environment in which family is the primary source of identity. His ending, drawn from the escapist romance tradition, fails to solve the problem of exchange in the growing city, as is made clear by the switch in genre needed to effect it. Women play a central role, both in causing and enhancing the chaos that marks the main plot and in achieving the recognition scene at the end. The worries generated in the main plot about the female other, felt keenly by both Antipholuses, are ultimately dismissed by means of silencing the women at the end. Chapter two examines the contradictions that beset the generic mixing in the play and explore what women have to do with this, how their presence is transformed in the shift from farce to romance, and why they are so central to scenes of misidentification and recognition.

While the play works hard to restore order at the end, one cannot help but notice that the relationships that break down in The Comedy of Errors do so with alarming ease and without conscious effort on the part of anyone. The containing gestures in the pamphlets, Jack Juggler, and in Shakespeare's play never fully dispel concern with the processes of identification and the mistakes people inevitably make. The Comedy of Errors leaves the playgoers, like the readers of the pamphlets, with the uncomfortable
sense of an unpredictable social world in which cultural expectations only serve to further disorder and the truth about the other is forever elusive.

Notes

1 Messenio says: “among the Epidamnei are the most outrageous voluptuaries and drinkers; besides, very many slanderers and flatterers live there; then, the whores of no other races are said to speak with a more flattering tongue.” The original reads: “in Epidamnieis voluptarii atque potatores maxumi; tum sycophantae et palpatores plurumi in urbe hac habitant; tum meretrices mulieres nusquam perhibentur blandiores gentium” (2.1.1.258-62). I would like to thank Clifford Dammers for his literal translation of the passage. For the Latin version of the play, see Plautus, “Menaechmi,” The Perseus Project, ed. Gregory R. Crane <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu> (December 1999).


4 Shakespeare used The Second Part of Cony-Catching (1590) and probably The Third and Last Part of Cony-Catching (1592) as a source for Autolycus’s trick on the Clown

5 See "References to Playgoing," in Andrew Gurr's Playgoing in Shakespeare's London (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 205-51, 210. Gurr includes a quotation from The Second Part of Cony-Catching, in which Greene describes the "Nip" who "standeth there leaning like some manerly gentleman against the doore as men go in," getting ready to pick their pockets. Gurr, 208 and Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets: An Anthology of Elizabethan Low Life, ed. Gámini Salgádo (Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin, 1972), 193-229, 212. I have used this collection for all other rogue pamphlets quoted in this chapter. The anti-theatrical literature often cited the rogue's presence in playhouses, positing the vagrant as an 'other' over and against which proper identity is established.


7 Dionne, 35 and 46.


10 The story is entitled, "A Pleasant Tale of a Country Farmer, that Took it in Scorn to have his Purse Cut or Drawn from him, and how a Foist Served Him." Robert Greene, "A Disputation," in Salgádo, 265-315, 275-78.


1997), 299-334, 302 and 306.

13 Cf. Lorna Hutson, who shows how in the case of Twelfth Night, Stephen Greenblatt’s use of Galenic gender theory and a very limited number of early modern texts (mainly found in the work of Ambroise Paré) has led to an accumulation of criticism that draws on the same evidence. A handful of documents thus comes to constitute evidence of a general cultural anxiety. Hutson uses the phrase “circulating arguments” to describe this phenomenon. Lorna Hutson, “On Not Being Deceived: Rhetoric and the Body in Twelfth Night,” Texas Studies in Language and Literature 38, no. 2 (1996): 140-74, especially 140-47. See also Jean Howard, “The New Historicism of Renaissance Studies,” English Literary Renaissance 16, no. 1 (1986): 13-43 and Carolyn Porter, “Are We Being Historical Yet?” South Atlantic Quarterly 87 (1988): 743-86, although it should be noted that Porter’s reading of the representation and “essentializing” of power in Stephen Greenblatt and Foucault is based on early material whereas both have complicated their views of power in later work.

14 Frances E. Baldwin, “Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England,” Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science 44, no. 1 (1926): 238-40. Baldwin sees the Elizabethan period as “the zenith of sumptuary legislation,” yet claims that there is little evidence of the actual enforcement of these laws (248). In 1604, the sumptuary laws were repealed (249).


16 Recent critical developments have led to a revaluation of Shakespeare’s input into the creative process and an emphasis on the drama as a product of collaboration between company and playwright, to which the minor and major changes made in the text by compositors, printers, and others contribute. See Stephen Orgel, “What Is a Text?” for a good statement of what is now the critical consensus on this subject. Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama 24 (1981): 3-6, reprinted in Staging the

17 Beier claims that with Jennings we have one of the few cases in which the description in a rogue pamphlet has been confirmed by the historical record (Masterless Men, 117-18). For an interesting reading of the Jennings episode, William C. Carroll, Fat King, Lean Beggar: Representations of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 70-96.


20 Lines 174-76. “Jacke Jugeler,” Four Tudor Comedies, ed. William Tydeman (Middelsey, : Penguin, 1984), 45-94. Modern productions of The Comedy of Errors often feature the twins in identical clothing, a choice that is an interpretive shift away from the play, which does not call for the twins’ similar dress.

21 This point may even have been made in performance of the play. It is unlikely for Shakespeare’s company to have had access to two sets of twin actors. For the audience, then, the discrepancy between the treatment of the characters and their actual, physical presence must have been obvious. It makes even clearer that performativity is crucial to bringing about this situation. Cf. Ben Jonson’s remark that he had begun an adaptation of Amphitruo, but stopped because “he could never find two so like others that he could persuade the spectators they were one.” Anne Barton rightly points out that in Plautus’s time, the twins would have worn masks and would therefore have appeared identical to the audience, while Shakespeare capitalizes on the discrepancy between the dramatic fiction and the actual appearance of the actors. Cf. for the quotation (from Conversations with Drummond) and Barton’s discussion, Ben Jonson, Dramatist (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 29-31.

22 Katherine Eisaman Maus, Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance
Barnard Law is described in most rogue books, based on the frequently plagiarized *A Manifest Detection of Dice-Play*. Much of Walker's entire work is presented as if never before published in the anonymous *Mihil Mumchance* (1597).

Greene, "The Third and Last Part," 242. The jargon is a little confusing because this type of trickery is also known as "cross-biting," i.e. deceit that involves the help of a female.


Harrman, 94.

Steve Rappaport's revisionist argument for London's stability during the period relies on the strength of close personal contact between and within social groups; the rogue literature shows that the very types of relationships that maintain stability may be undermined and exploited by cony-catchers. See *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), chapters 6 and 7.


As Stephen Greenblatt remarks in his introduction to *The Comedy of Errors* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, "Shakespeare's play calls attention to all that is potentially disorienting in the routine circumstances of life." "The Comedy of Errors," introd. to *The Comedy of Errors*, 683-89, 683-84.

In the context of a different argument, Eamon Grennan has also treated the traveling twins as deceptive regardless of intention. "Arm and Sleeve: Nature and Custom in *The

32 In Plautus, the traveling twin fully intends to make the most out of his mis-identification. Gail Paster has helpfully pointed out that the scenes of misidentification in Shakespeare follow a distinct pattern, "outward from the domestic world to the world of commerce," the opposite of the pattern in Plautus, whose traveling twin begins by meeting the courtesan and ultimately encounters the wife. On the whole, this means that Antipholus is more estranged from the city while Menacehms Sosicles is always on top of the confusion. Gail Kern Paster, The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1985), 188.

33 Paster, 187.

34 Lanier in Miola, 308.


36 For Coppélia Kahn, the speech is an expression of the fluidity of adolescent identity and the need for mirroring confirmation of the self. From a Lacanian perspective, Lynn Enterline reads the speech as nostalgia for the mirror stage and the feeling of incompleteness that accompanies the subject's entry into the symbolic order (the Other with a capital letter). While Kahn and Enterline plot psychological development differently, both see this as a universal expression of self-loss. Coppélia Kahn, Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), 194-205, 201-02, and Lynn Enterline, The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995), 189-241, 198-202.

38 Cf. Gámini Salgádo, "'Time's deformed hand': Sequence, Consequence, and
39 Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy
(Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), 28-113; reprinted as "Reading Errantly:
Misrecognition and the Uncanny in The Comedy of Errors," The Comedy of Errors:
Critical Essays, ed. Robert S. Miola, Shakespeare Criticism 18 (New York: Garland,
1997), 261-97.
40 This is also the situation in the case of Martin Guerre: without Guerre’s unwillingness
to be a husband and a master of a household, Arnaud would not have been able to
41 Leggatt points out that the supernatural hints at the famous representation of Ephesus
as a town of witchcraft in the Bible. Alexander Leggatt, Shakespeare’s Comedy of Love
(London: Methuen, 1974), 1-3; reprinted in Miola, 135-153, 135-36.
42 Cf. my remarks on this passage in chapter two, 125-26.
43 3.2.36. Michel Grivelet highlights the thematic importance of Adriana’s potential
adultery. He sees this as an instance of Shakespearean ambiguity. "Shakespeare,
46 Greene, “A Disputation,” 274.
47 Enterline, 197.
48 The character is elsewhere in the play named Luce; here, her name seems to be Nell
primarily because it is part of a lengthy joke that Dromio is making to his master, the
point being that a name can become whatever one wants if it fits the joke. Charles
Whitworth argues that both names should be retained in "Rectifying Shakespeare’s
Errors: Romance and Farce in Bardedity," in The Theory and Practice of Text-Editing,

"Jonathan Hall writes, "If identity fails, in the specific form of mercantile reputation, then there must be a recourse to the law. It is ultimately the law, and not persons themselves, which underwrites the system of mutual trust, and it is only the law which guarantees that the value of a promise will inhere in a real body. Thus the law is the last resort of the system, the violence whose existence is necessary, but whose emergence into visibility is itself a sign of crisis." While apt in the context of the fate of Antipholus of Ephesus, Hall’s terms are too general because the play describes the role of the law specifically in trade relations at this point. Cf. Jonathan Hall, Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1995), 42.

"Ann C. Christensen, ‘‘Because their business still lies out a’ door’: Resisting the Separation of the Spheres in Shakespeare’s The Comedy of Errors," Literature and History 5, no. 1 (1996): 19-37, 24. Susan Amussen and others have pointed out that early modern male identity depended on status in the family. Citing Sir Thomas Smith’s De Republica Anglorum (1583), Amussen contends, “while women’s position in society was based on their position in the family, so was men’s. Sir Thomas Smith argued that yeomen—the lowest group with a stake in society and a role in its government—had to ‘be married, and have children, and as it were some authority among his neighbours’. The position belonged to the head of the family.” S.D. Amussen, “Gender, Family and the Social Order,” Order and Disorder, 196-217, 201. Coppélia Kahn has also pointed out that early modern patriarchal attitudes gave women the “power to validate men’s identities through their obedience and fidelity as wives and daughters,” Man’s Estate,
Maurice Hunt has rightly drawn attention to the ways in which the play uses both the term "servant" and "slave" to describe the position of the Dromios; he believes the play underscores "the slavishness of English servitude." Maurice Hunt, "Slavery, English Servitude, and The Comedy of Errors," English Literary Renaissance 27, no. 1 (1997): 31-56, 41.

Grennan, 159.


Douglas Bruster has pointed out that the London setting is crucial to the play's comic plot, "for so much of its action hinges on the proximity of characters and the conflict of motivations afforded by city crowding." Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 71. For Bruster, the play marks the "post-Reformation emergence, in literature, of the bourgeois subject" (71). See for essays that make this argument for The Comedy of Errors for instance Lanier and Christensen.

Cf. 2.2.198, 2.2.201, 3.1.15, 3.1.18, 3.1.47, 3.2.77, 4.4.26, and 4.4.27.

Bernard Spivack writes that Jack Jugger "purg[es] the erotic theme by purging the God" from its source, but the erotic is not altogether absent. When Jenkin first finds out that Juggler is blocking his way into the house, he assumes immediately that "sum bauderie might now within be founde" (l. 359). While the adultery plot is no longer the driving force behind the imposture, it still is important to the ways in which the servant negotiates his relationship with his superiors. Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1958) 316.

58 John Awdeley, "The Fraternity of Vagabonds," in Salgádo, 59-77, 74. Confusingly, the term "proctor" is also used in the period to designate those who beg on behalf of others, especially for the poor who are too sick to beg. Cf. Kinney, Rogues, 42.

59 The device is a familiar one: many tricksters end up re-establishing order in spite of their harmful intent, establishing a generic link with the Vice in morality drama, whose evil serves to reform the representative of mankind. See for instance the part played by Diccon in creating harmony at the end of Gammer Gurton's Needle (1575) and, for a later Shakespearean example, Autolycus's role in achieving the family reunion in The Winter's Tale.

60 For a discussion of the references to Catholicism in the play and Epilogue, see Tydeman (19), Axton (19-20), and David Bevington, Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), 124-26.


62 Moll Cutpurse can be compared to these narrators in Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's The Roaring Girl (1611). In Act 5, scene 1, Moll acts as an intermediary between gallants and rogues and teaches the former how to understand and uncover the latter. Her own position, however, is as slippery as that of the trickster-rogue since she is capable of moving seemingly without effort between different social circles, perhaps on the basis of her trickster experience.


66 'Cuthbert Cony-Catcher,' 346.
67 Cuthbert accuses R.G. of selling his dramatic version of *Orlando Furioso* to two players' companies (360).
69 Harman, 153.
CHAPTER TWO

"This sympathized one day's error":

Identification, Femininity, and Genre in *The Comedy of Errors*

Early modern authors understood genres, as Stephen Orgel writes, "not as sets of rules but as sets of expectations and possibilities."\(^1\) This attitude allowed for frequent mixing of genres and the "contamination" of one genre by another. It accounts for a dramatic environment in which plays could belong to a range of sets and subsets. In her work on Renaissance "kinds" (as the period called it), Rosalie Colie proposes that every genre "offers a set of interpretations, of 'frames' or 'fixes' on the world."\(^2\) Taking this idea as its premise, this chapter argues that *The Comedy of Errors*, with its blend of farce and romance, combines two fundamentally different 'fixes' on the world that offer irreconcilable and opposing approaches to identification, and therefore to class and gender. By thinking about the characteristics of romance and farce, we can work towards an explanation of their presence in the play and examine the contradictions to locate the historical and cultural context that made this curious blend of genres significant to its early modern audience.

As the uses of identification within the generic worlds of farce and romance show, both genres present subjectivity and social position as a product of performance. While the notion of performance I am employing here is closely linked to the theater, I am not arguing that farce and romance always reflect self-consciously on themselves as theater. Butler describes "performance" as a "ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint ... with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling
and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance.\textsuperscript{3} \textit{In} spite of this constraint, the idea of ritual itself is undermined in farce and its constraints are exposed as fictions. Farce highlights, or even celebrates, the extent to which social position is not secure. In light of the contextualization of the previous chapter, we can link farce with the trickster ethic found in the cony-catchers pamphlets, which put forward a similarly performative notion of class and identity. While I want to disregard for the moment the question of whether subjectivity is \textit{really} produced through performance, I do want to argue here that the concept of subjectivity prevalent in farce is a performative one and that farce stages the disruption of those multiple performances that make up selfhood.

Romance, once the quest or wandering has come to an end, finds its ground firmly in the body and makes physicality, presented as an expression of destiny, the basis for social position and relationships. While this is shown to be true in moments that are highly performative and ritualistic, romance emphasizes the ways in which performance \textit{is} determined in advance, reflective of a divine order, to deny the possibility of disruption. \textit{Here}, bodies are presented as sources of comforting evidence of the fixity of identity. The term ritual is highly appropriate to romance where the threat of death is, as Butler says, "controlling and compelling the shape of the production." In the final recognition scene, this threat is overcome through a presentation of identities as fixed and divinely ordained.

In short, farce and romance give diametrically opposed representations of identity, gender, and class, even though performance is central to both. In an essay on romance, Fredric Jameson notes that we need to analyze the mixed genres that were so
common in the Renaissance, to understand how and why one of the two genres may serve to repress or defuse the other. In *The Comedy of Errors*, romance serves to repress or defuse farce, eliminating the need to answer the troubling questions farce poses about the social order and the nature of identity. In repressing farce, romance represses its own performativity. It mystifies identity by attributing its source to a divine order that is reflected rather than produced by means of theatrical acts. The result is a restoration of harmony that is drawn from a mode of representation that conflicts with the farcical main plot, and, I argue, provides a nostalgic perspective on the world.

Women are central to the scenes of misidentification in *The Comedy of Errors*. This chapter examines the scenes that involve women to show how the presence of women is paralleled with and affected by the presence of two identical bodies and therefore the pervasiveness of misidentification. The representation of the three central female characters, Adriana, Luciana, and the Abbess, is generically complex because it is determined by farce and romance and because it helps to produce the shift from one into the other. Women's voices (and the absence of their voices) are essential to both farce and romance, but treated in opposing ways. In farce, the possibility of female promiscuity is part of the general disorder; in romance, female chastity is established beyond doubt and promiscuity is made to look impossible. Without female chastity, a harmonious resolution would not be possible.

The two genres, and therefore the two modes of representation, exist in an uneasy relationship with each other in the play. This problematic combination is replicated in contemporary criticism of *The Comedy of Errors*, which has not yet accounted for the breaks and contradictions that mark the comedy's mixing of different
narrative impulses and tendencies. In this chapter, I explore the contradictions between
the two genres as well as the presence of these contradictions in the play’s
representation of femininity. Before I do so, I survey critical approaches to the work, to
show the extent to which the play’s form has remained a critical conundrum and has
divided criticism into two incompatible ways of thinking about the text, reflecting the
generic disjunction that characterizes the comedy itself.

1.

It has long been a commonplace that *The Comedy of Errors* blends romance and farce
in a not altogether unified manner since the opening and closing scene take their
inspiration from a medieval retelling of Greek romance, *Confessio Amantis* by John
Gower, while the main plot is based on Plautus’s *Menaechmi* and *Amphitruo*. For
critical approaches that value unity and coherence, this has long meant a view of the
play as early and immature. In more recent reevaluations of *The Comedy of Errors*, we
can detect two schools of thought on the play: readings either emphasize the importance
of the Christian themes, stressing the romance frame, or they highlight the play’s
farcical nature, focusing on the main plot. In the “romance” readings, the theme of
redemption is central. Egeon is often treated as an Everyman figure and a
representative of mankind, whose condemnation at the outset and pardon at the end
reflects a Christian progression from sin—Egeon uses the word “fall” in the very first
line of the play—towards salvation. This group traces biblical echoes and sees the
setting of the play, Ephesus, as a reference to Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians.
Ultimately, they argue, identity is reconstituted through redemption.
Perhaps the best example of this type of reading, and certainly one of the most forcefully argued commentaries on the Christian themes in the play, is Arthur Kinney’s “Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors and the Nature of Kinds.” Kinney acknowledges that the play combines Roman farce and Christian beliefs, but goes on to assert that Shakespeare supersedes “the pagan world of Plautus with his own Christian one,” and that “Structurally, for example, The Comedy of Errors has no real basis, no deep structure in common with Roman Old Comedy.” Kinney reads the basic structure of the play as analogous to the Church service on Holy Innocents’ Day, on which the play was twice staged. His reconstruction of the play’s Christian narrative foregrounds, as do other readings of this kind, the frame plot, which he feels has been undervalued in previous criticism.

Psychoanalytic readings, while less overtly Christian in focus, display modes of interpretation and areas of concentration that resemble other romance readings. In her early work, Barbara Freedman foregrounds the themes of redemption and debt (seen as symbolic), prioritizing the Christian narrative of sin and salvation that she treats as fundamental to the play. As in the case of Kinney, Freedman sees Egeon as central. The twins, she argues, symbolize aspects of his personality, in medieval morality fashion. The terms of her analysis, then, combine Christian and psychoanalytic modes of thinking about subjectivity: Egeon’s “fall” and “redemption” drive the errors of the middle plot and find their origin in his guilt for separating himself from his wife. Coppélia Kahn likewise concentrates on the frame plot although in her analysis, based on ego-psychology, the play traces the development from (masculine) adolescence to adulthood. The ultimate “normalization” becomes more important than the general
destabilization of identity that is a part of the development from narcissism towards heterosexual marriage. Concentrating almost exclusively on Antipholus of Syracuse, Kahn discusses the role of the twin primarily as a normalizing influence, excluding much of the more widespread confusion in the city, which is treated as nothing more than a reflection of the individual turmoil of adolescence. That this type of reading too can be placed with the Christian accounts becomes clear in Kahn's discussion of the tempest at the outset as "providential"—the resolution involves for both Kahn and Freedman a development towards integration and normalization that is synonymous with the restoration of order by God in other romance readings. Lynn Enterline offers a Lacanian account of the play, rejecting the idea of the subject's coherence and integrity in general and stressing the disjunction in the relation of the subject to language. Here too, the emphasis is on the traveling twin, who comes to stand for "the Shakespearean subject," in disregard of the predicament of the much more established figure of the citizen twin. While the resolution only offers a fantasy of the subject's coherence, Enterline uncovers the same structure of temporary fragmentation and ultimate unification that is presented in other psychoanalytic readings. Like Kahn and Freedman, Enterline argues that the play reveals developmental stages in the constitution of the subject in a way that is consistent with the psychoanalytic paradigm, both in the intervening plot and in the frame, so that fragmentation and dislocation is stressed in the middle only as a stage on the way toward re-integration (of a fictional kind) in the conclusion.11

The romance readings are based on an approach to the comedy that is fundamentally at odds with what I call the "farce" readings of the play. Here, the
emphasis is on the confusions of identity in the main plot, which revolve around money, material possessions, and business relations.\textsuperscript{12} These readings find loss of identity to be pervasive and not caused by the “fallen state” of mankind, but by secular causes, such as the nature of the market place and urban forms of exchange. New historicists Jonathan Hall and Douglas Lanier, for instance, see the play as a reflection on early capitalism and the emergence of a modern subjectivity. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Lanier claims that the play exposes the materiality of identity and forms part of an early modern cultural crisis of self-representation that causes a turn towards more modern, interior concepts of self. Hall gives an economically-based reading of the play as a “dramatic and poetic participation in the construction of the new modalities of mercantile desire.”\textsuperscript{13} For Lanier, Ephesus is not a biblical location but simply “a commercial center.”\textsuperscript{14} In the new historicist view, the play proves the historicity of the way in which crises of identity are negotiated. In their exploration of the early modern subject in a state of transition, new historicists and cultural materialists stress either the play’s historical specificity in its presentation of the subject as materially constituted or the play’s modernity in the movement towards an inner-based subjectivity, characteristic of the later, bourgeois subject. The significance of the marketplace dominates in these readings of the play, so that the Christian materials in the frame plot tend to be underemphasized or not examined at all. Camille Wells Slight, to name a more extreme instance of a farce reading, argues that the concluding scene and the activity that produces the reunion, “can be read as the work of a beneficent fate or providence. In the text nothing precludes and nothing necessitates such an interpretation. But the change in the last scene from chaos to clarity focuses on factual
explanation of the relations among people, not on moral or spiritual enlightenment."\textsuperscript{15} Frequently, in such readings, the play’s conclusion is seen as compromised by the continuing farcical confusion of the twins.\textsuperscript{16}

Recent criticism has begun to acknowledge more the disjunctive nature of the play, influenced in part by Barbara Freedman’s revision of her earlier work in “Reading Errantly: Misrecognition and the Uncanny in The Comedy of Errors.” Acknowledging the contradictions in the play in terms of the frame and main plot, Freedman has made it imperative for others to address this issue. However, her representation of the two twins as different types of readers (deconstructive and formalist) and even her account of the play’s theme of redemption, based on her earlier romance reading, become too schematic when read in the context of her own acknowledgments. Her conclusion that no coherent reading or even any reading is possible that attributes meaning to this play is belied by her own argument on the theme of redemption. She also seems to forego the historical and cultural contexts that might have made this impossible combination meaningful to early modern playgoers.\textsuperscript{17}

2.

In the context of this play, Freedman has revised Eric Bentley’s view of farce to include a psychoanalytic perspective on its mechanisms. She defines it as “a type of comedy deriving laughter chiefly from the release and gratification of aggressive impulses, accomplished by a denial of the cause (through absurdity) and the effect (through a surrealistic medium) of aggressive action upon an object.”\textsuperscript{18} Bentley treats the absence of cause and effect as evidence of farce’s inherent meaninglessness. By adding the term
"denial," Freedman provides a different approach: now, meaning is not so much absent, as hidden. In Freedman's words, "a strategic denial and displacement of meaning is intrinsic to the genre." For that reason, she adds, we can reconstruct these displaced elements to reveal the meaning behind the seemingly meaningless action. In The Comedy of Errors, the main reason that normal relations of cause and effect are neutralized is that there are two sets of twins with the same name and identical bodies. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this denial of cause and effect sets the play apart from the cony-catching pamphlets and their intentional trickery, but only if we take this denial at face value. Strictly speaking, transgressive behavior in this play cannot be attributed to devious intention, because it is the product of unintentional mistaking, and its punishment, the expected effect, is thwarted because it is invariably directed towards the wrong person. The device of the twin brothers allows for the "gratification of aggressive impulses" both sexually and socially. We imagine the usurpation of someone's place in the domestic and the public sphere, as we do in the case of the cony-catching pamphlets. Thus, the play shows that identity is, as Lanier puts it, "perhaps never more (and no "deeper") than a well-managed stage spectacle, a function of theatricality and the logic of farce." This representation of identity attributes a central role to identification in producing identity. Yet, in spite of Lanier's insistence on the "truth" of this view to the Elizabethan period, the play avoids the consequences of entertaining such a view by the farcical absence of intention (cause) and punishment (effect).

Such comic denial of responsibility would be impossible in romance. Unlike in farce, romance individuals undergo tests of faith and courage, suffer, see their family
relations lost, and are eventually rewarded for their courage and patience by divine providence. The structure of romance, as genre theorists have noted, is characterized by deferral, or, in terms relevant to this play, “error” in the sense of wandering. The structure of farce is also marked by deferral, but the error that motivates it is the farcical mistake that allows for the suspension of normal cause and effect. Closure in the form of ultimate revelation, recognition, and redemption is inherent to the genre of romance, but not to farce, which seems capable of endless reiteration. This need for revelation and recognition makes misidentification seem never more than a temporary mistake since identity is ultimately shown to be essential, fixed, “natural,” and divinely ordained, and therefore immune to devious performance and trickery.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare creates a complicated generic mix both in the frame and in the middle plot. While farce takes on romance qualities, the romance frame is adjusted to acquire unexpectedly urban, secular aspects. Egeon’s lengthy narrative sets up the romance story of family separation. His speech already points to the mercantile themes of the main plot in a way that is unconventional in romance and not found in the source text by Gower. Egeon’s business dealings as a merchant have led to the separation of the family—his travels were necessary because his agent had died, leaving his goods exposed to chance. In the Christian frame, providence is at the heart of the misfortunes that befall the family (whether this misfortune is evidence of a general fall of man or an individual failure on Egeon’s part). From a mercantile perspective, however, new forms of trade have removed Egeon and his family from the secure domestic space. *The Comedy of Errors* offers a very different perspective on the underlying causes of the romance separation than Gower or for instance the more
straightforwardly romantic *Pericles*, in which the family is split up as a consequence of the military obligations of the ruler-hero. From the beginning, then, Shakespeare adapts the romance narrative by introducing contemporary, social themes, suggestive of a different approach to questions of identity.

The influence of chance and the implications of new forms of trade for the merchant point, perhaps, to an explanation for Egeon's melancholy. He is not the only merchant in the play to feel this way, as we can see in the unexpected seriousness of Balthasar, a merchant with a minor role in the play. His presence places additional pressure on his host, Antipholus of Ephesus, who remarks, "You're sad, Signor Balthasar. Pray God our cheer / May answer my good will, and your good welcome here" (3.1.19-20). In his short section on farce, Douglas Bruster's asserts that because of their complex relationship to property, merchants (and citizens) "gained a special reputation for anxiety" in Renaissance drama, an argument cited by Ann Christensen to explain Egeon's sadness.²³ But when it comes to the romance frame this explanation is only partly applicable. It carries the theme of mercantilism, present in the frame but not determining it, over into romance in a way that conflicts with what we find out about the character. Egeon's self-presentation is much less mercantile than his citizen-son's, and the sense of doom that is associated with his character seems more metaphysical than materialistic. He is in Ephesus in his capacity as a father rather than a merchant. His goods are never mentioned again in the play.²⁴ While his impending execution is a result of a failure to gain access to his capital, we get the distinct sense that even if he had the money, he would forego the opportunity to buy his way out.
Egeon is concerned to tell his personal story so that "the world may witness that my end / Was wrought by nature, not by vile offence" (1.1.33-34). He presents his paternal feelings as natural and potential mercantile motives as "vile offence," distancing himself from the secular reasons for his impending execution. He seems to be melancholy not primarily because of his relationship to property but because he has, for reasons he cannot determine himself, been subjected to a test of faith that involves a complete separation from the family. His remark that he "would gladly have embraced" (1.1.69) his own death in the storm that split up the family suggests that there is a deeper sense of doom attached to this character that can only be removed by the trials he undergoes. His wandering has led to a stripping away of all social concerns so that the mercantile reasons for the execution are made to look irrelevant to Egeon's state of mind. Like Pericles, he has been reduced in typical romance fashion to the essentials of his humanity; in light of the trials he undergoes, his mercantile identity is a thing of the past.

*The Comedy of Errors* begins with a reflection on the problem of exchange between the law and accused and between the governing institution and its subject. At the outset, the law of Ephesus is presented as a-moral and irreligious, caught up in a cycle of revenge. It is constrained by the need to reciprocate violence because of the violations of the rules of the marketplace that have taken place. In accordance with the legal mode of identification, the Duke addresses Egeon only in the terms that matter to the law, calling him "Merchant of Syracusa" and "Syracusian" (1.1.3; 1.1.28). The mercantile law identifies its subjects in terms of nationality, profession, and access to money, limiting the personal exchanges between the Duke and Egeon. Egeon's life
story can be heard but has no effect on the death sentence, which suggests that there is no room for complex self-representation by the legal subject. The Duke’s impersonal mode of address contrasts with Egeon’s use of the Duke’s first name, Solinus, in the first line of the play. In a scene that must have been staged as a highly formalized confrontation between ruler and convicted subject, the first word of the play constitutes a break between what the audience sees and what it hears. Egeon’s use of the Duke’s first name places this character in a romantic frame of reference—in the romance plot, Egeon’s death penalty is part of his personal trial by Providence. To his individual story, the Duke’s position as a representative of the law is as important as his personal role as an obstacle to family reunion.

While providing us with generic pointers, Egeon’s use of the Duke’s first name also highlights the limitations imposed on the Duke’s relationship to his subjects. Egeon and the Duke inhabit roles that are exceeded by their own remarks, but that nevertheless force them to act in specified ways. They can signal verbally that their sense of self goes beyond the legal definition, but their words have no meaning to the impersonal mercantile law. Throughout the scene, the Duke wavers between his official role and his personal, Christian conscience. Egeon’s speech posits a distinction between man and institution at the outset, reinforced by the Duke’s own admission of a conflict between his soul and his identity as a ruler: “Now trust me, were it not against our laws—/ Which princes, would they, may not disannul—/ Against my crown, my oath, my dignity. / My soul should sue as advocate for thee” (1.1.142-45). It is not until the end, once personal narratives have forced themselves into the Duke’s consideration, that he acquits Egeon without even the slightest consideration of the fact that there is now an
entire family of Syracusan intruders, supposedly to be condemned by the Ephesian laws. The Duke’s name is not mentioned again because he eventually allows the institution itself to be transformed and Christianized, so that the conflict between conscience and public position no longer exists. At the start, however, Solinus is the law’s conflicted representative, compelled to uphold decisions made behind close doors by nameless “solemn synods” which will become irrelevant by the end.\textsuperscript{25}

The nature of the presence of the law shifts radically once we enter the farcical middle plot. There, the law is no longer a romantic obstacle to family reunion. The sense of doom at the outset is transformed into multiple comic allusions to Doomsday.\textsuperscript{26} The law is now personified by the nameless sergeant, hopelessly ineffective when it comes to controlling the chaos on the streets of Ephesus. In both the middle plot and the frame, the law is in need of reform, but the nature of that reform depends on the generic context. Solinus’s conflicted conscience points in a religious direction. Eventually, he will be able to encounter his subjects from a position of religious authority because he becomes indifferent to mercantile law. The middle plot, by contrast, simply suggests the need for accurate identification of slippery individuals in an urban setting. The ease with which Antipholus of Syracuse eludes the law suggests that such control of individuals is impossible in the chaotic, farcical urban setting where you need only “give out” that you are from another city to avoid being condemned to death (1.2.1).

The presence of romance elements in farce does not lead to a seamless generic blend. The farcical context varies in its use of romance: it deepens farce, creating a serious religious undertone, but it turns serious convention into parody. Shakespeare gives a presence to the supernatural not seen in Plautus’s farce.\textsuperscript{27} His characters speak a
language rich with Christian allusion and biblical echoes. Phrases such as “You know since Pentecost the sum is due” (said by the second Merchant, 4.1.1) and Dromio of Syracuse’s request for his master’s “redemption—the money in his desk” (4.2.46) have been emphasized in romance readings. Disregarding the secular context for these allusions, Kinney argues that they produce a general sense of a metaphysical significance to the overall plot.28 On this reading, Shakespeare gives his characters even in the farcical main plot the Christian language with which events will ultimately be explained so that superstition and bewilderment can ultimately make way for the recognition of a divine order.

Yet, such superimposition of a coherent narrative must disregard the social and rhetorical situation in which these Christian allusions occur. Taking into account the context for these allusions makes us aware of their double significance as signs of a divine order and as subversive jokes. Many of the speeches and echoes mentioned in the romance readings are spoken by the Dromios. In burlesque fashion, low comic characters employ and transform biblical references for everyday, social purposes. When Dromio of Ephesus tries to persuade the wrong Antipholus to come home for lunch, he tells him: “we that know what ’tis to fast and pray, / Are penitent for your default to-day” (1.2.51-52). Antipholus’s failure to arrive on time is with a pun presented as a religious sin. Dromio’s quibble on “penitent” combines the secular and the religious. He uses it to describe his punishment by Adriana and the fact that they are all fasting and praying, as if doing religious penance. When Dromio of Ephesus is unable to tell Antipholus of Syracuse where he left his money, Antipholus responds in aggravation, “As I am a Christian, answer me” (1.2.77). In turn, Dromio, trying to
persuade Antipholus to come home, describes his mistress as praying "that you will hie you home to dinner" (1.2.90). Religious language in the mercantile city may be employed for the worldly purpose of persuading your master to come home and eat lunch or getting your servant to tell you where your money is. Moments like these reveal the extent to which farce constantly undermines any kind of master narrative we would like to see develop and the importance of understanding the discrepancy between the meanings of Christian allusions within the different worlds of farce and romance.  

To the errors and mistakes that motivate the main plot, Shakespeare adds the wandering typical of romance. Antipholus of Syracuse, who feels besieged by the witch-like inhabitants of Ephesus, increasingly perceives his predicament as that of the romance knight. At the climax of the confusion, he wanders around ready to do battle with the powers that besiege him. After having accosted the courtesan with the preposterously incongruous, "Satan, avoid" (4.4.44), Antipholus proceeds, according to the Folio stage direction, to walk around "with his rapier drawn" (at 4.4.138), a type of posturing that is mocked because it only serves to perpetuate and intensify the confusion.  

Knighthly behavior is made laughable because of the recognizably urban setting. Dromio of Syracuse, the traveling twin-servant, complains that he is faced with the sexual demands of Nell or Luce, the greasy kitchen-wench. Her knowledge of Dromio's body is more invasive than the town's inexplicable awareness of the names of the travelers:

this drudge or diviner laid claim to me, called me Dromio, swore I was assured to her, told me what privy marks I had about me—as the mark of my shoulder,
the mole in my neck, the great wart on my left arm—that I, amazed, ran from her as a witch. And I think if my breast had not been made of faith, and my heart of steel, she had transformed me to a curtal dog, and made me turn i’th’ wheel.

(3.2.138-44)

The signs that are supposed to distinguish the body from all others are now no longer unique, so that women (citizen and maid alike) can lay claim to men sexually, causing such a sense of disorder that only supernatural categories serve to explain it. The minute evidence of the body that has become public knowledge is precisely the sort of evidence pointed to in romance conclusions to reveal the true identity of the hero or heroine. Like his master, Dromio presents himself as a Christian knight, referring to Ephesians 6:13-17, which describes the Christian believer’s “breast plate of righteousness” and “shield of faith” to protect himself from the assaults of the devil. This romance-like response is undercut not only by its urban setting, but also because it is the culmination of Dromio’s comic rhetorical performance for his master. His description of the grotesque body of Nell as encompassing the entire world ends with this comic deflation of romance. Here, the powerful theatricality of farce turns romance upside down.

3.

As many have noted, however, romance also influences farce in a more serious manner in The Comedy of Errors. Shakespeare has deepened individual characters: the traveling twins reflect on their own loss of identity and sense of transformation, and the shrewish character called “wife” in Plautus’s Menaechmi becomes the equivocal Adriana, who
contemplates her dependence on her husband in depth. While a serious, romance-like
desire for selfhood marks the expressions and dialogues of these characters, the basic
farcical premise of the misidentified twin continues to place them in a context that
disrupts their attempts to find a self.

We are prepared for the encounter with and conversations of the women in the
play by Antipholus of Syracuse. Before he meets them, he begins by disavowing any
claim or attempt at relationship made by the inhabitants of Ephesus in a speech I
discussed in the previous chapter, but because of its significance to the exchange with
the women, cite here once more:

They say this town is full of cozenage:

As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many such-like liberties of sin. (1.2.97-102).

As noted before, it is important to the connection with the cony-catching pamphlets that
these figures are performers of different kinds. Antipholus imagines the far-reaching
consequences of their tricks, which are in part supernatural and in part derived from the
typical arsenal of the cony-catcher: juggling, disguise, and persuasive speech
(“prating”). Eye, mind, body, and soul, those human attributes that seem to be most
fixed and tend to be central to the romance resolution, are presented as open to
penetration, deformation and alteration by these characters. Their devious performances allow them to “insinuate” themselves, to use one of Greene’s favorite words to describe what cony-catchers do, into the deepest and most intimate aspects of the self. Of course, those aspects on which selfhood depend are indeed under siege, but not, as Antipholus imagines it, by the supernatural, but by the impact of misidentification on “normal,” everyday exchange. The play, as we have seen in the first chapter, presents us with the possibility that the effects described by Antipholus are the consequence of everyday exchange gone wrong.

The exchanges between Adriana, Luciana, and Antipholus of Syracuse establish an important relationship between farcical misidentification and femininity. Parallel to the upsetting of social relationships, a narrative of near-adultery is set up as a consequence of misidentification. Misidentification, in other words, creates a general disorder that influences and is influenced by the dramatic presence of women. In generic terms, we can expect to see in farce the staging of illicit behavior without the usual cause and effect. Part of the pleasure of the scene, then, derives from the farcical subversion of respectable marriage, a process that is already underway because of Antipholus of Ephesus’s absence when Antipholus of Syracuse arrives to take his place. In this case, the farcical denial of cause and effect means that we can be entertained by the “impostor’s” effortless intrusion into the household and the possibility of adultery (were he to sleep with Adriana) or sexual intercourse between a man and his sister-in-law (were he to persuade Luciana to sleep with him).

As much historical and literary research has shown, the period’s cultural anxiety about women’s voices renders extended attempts at persuasion of a man by a woman
potentially sexually suspect. Farce uses misidentification to bring center stage this connection between female speech and sexuality, even in the absence of illicit intention. The social implications of cony-catching (in which the trickster inserts himself into social circles not his own) are given sexual form. Thus, misidentification and the possibility of adultery are brought together in a scene that enacts the fear frequently expressed by cuckolded males in Renaissance drama: that female sexuality is equal to “blindness” on the part of the wife, whose desire causes her failure to distinguish properly between her husband and other men. This gives a sexual resonance to female speeches, which are always potentially subject to sexual interpretation, and adds to a general sense of sexual chaos because one male can be replaced by another with frightening ease.

This phenomenon is central to Much Ado about Nothing, in which Shakespeare gives the parallel between misidentification and the suspicion of adultery an explicit dramatic form in the gulling of Claudio by Borachio and Don John. Using the waiting woman with a desire for upward mobility as his pawn, Borachio relies on minimal staging for the actual deception. He has the power to “appoint her to look out at her lady’s chamber window” (2.2.16) where Claudio, Don Pedro, and Don John will “hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term me Claudio” (2.2.35-36). Lewis Theobald emended the line to read, “hear Margaret term me Borachio.” This correction serves the purpose of rendering Margaret innocent; if deception is based predominantly on naming, then her use of the correct name reduces her guilt. But the line in the 1600 Quarto (and the Folio, presumably based on the Quarto) does not maintain the innocence of Margaret in this manner.
In Borachio's plot, misidentification happens primarily on the basis of misnaming. The materiality of the scene of misidentification in the source texts, which involve more elaborate plots, ladders, and dressing up, is reduced to a simple act of calling out names at a window. It is not until Act 5, when Borachio confesses to Don Pedro, that he mentions that Margaret is in this scene "dressed up in Hero's garments" (5.1.221-22), making the misidentification at least partly based on material evidence and disguise. If Margaret is thus dressed up in the scene of misidentification, she is more seriously implicated because of her desire to be Hero. Her witty conversation with Hero the next morning on Hero's wedding dress is made to look more suspect. But it is at least notable that for the purpose of planning this scene of misidentification, Borachio relies only on the use of the wrong names. The simple exchange of name for name is often a part of romance recognition scenes at the end of plays, in which the misidentified protagonist signal his or her correct identification by accepting the proper name, or in which the identity of others is confirmed by correctly naming relatives. Pericles's recognition of Marina begins with asking for her story, but culminates when he asks her for her name. This leads to her questioning of him, to which he ultimately can respond by naming himself and calling his daughter by name repeatedly.

The scene of misidentification in Much Ado about Nothing presents us with a perversely sexual "mis-staging" of the recognition scene. Misnaming suggests a double crime: Borachio's devious play and Margaret's ambition to be Hero. Margaret enjoys playacting outside the legitimate sphere of the masked ball and willingly assumes her mistress's place in the bedroom, calling her lower-class lover by an upper-class name in exchange for hearing herself called by the name of her mistress. In other words, she
violates the rules of chastity and the boundaries of class by using the bedroom window
of her mistress as the stage for a sexual flirtation that involves the assumption of Hero’s
identity. Whether Margaret is using her sexuality to get Borachio to join in her acting
out a moment of upwardly mobile fantasy or whether one or both are sexually aroused
by assuming the identities of their noble counterparts remains unclear. We might even
wonder whether Margaret is certain of the real identity of her lover. Such questions are
left unanswered as the scene itself is not even staged, even though all source texts stage
it and Ariosto’s version even provides us with the gentlewoman’s own story.

Whatever Margaret’s motive, the consequence, the accusation of Hero, follows
logically from the sin committed by Margaret as her behavior implicates and
contaminates Hero with the waiting woman’s lack of discretion and class ambition. The
scene hints at the rhetorical figure of chiasmus: Margaret’s desire for and momentary
enactment of upward mobility given form by her sexuality leads to Hero’s loss of sexual
reputation and social position. Whereas Margaret uses her sexuality to assume a
counterfeit noble identity, the damage to Hero’s sexual reputation causes a loss of
respectability and position, as it turns her, in the public eye, into a prostitute. The fact
that Borachio can stage this moment so easily calls Margaret’s sexual discretion into
question—Claudio is in fact literally “cozened with the semblance of a maid.” The
waiting woman is merely the appearance of a maid, with a physical resemblance that is
made to seem more striking by the assumption of her mistress’s name.

The moment enacts succinctly the fear on the part of cuckolds that female
sexuality causes an inability to distinguish between men. The idea that an adulterous
woman would crave sexuality for its own sake and sleep with other men regardless of
their individual identity is forcefully staged. This is why the editorial emendation shifts
the focus. If Margaret calls Borachio by his right name while he calls her Hero, then
Claudio’s fear is simply that Hero loves another man. If Margaret calls Borachio
Claudio, then Claudio’s fear is not merely that he has been matched up with “an
approved wanton” (4.1.44), but also that, in her uncontrolled sexuality, Hero does not
perceive an inherent difference between her husband-to-be and any other (lower-class)
male. Hero’s use of Claudio’s name to Borachio perverts the idea of the impending
marriage through misdirecting her words. Claudio’s suspicion must be that his place in
the bedroom is taken by another man, who usurps his name in the process, and that his
wife-to-be either cannot tell the difference or does not care to.

The same idea is present in Adriana’s welcoming of the wrong Antipholus. The
desperate attempt on her part to persuade the wrong man to enter into her house and
dine with her, places her in a sexually suspect position, created by the misdirection of
her words, an inadvertent and unintentional form of “misnaming.” Similarly, Luciana’s
morally dubious advice to Antipholus to hide his adultery from his wife troubles her
chaste self-representation at the opening of Act 2.

Confronted with Antipholus of Syracuse, Adriana employs two persuasive
registers, combining language of physical closeness and of performativity. Adriana’s
“drop of water” speech, discussed in the first chapter in terms of its effect on Antipholus
of Syracuse, is a romantic gesture meant to establish a fixed basis for the relationship.
Echoing Pauline rhetoric of conjugal oneness, she assures him:

as easy mayst thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
And take unmingled hence that drop again,
Without addition or diminishing,
As take from me thyself and not me too. (2.2.125-29)

Thomas Henning and others have traced this language to the Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, repeated in the Homily of the State of Matrimony (1563). The injunction that men ought to “love their wives, as their owne bodies: he that loveth his wife, loveth him self,” is a crucial part of Adriana’s argument. Similarly, Adriana presents herself as the vine on the elm that is her husband. The speech contains a faint echo of the biblical image of the wife as a “vine plentifully spreading about [the husband’s] house,” quoted in the Homily and often the subject of representations in emblem books, in which the husband becomes the elm and the wife the vine.

The Christian gestures towards romantically inseparable husband and wife are, as we have seen in the case of other Christian allusions, undermined by the rhetorical situation. As we saw in the first chapter, Adriana threatens her supposed husband with the consequences of his adultery:

My blood is mingled with the crime of lust.
For if we two be one, and thou play false,
I do digest the poison of thy flesh,
Being strumpeted by thy contagion. (2.2.129-32)
The image of physical oneness transforms into an image of contagion, digestion, and poison. Their physical inextricability is not a source of comfort but of a frightening responsibility for another body. The male body itself is not affected by adultery, but through its oneness with the wife spoils her body. Similarly, to the conventional image of the vine, Adriana adds the idea of the "Usurping ivy, brier, or idle moss" (2.2.177) that may come to infect the sap of the elm, to put her point across.⁴³

In both cases, then, Adriana relies on conventional scriptural language, but transforms its metaphors for her own purposes, a move used numerous times by the Dromios in their comic speeches. Moreover, the dramatic situation affects our (and Antipholus's) interpretation of the passage. Her warnings about adultery, made to the wrong Antipholus, come when she is herself dangerously close to unwitting "adultery." The effect is that the speech, in its vivid description of the contamination of her body enhances the audience's sense of the moment as potentially adulterous. Furthermore, this notion of physical oneness is combined with a view of marriage as based on repeated performance. Much like the merchant status turns out to be unstable and in need of repeated acknowledgment of his social status in town, marriage requires constant confirmation. Improper identification can undermine marital and business relationships with such ease, the play suggests, because of their inherent instability.

Adriana's description of courtship to persuade Antipholus to come home again constructs a performative ideal:

That time was once when thou unurged wouldst vow
That never words were music to thine ear,
That never object pleasing in thine eye,
That never touch well welcome to thine hand,
That never meat sweet-savored in thy taste,

Unless I spake, or looked, or touched, or carved to thee. (2.2.112-17)

The language of this speech is, as we shall see later in this chapter, typical of romance in its repetition and transparency. The husband is remembered as verbally complimenting his wife for her entertainment. The exchange that precedes the compliment, in which the wife listens and the husband speaks, is one in which the husband passively receives what his wife gives him, as she speaks, looks, touches, and carves, catering to each of his senses. Courtship is presented as a physical exchange. It is comparable to the soliloquy in which Antipholus of Syracuse describes his engagement with the city, when he is mistaken for his brother and is greeted, invited over, and given the material evidence of his brother’s position (4.3.1-9). Antipholus of Syracuse is not an impostor and Adriana is not an adulterous wife, but misidentification highlights the extent to which those relationships that seem established are based on repeated performances and shows that this means that these relationships are open to intrusion (in this case by substitution of one man for another). Just as Claudio believes Hero may have substituted Borachio for himself and even gives Borachio Claudio’s name, Adriana is here substituting one Antipholus for another. The twins’ similar names are an indication of a social setting in which names do not anchor position; Hero’s supposed willingness to call another man Claudio gives a similar sense of mutability on the basis of female sexuality.
Before the wrong Antipholus arrives, Adriana complains about the effects of her husband’s absence on her own sense of self:

His company must do his minions grace,
Whilst I at home starve for a merry look.
Hath homely age th’alluring beauty took
From my poor cheek? Then he hath wasted it.
Are my discourses dull? Barren my wit?
If voluble and sharp discourse be marred,
Unkindness blunts it more than marble hard.
Do their gay vestments his affections bait?
That’s not my fault; he’s master of my state.
What ruins are in me that can be found
By him not ruined? Then is he the ground
Of my defeatures. My decayed fair
A sunny look of his would soon repair.
But, too unruly deer, he breaks the pale
And feeds from home. Poor I am but his stale. (2.1.86-98)

The speech relies heavily on material evidence of emotional well-being. Adriana reads herself for the material signs of the decline of the relationship. The husband’s approving look, for which Adriana is, at this point, literally starving, is directed elsewhere.

Adriana lists her feminine attributes that should be attractions for her husband, her
beauty, her discourses, her wit, and her apparel, each of which suggests a relationship in which she performs for him. But, she finds out, each of these are dependent on him. As a consequence of Antipholus's neglect, Adriana imagines her own disfigurement, using the word "defeatures," a word used only three times by Shakespeare. It occurs twice in this play, to denote physical ruin or deformity in a situation of psychological estrangement.44 Her complaint is based on the extent to which her husband's actions limit her ability to perform her role as wife. As in the case of the accusation of adultery, Adriana imagines her own body as passively dependent on her husband's actions. Adriana's body is essentially one with her husband, but prone to change on the basis of his behavior. Her "defeatures" are not permanent, but would easily be repaired if her husband gave her the attention she craves for. Again, we have to take the rhetorical situation into account: Adriana is making her complaint to her sister, defending her own sense of discontent, rather than challenging the nature of the relationship itself.

That the power structure posited by Adriana, in which she is the poor victim of her husband's wandering, is ambiguous becomes clear when she contradicts herself. She presents volubility and sharp discourse as good wifely qualities and goes on to imagine her husband as the imprisoned deer (with the usual pun on "dear") who breaks out of his imprisonment to feed elsewhere. The effect, she concludes, is that she herself has become his "stale," a word that suggests an aging horse, but also a prostitute, to denote her loss of social position through his sexuality.45 Adriana's speech is not merely shrewish complaint, but is proven by the subsequent events. Antipholus of Ephesus turns to the courtesan for entertainment, when it is denied him by his wife, replacing the
marriage with a relationship more easily managed through material exchange and payment, so that wife and prostitute have indeed taken each other’s place.

Luciana’s defense against Antipholus of Syracuse’s advances takes the form of a more overt presentation of marriage as a matter of performance, offering the husband a way out of the dangerous physical dependence of the wife on his actions:

If you did wed my sister for her wealth,
Then for her wealth’s sake use her with more kindness;
Or if you like elsewhere, do it by stealth:
Muffle your false love with some show of blindness.
Let not my sister read it in your eye;
Be not thy tongue thy own shame’s orator;
Look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty;
Apparel vice like virtue’s harbinger. (3.2.7-16)

The speech comes just after the scene in which Antipholus of Ephesus has been locked out of his house, which constitutes dramatic evidence of the extent to which seemingly fixed relationships have come undone because of misidentification. Dromio of Ephesus has just accused his twin brother of stealing his “office” and his name (3.1.44), and now Luciana asks Antipholus of Syracuse if he has forgotten his “husband’s office” (3.2.2), making clear that office or place can become subject to usurpation. Positing a discrepancy between inward and outward, inner vice and outward virtue, presence and heart, Luciana’s speech takes the idea of marriage as a performance a step further. As
Eamon Grennan has pointed out, "Mutability penetrates the fixed hierarchical picture of the world," and Luciana’s speech employs, not surprisingly, clothing images throughout. The culmination of the speech in the line, "Though others have the arm, show us sleeve" (23) is tantamount to advising Antipholus to become a Iago-like figure. Adriana has just moments before announced to Antipholus that she will "fasten on this sleeve of thine" (2.2.173), an attempt at fixing herself to him that is now made to look pathetic. The very aspects of the relationship that are valued by Adriana, the signs of approval she yearns for from her husband to feel secure in her position as wife, are turned into the appearance that will disguise the sinner.

From Antipholus of Syracuse’s perspective, more elaborately discussed in the previous chapter, Luciana proposes an illicit affair. Luciana’s advice to hide his true identity behind an outward performance almost leads to a loss of “real” self for Antipholus. Lorna Hutson suggests that Luciana’s speech “dissociates the figure of the rhetorically mobile impostor, the supposed husband, from the threat of sexual betrayal, and relocates that threat in the indiscreet or involuntary ambiguous implication of a woman’s words.” However, this disregards Antipholus’s role in courting Luciana. The threat of the impostor remains present, while the sexual betrayal is located not only in Luciana’s words, but also in Adriana’s. Conversation between men and women, linked with misidentification, means that female speech, even when it is spoken from a position of respectability, gains a sexual significance. The idea of female “blindness” to the real identity of the love object, present in this scene as in Much Ado about Nothing, supposes not necessarily devious intention on her part, but the rampant sexuality that leads to her inability to distinguish between men.
Adriana’s insistence on the performative aspects of the relationship, on the fair words and merry look as evidence of Antipholus’s devotion to her, becomes in Luciana’s speeches the transformation of the eye and tongue into instruments of deceit. Luciana’s advice that Antipholus should not let her sister “read” the evidence of his adultery in his eye and that he should “muffle” his “false love with some show of blindness” begins a thread of references to sight and the gaze of lovers in the scene. Later, Adriana asks if Luciana’s assessment of Antipholus’s love for her is correct, by directing her towards his eye: “Mightst thou perceive austerely in his eye / That he did plead in earnest, yea or no?” (4.2.1). While words are mistrusted as potentially untruthful, the eye is relied on as a body part that gives access to intention and inwardness. Yet, Luciana’s advice has undermined even this form of evidence of the truth about the other. The male eye is affected by the farcical sense that everything is subject to performance, depicted as a potential mask behind which unlawful feelings can be hidden.

The danger posed by the eye as mask is matched by the fact that it is a bodily “opening” through which others can influence a person. Luciana explains Antipholus’s unexpected advances as “a fault that springeth from your eye” (3.2.55), directing him to “Gaze where you should” (3.2.57). Her lines construct a double relationship between the male self and the eye: the self is enslaved to the eye (sexually) but also able to distance itself from the eye and manipulate it. She depicts the eye as a receiver of sexual and physical stimuli, a reminder of the position given to the husband in Adriana’s nostalgic memory of courtship. It also echoes Antipholus’s fears on entering the strange city of the “nimble jugglers that deceive the eye” (1.2.97). This dual representation of
the eye as what masks intention or exposes the victim to deception suggests a general lack of fixity, the possible switching between positions of victim and trickster, noted in the first chapter. Farce makes this type of switching a central part of its dramatic action.

The depiction of the eye as a source of knowledge with respect to the other, a part of the body through which others can “insinuate” themselves, and a cause of lust and sin, is central to the plot of misidentification, based as it is on the undue reliance on sight as evidence of the other’s identity. The words of the women are subverted because of their comic blindness to the real identity of Antipholus. Their inability to see that the key to his strange behavior lies not where they expect it, in his adultery, but in his words, which are in fact the more reliable indicators of his identity. His assertion that he is “As strange unto your town as to your talk” (2.2.148) is interpreted by the women as a refusal to acknowledge his wife’s claim to him. Actual estrangement is mistaken for emotional and social estrangement. Adriana tries to summon him back to his duties by reminding him of his social position: “How ill agrees it with your gravity / To counterfeit thus grossly with your slave” (167-68). Adriana’s use of the term “counterfeit” points to the alternative meanings of the word, which is associated with pretense, adultery, and with false copying. Antipholus of Syracuse is not counterfeiting with his Dromio, but a counterfeit husband, whose presence at Adriana’s dinner table links his identity as a counterfeit copy of his brother with the adultery that could be, yet is not, the outcome.

The Abbess, who is crucial to accomplishing the shift into romance and the recognition that follows, has, not surprisingly, always struck readers as a conflicted and contradictory character. In romance readings, her presence is essential. For Kinney,
she symbolizes the Church and the Holy Mother, in spite of the fact that her status as a member of the Catholic church might make her, like Shakespeare’s friars, suspect in the eyes of the Elizabethan playgoer. Critics have puzzled over her lengthy admonition to Adriana, debating whether we should think of it as a justified correction of a possessive wife or a mistaken accusation of a woman who is deeply invested in maintaining the marital relationship. The Abbess’s assertion that “the venom clamours of a jealous woman / Poisons more deadly than a mad dog’s tooth” (5.1.70-71) and her accusation that Adriana’s railing has “hindered” her husband’s sleep and caused “unquiet meals” which make “ill digestions” is curiously lacking in religious sensibility (5.1.73-75). Maurice Hunt points out that much of Adriana’s “shrewishness” is directed at preventing her husband from committing adultery. He argues, “It is surprising—and a bit contradictory—that the head of a religious order should sharply condemn a wife for railing partly meant to be morally redemptive.”

A solution to this problem, suggested by the character’s names (the Abbess and Emilia) is her double function in generic terms. If this figure is contradictory, it is a consequence of her different roles in farce and romance. As the farcical Abbess, she fights with Adriana for authority over Antipholus, making him a comic pawn in the hands of two women. She condemns the “shrew” for her sharp tongue, even though her own, long speech is an example of powerful female scolding. She voices a double standard in berating the wife for her shrewishness while disregarding the husband’s adultery. Hers are popular stereotypes with regard to marital relationships. She makes marriage out to be a purely physical exchange between a woman who is supposed to provide material comforts to a husband, and a man who is no more than a vulnerable
body thatrespondstowhathegisgivenbythiswife. As theauthorityfigure, he is not the
Pauline “head” of his wife in this speech, but a mere consumer or, as the case may be,
victim of what his wife offers him.

Of course, the Abbess’s words are discredited because they are, like everyone
else’s words, misdirected. They are also problematic as a representation of marriage and
in fact, close to the performative materiality of the presentation of marriage by Adriana
and Luciana, in spite of the fact that she assigns the blame for the troubled relationship
to the wife and her transgressive speech. That Adriana recognizes herself in the
stereotype of the jealous wife and that Luciana, the voice of submissive femininity in
the first act, should be the one to protest it, is part of the joke. Yet, this is also to be
expected because the Abbess’s injunction is based on a view of marriage that Adriana
shares. As an early scene of recognition, this is false because it is based on farcical
principles. The Abbess, Adriana, and Luciana will take on different roles once the play
shifts into romance. If we read Adriana’s silence in the closing scene as a direct result
of this speech, we carry farce over into romance in a way that undermines the emotional
logic of both. 53

4.

When the two generic modes come together, the result is the most poignant moment of
misidentification in the play, the failure of Antipholus of Ephesus to recognize his
father. What was a source of laughter in the main plot has now become ambiguous.

Misidentification is a sign of the emotional and temporal barriers that have separated
the family, as becomes clear in Egeon's response to his son's refusal to acknowledge him:

O, grief hath changed me since you saw me last,
And careful hours with time's deformed hand
Have written strange defeatures in my face.
But tell me yet, dost thou not know my voice? (5.1.296-301)

The misidentifications up to this point have been laughable, though darkly so, but now there are serious emotional consequences. Misidentification almost inevitably collapses into a failure to recognize the other's claims, be they social, sexual, or emotional. But here, the emotional consequences of misrecognition are intensified, not only in terms of the pathos of the moment, but also because of the ensuing execution of Egeon. The disorderly farcical time is transformed into a steady, harmful and deforming progression that has left its traces on the father's body. Egeon's question, "dost thou not know my voice?" makes the relationship between misidentification and voice, so crucial throughout, explicit. Proper identification in this play includes an acknowledgment of the words of the other as valuable, meaningful, and authoritative in describing a shared reality and confirming mutual positions. Like Adriana, Egeon uses the word "defeatures" to describe the effect of misrecognition. The failure of the twins to recognize wife and father leads to physical ruin (or at least the perception of physical ruin), a sign of social degradation that follows for Adriana from her "husband's" refusal to assign her proper place in his life, and for Egeon from his son's refusal to save him
from the grip of the misguided law. From the perspective of Antipholus of Ephesus, Egeon’s words are an attempt to claim him, much like Dromio of Syracuse feels claimed by the greasy kitchen wrench. The Duke’s response that it must be Egeon’s age that causes this mistake marginalizes the father in the way we have seen every other character marginalized at some point in the farcical plot, on the basis of social prejudice. The “blindness” of the Ephesians to misidentification now includes the Duke, but whereas this type of mistake has no serious consequences in farce, in the context of romance, it brings Egeon very close to his death.54

In the generic context of romance, Emilia is no longer a comic Abbess. Since romance attributes the break-up of the family to divine purpose, the function of the mother is simply to be present and chaste, and to bring the other twin on stage, initiating the scene of recognition. In an instant, the Abbess becomes Emilia, repositioning herself as Egeon’s wife and the twins’ mother:

Speak, old Egeon, if thou beest the man
That hadst a wife once called Emilia,
That bore thee at a burden two fair sons.
O, if thou beest the same Egeon, speak,
And speak unto the same Emilia. (5.1.342-46)

Emilia “loosens” Egeon’s physical bonds and re-establishes the old ones of the family in this simple speech act, a call for mutual speaking that reveals that these are unchanged and unchangeable individuals.55 The relationship is markedly different from
the presentation of marriage earlier in the play, in which the husband and wife are bound in unequal relationships that are satisfactory to neither. Here, such inequality is not examined or overcome but simply set aside. Romance is not a realm in which such social concerns are examined. Instead, the pure and unadulterated equality of the two is established by Emilia's repetition of the word "same" and her request that Egeon speak in exchange for her verbal recognition of him. In the romance ending, the act of speaking itself serves to confirm relationships, both in personal and social terms; in the farcical main plot speaking consistently undermines relationships.

Romance offers a perspective on the social order that is fundamentally in conflict with farce. What is cause for anxiety and disruption in farce is cause for harmony in romance. The recognition scene at the end of The Comedy of Errors transforms the stage into a different space. From the urban marketplace we move to a fictional, divinely controlled arena within which relationships are simply recreated in an instant. The very materiality of identity that was cause for such general chaos now becomes the secure basis of order. Objects that were misplaced are returned:

ANGELO: That is the chain, sir, which you had of me.

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE: I think it be, sir, I deny it not.

ANTIPHOLUS OF EPHESUS: And you, sir, for this chain arrested me.

ANGELO: I think I did, sir, I deny it not. (5.1.379-82)

Single gestures magically restore relationships. What Freedman calls, the "denied connections" that motivate the farce plot are here reconfirmed. Individual voice is
now entirely ruled by the collective process of setting the "morning story right"
(5.1.357). The speech afforded to Luciana and Adriana in the main plot is limited.
Adriana asks two factual questions: "Which of you did dine with me today?" and "And are you not my husband?" and remarks to her husband that she sent money for his bail through Dromio. In farce, comic pleasure and dark anxiety is derived from the possibility of adultery and excessive female speech; in romance, female chastity has to be certain without any doubt, which explains the silence on the part of the two sisters.

In comedy, language is used to influence, manipulate, or upset the social position of self and others. Comedy and especially farce may make this process independent of the speaker's intentions. Individuals propose their own downfall without having any access to the meaning of their words. The sheer possibility of misdirection of words exposes the extent to which social positions have no fixed basis, but are instead dependent on correct exchanges. In romance, on the other hand, language describes truth and fixes relationships. With the transformation of the dramatic space in this play, language relinquishes its rhetorical meaning and gains "gestural" meaning. Speaking happens in disregard of the individual speaker or the substance of what is said; language is emptied out of meaning that is subject to interpretation and becomes a completely transparent medium that serves only a collective purpose, reconfirming relationships both in emotional and in social terms. The repetitive nature of the lines with which the merchants return objects to each other shows that it has primarily a ritual function. Rather than being marked by confusion, sexual ambiguity, and social expectations that hinder communication, language becomes an unequivocal means of
exchange, denying the social differences that exist between people, while reaffirming their individual place.

Perceptions of others and self are established in terms that are resolutely external and no longer subject to misinterpretation or misdirection. Individual characters who struggle with their sense of self in the main plot are here simply wife, husband, son, mother, father, and their identities are confirmed by a factual reconstruction of the events of the day. Adriana’s lengthy speeches complaining of wifely dependence on an unreliable husband are no longer relevant to this new dramatic space—she resumes her normal position in marriage without question, while her husband’s hysterical threats to “pluck out those false eyes” are forgotten (4.4.99). Similarly, the simplicity with which Antipholus of Syracuse announces that he will be courting Luciana disregards the disturbingly sexual aspects of their previous encounters.

Francis Fergusson, an early critic of the play, has remarked that “the arabesques of absurdity in *The Comedy of Errors* might continue indefinitely.” Others have expressed dissatisfaction with the role of chance in clearing up the confusion and the failure of individual characters to learn from their mistakes. This dissatisfaction is a product of the generic shift made at the end. Romance treats chance ultimately as misunderstood divine protection, whereas in farce, chance allows for the suspension of normal cause and effect in allowing for the staging of illicit behavior.

In the final scene, the determination of identity is taken out of the realm of the law, the marketplace, and the household. The romance narrative requires all institutions to relinquish their authority over individual identities, in order for the divinely ordained family to take center stage. The “full satisfaction” (5.1.400) promised by Emilia is not
part of the on-stage conclusion, since the questions that have arisen as a part of the farcical examination of identity, social position and exchange are not answered within this generic frame. What it takes to reinstate social harmony is unproblematic, ritual exchange. There is no need for questioning of the underlying causes of the farcical chaos, no doubt about what makes it so easy for long-lasting relationships to break down so rapidly, because such questioning is irrelevant to romance.

It is the task of romance conclusions to foster the illusion of individual uniqueness and the essential link between identity and body, with its moles, scars, and other distinguishing marks. The continued confusion with regard to which twin is which is not a sign of continued insecurity about identity and social position, the usual reading by farce critics. Instead, in the romance frame, it is comforting proof of all eyes now seeing alike. The fact that these are twins takes the place of the usual pointing to physical details because it too suggests that the error is purely a matter of the body, not of any deeper misunderstanding. The exceptionality of twins ensures that “error” is shared by all.

Emilia’s description of the confusions as “this sympathized day’s error” (5.1.398) is crucial in that it dispels concerns left over from the preceding events. The OED cites this as the only instance for a specific meaning of the word “sympathized,” which it glosses as “compounded of corresponding parts or elements, complicated.” The Arden Shakespeare explains it as “shared in by all equally, matched, harmoniously contrived.” The three options provided by Foakes are quite distinct: contrived suggests making of some kind, a production, whereas “shared in by all equally,” and the more neutral “matched,” move away from the OED gloss. The idea of complication and
compoundedness in the OED and contrivance in the Arden is partly based on the claim that this is the sense in which Shakespeare used the word in *Love's Labour's Lost*. There, Moth jokingly remarks on “a message well sympathized—a horse to be ambassador for an ass” (3.1.42-43). *The Norton Shakespeare* opts for neutrality in glossing this first use simply as “matched” as it does in the case of its use in *The Rape of Lucrece*, which is roughly contemporaneous with *The Comedy of Errors*: “True sorrow then is feelingly sufficed / When with like semblance it is sympathized” (1112-13).

If we move away from the sense of the word in *Love's Labour's Lost* and closer to its use in *The Rape of Lucrece*, it becomes clear that the OED definition does not adequately cover the word’s meaning in *The Comedy of Errors*. The use of compounded or even contrived suggests some planned activity and artificiality alien to the genre of romance. Particularly since this is the only instance of the use of the word with this meaning cited by the OED, it might be safer to look to more generally current uses of “sympathize” in the period, uses that are not explained sufficiently by the gloss “matched” either. The OED also glosses the word as, “to have an affinity; to agree in nature, disposition, qualities or fortune.” The early modern understanding of sympathy differs from our contemporary use of the word in that it highlights a mystical affinity or correspondence of experience, not just a fellow feeling.

Each of the other definitions for sympathy points to the idea of harmony and affinity as a natural, essential relationship. Read in this way, the Abbess’s use of the word denotes a general concord and kinship in opposition to the separations and dislocations that are a consequence of physical similarity in the main plot. The line
posits a mystical order based on affinity and similarity, to overcome the chaos caused by similarity in the main plot. Error is now seen as collective, not based on the specifics of social relationships between individuals, but on their inherent kinship. Emilia’s phrase emphasizes the essential, natural unity of the family and the community on stage and points to the physical similarity of the twins as a symbol of collective, rather than individual error.

The romance frame transforms Ephesus from a disordered, early modern city into a small, localized setting in which individuals are recognized and properly identified. From the perspective of the historical changes that characterized life in early modern London, the ending of The Comedy of Errors is escapist, harking back to an ideal, small-scale community in which individuals are assigned permanent positions, and “error” only happens in the exceptional case of twins. The lack of intention involved in the confusion has prepared the audience for the possibility of returning to the romance narrative in which wandering, in the end, seems to have had a purpose determined by providence. In adding this conclusion, Shakespeare departs substantially from Plautus’s Menaechmi, in which the life of the marketplace and the household is joyfully abandoned in favor of more wandering, an apt conclusion to a farce.61

In the farcical main plot, with its suspension of normal cause and effect, Shakespeare is free to contemplate the extreme instability of the urban social order in a manner that, as the previous chapter argues, resonates with the trickster literature of the 1590s and with the many historical transitions of the early modern period. Urban growth, emerging forms of trade, increased upward and downward mobility, and the reformulation of the position of women are all reflected on and laughed at in this
farcical destruction of certainties. Each of these changes are addressed in comic form. Through the repeated scenes of misidentification, the play makes the point that the social order is undermined from within. All the misdirected talk makes clear to us that there is a parallel between physical misidentification and other forms of miscommunication, a parallel that is, as we shall see, further explored in The Winter’s Tale. The confusion is never cleared up because every exchange can be explained away by reverting to some sort of social prejudice, of unfaithful and shrewish women, unreliable slaves, greedy merchants, and adulterous husbands. The pervasiveness of misidentification and the ease with which the impostor-twin takes the place of his brother shows that identity and social position are unmoored because of the value placed on the physical and the material and the need for repeated confirmation of position. Misidentification in the farcical main plot brings about a situation in which social boundaries between people come apart and social position is unsettled. The possibility of “misdirection” and misidentification exposes the extent to which social positions have no essential basis, but instead depend on performance and its use of material signs of identity. It is not surprising that the “farce” readings of the play emphasize its urban, marketplace setting; these concerns would appeal to an audience grappling with historical transition and fearing precisely such erasure of social distinctions as is made fun of in the play.

The romance frame, then, conflicts with the social thematics of the intervening plot, which is ruled by confusion, uncertainty, and social inequality. Because of these contradictions, the attempt to explain the entire plot as providential will inevitably become contradictory, as will readings that see the romance frame as irrelevant to the
secular themes. The fact that Shakespeare’s main plot and frame are disjunctive suggests that he may have found it impossible to resolve the confusions and dislocations of the main plot without shifting into another mode of representation. Though David Bevington gives ample precedent for adaptations of farce that involve romance, Leo Salingar points out that it was by no means a logical combination, in spite of the hints at romance in Plautus. In *The Comedy of Errors*, recognition is achieved by means of a dramatic coup. Jameson has suggested that romance “expresses a nostalgia for a social order in the process of being undermined and destroyed by nascent capitalism, yet still for the moment coexisting side by side with the latter.” He concludes that the genre of romance “expresses a transitional moment.” This suggests that we should read the conclusion to *The Comedy of Errors* as a nostalgic solution to the problem of encountering and deciphering the other in the rapidly growing city. Yet, the experiment of combining the two genres in itself must have been noticeable to playgoers and may have made them think back from romance to farce, wondering what it was that made the intervening comedy so different from the ending. Modern audiences tend to laugh at the elaborate nature of Shakespeare’s recognition scenes; it is a real question what the response of the early modern playgoers may have been. Would they have laughed, as we do, at the artificiality of the romance conclusion? Or would it have struck a chord with those who longed back for simpler days? Whatever their response may have been, it is clear that the recognition scene is not a logical outcome of what has come before, but a dramatically self-conscious gesture towards resolution, where resolution seems impossible to achieve by other than drastic means.
Notes


4 Fredric Jameson, "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1975): 135-63. He follows Northrop Frye in his distinctions between comedy and genre: "[comedy] remains resolutely within the social order, finding its culmination in the renewal of that order by marriage and sexual fulfillment, where romance must seal the hero’s mission by some form of revelation ... Comedy is therefore active and brings into play desire and the obstacles to its fulfillment while romance unfolds beneath the sign of destiny, either benevolent or malign" (153).


7 In spite of the fact that there is a fairly long tradition of examining the religious aspects and themes of the play, critics in the "romance" school of thought frequently claim that their importance has been underestimated. We can see this claim as recently

Kinney in Miola, 157. Contrary to general practice, Kinney uses the term “old comedy” for Plautine farce, which he sees as based on Aristophanes more than Menander, though it is usually labeled as Roman imitation of Greek New Comedy.


Enterline reads the play primarily in the context of the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage. It is hard to pinpoint to what extent she sees the middle plot as consciously
exposing the fictional relationship of the subject to itself or as merely reflecting it. It is clear that for Enterline the ending of the play reflects a male fantasy of coherence, which she condemns for the extent to which it reproduces uneven power relations and erases the female subject. The role of the author in revealing Lacanian paradigms remains a mystery—is Shakespeare's construction of a subject an achievement in that it shows "truths" about the subject or can an author not help revealing the inconsistencies that beset subjectivity?


13 Hall, 40.

14 Lanier in Miola, 306.

15 Slichts, 30. She argues that the play is fundamentally concerned with social roles and the need to "belong" to society, not the reformation of it. The ending, she finds, is produced by accident, not providence.
The same split in interpretation can be seen in discussions of the play’s first production. In his romance reading, Kinney attributes a great deal of significance to the fact that *The Comedy of Errors* was twice staged on Holy Innocents’ Day. Lanier, on the other hand, gives an elaborate analysis of the feast of misrule on the night of the play’s first performance in the urban, legal setting of the Gray’s Inn. Kinney in Miola, 161; Lanier in Miola, 104-111.

Patricia Parker objects to Freedman’s deconstructive conclusion with the assertion that “we need to read this fragmentation and disjunction more concretely and historically in relation to its contemporary contexts, rather than as a transhistorical lesson in the pitfalls of reading for mastery or a panhistorical experience of Lacanian méconnaissance.” Clearly, Parker’s interests are not Freedman’s. While I do not reject Freedman’s conclusions as necessarily trans- or even panhistorical, I try to find a balance between treating the generic differences in a theoretical manner and uncovering the historical and cultural contexts for the play’s contradictions. Parker, *Shakespeare*, 80.


Lanier in Miola, 326. Lanier makes this assertion true to the play as a whole by dismissing the romance ending as full of “very conventional closure devices” (315).

primarily from the perspective of structure and rhetorical presentation, whereas Jameson aims for an ideological approach.  

22 Hall makes much of this shift, to such an extent that the providential aspects of the frame disappear from his analysis.  

23 Cf. Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*. The influence of chance and the implications of new forms of trade for the merchant make his lack of control (or perhaps alienation is a better term) evident in his expressions of melancholy. Commercial dealings through intermediaries rather than direct trade in the marketplace has complicated the position of the two merchants. Cf. Ann Christensen, 20 and Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 67. For a very different, psychoanalytic comparison of Antonio and Egeon and their melancholy, Lynn Enterline’s chapter on *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merchant of Venice* in her *Tears of Narcissus*.  

24 In this sense, Egeon is very different from Antonio, whose melancholy at the outset of *The Merchant of Venice* is equally unexplained but who does suffer mercantile losses and the consequences thereof.  

25 It is relevant that “error” could signify, along with wandering and mistaking, the primary meanings in the play, also “a mistake in matter of law” (a technical term, but relevant to the Duke’s behavior here).  

26 Cf. Parker, *Shakespeare*, for elaborate reflections on these allusions, e.g. in Dromio of Syracuse’s descriptions of Nell, 3.2.81-106, and in the binding of Antipholus of Ephesus.  

27 G.R. Elliott was the first to draw attention to the disturbing, darker elements of the play in his famous essay, “Weirdness in *The Comedy of Errors*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 9 (1939): 95-106, reprinted in Miola, 57-70.  

28 Kinney in Miola, 171-73. He argues that through these references, “The stations derived from the miracle and morality plays are underscored” (171) and that the “many punning and persistent words introduce us, at the end, to The Word” (173).
Unlike Kinney, Patricia Parker acknowledges that these biblical echoes and Christian allusions are marginal, yet treats them as highly significant in *Shakespeare from the Margins*. She concludes that it is important to recognize “the identifications forged by such allusive networks—beyond the apparently marginal importance of the isolated verbal quibble—and to consider what is being done to as well as through such authoritative structures” (82).

In a problematic attempt to unify his reading of the play, Kinney treats this moment in all seriousness as a sign of the travelers’ moral stature: “both he and his servant are aware of the temptation she represents, and in Christian terms. ... Both are tested here, and not found wanting.” Kinney in Miola, 173.

Ephesians 6:13-17: “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Michel Grivelet discusses the nature of the audience’s comic pleasure at the moment when Adriana invites the wrong Antipholus into her house, claiming that the moment has “greater intensity” than in Plautus. Cf. Michel Grivelet, “Shakespeare, Molière, and the Comedy of Ambiguity,” *Shakespeare Survey* 22 (1969): 15-26, 17.

Church law of the period defined such a possibility as incestuous.

Cf. for two important formulations of this connection, Ian MacClean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European and Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980) and Peter Stallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed,” in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, Women in

35 Cf. Katherine Eisaman Maus, "Horns of Dilemma: Jealousy, Gender, and Spectatorship in English Renaissance Drama," *ELH* 54 (1987): 561-83. Citing scenes in which the cuckolded husband watches the moment of sexual betrayal, Maus writes, "The jealous witness, seeing but himself unseen, is inclined in his frustration to imagine the woman's fault as a form of blindness. He conceives of her infidelity as a kind of careless obliviousness to the distinction between man and man" (570). In support, she cites moments in *The Winter's Tale, Troilus and Cressida, and Hamlet.*


37 In *Orlando Furioso,* Ariosto's Dalinda dwells at length on the details of dressing up as Genevra. Polynesso instructs her, "Take thou the clothes she ware and put them on: / As she is won't her golden haire to dresse, / In stately sort to wind it on her wyre, / So you her person lively to expresse, / May dresse your owne, and weare her head attyre: / Her gorgets and her jewels rich no lesse / You may put on t'accomplish my desire" (stanzas 24-25, p. 88). Dalinda describes her attire again in stanza 47. In Canto IV of *The Faerie Queene,* in which the narrative is told by the gulled lover, the waiting woman is not the only one to be dressed up. The deceitful friend Philemon "his owne false part playd, / Disguised like that groome of base degree, / Whom he had feign'd th'abuser of my love to bee." (XXVII, p. 109). In Bandello's *Timbreo and Fenicia* (1554), perhaps the most important source for Shakespeare, the treacherous Girondo dresses up one of his servants as a gentleman, even taking the trouble to perfume him, to climb a ladder into the room of the absent Fenicia. Here, no cooperation of a waiting woman is required, and the spectacle of male intrusion into the bedroom is enough. Cf. for these source texts, Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare,* vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1957), 59-139. The translation of Bandello is by Bullough and of Ariosto by Sir John Harrington (1591).
Scenes involving Margaret have been subject to frequent editorializing. For instance, 2.1.100-111, the scene at the masked ball, has frequently been amended to reduce Margaret’s two dancing partners (Benedick and Balthasar) in the Quarto to one (either Balthasar or Borachio). Edward Capell added a stage direction here for a change in partners in his 1767-68 edition. The effect of giving her only one partner is to make Margaret look more chaste and less problematic, and, in this case, to pair Benedick up more consistently with Beatrice, although his conversation with Margaret in 5.2 makes it at least a possibility that Benedick dances with her earlier. Dover Wilson’s 1923 New Shakespeare edition began the tradition of substituting Borachio for Benedick and Balthasar. In the Oxford edition, Sheldon Zitner argues that Borachio is the least likely partner, because he is supposedly “in her good graces” while here, Margaret is “standoffish and her last speech prays God to keep her partner from her sight afterward: hardly the language for flirting with Borachio” (84). He opts, for that reason, to assign all her partner’s speeches to the “ineffectual” Balthasar, who is embarrassed by her rejection which adds, he concludes, to the exchange as part of a “triad of female self-possession” (85). Cf. Zitner’s discussion in the Oxford edition of the editorial tradition and his choice for Balthasar throughout. Zitner, Textual Introduction, 79-87, 84-85.

Cf. Pericles, 5.1, esp. 142 and 204, after which Pericles repeatedly refers to her as “My Marina” (224, 229, and 264).


The biblical reference is taken from the Arden edition of the play, in which Foakes has collated the Bishop’s Bible (1586) and the Geneva Bible (1560) to produce a source text (p. 114). This particular passage is Ephesians 5:28. The merits of Paul’s injunction as evidence of a trend towards mutuality rather than hierarchy in the marital relationship has been much debated. Lynn Enterline reminds us in her chapter on The Comedy of Errors that Paul’s command maintains male superiority in subsuming women under the
heading of the male body. Enterline regards the play as similar to the biblical text in that it too offers representations of fusions of male and female that erase the female subject (222). For the debate on this passage, cf. for instance Hunt, who emphasizes Paul’s command immediately preceding this passage to submit “yourselves to another in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:21) as an argument for “the mutuality of companionate marriage” (52). Dusinberre’s work is well-known for its emphasis on the shifts in female position under the influence of the Puritan doctrine of the mutuality of marriage. Hennings locates this shift within the Anglican church primarily. Historians have objected to the idea that Puritans advocated a measure of equality in marriage and continue to debate the extent to which changes in views on marriage originated with the Puritans or the Anglican church. Others, like Belsey and Jardine, point out that consensual, affective marriage represents a more insidious form of control than the hierarchical view. For a summary of the historical debate, see the introduction to Ann Jennalie Cook, Making a Match: Courtship in Shakespeare and His Society (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991); also, Catherine Belsey, The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama (London: Routledge, 1985), esp. 129-40 and Lisa Jardine, Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare (Brighton: Harvester, 1983).


43 Thomas Hennings has argued that, contrary to conventional critical comparisons of the two sisters, it is in fact Adriana who “upholds the Anglican standard of conjugal unity, intimacy, and affection” (102), while it is Luciana who is subject to “a misunderstanding of the roles of husband and wife, seeking to impose upon them the merely natural order of male dominance” (98), rejected by the Anglican Church. While Hennings offers a valuable correction of the reading of Luciana as a mouthpiece for
Elizabethan orthodoxy on gender issues, his view of Adriana as the voice of Anglican doctrine is belied by the darker aspects of her discourse.

44 The word is also used in *Venus and Adonis* (1593, roughly contemporary with *The Comedy of Errors*), where it is used to describe the effects of meddling with nature:


45 Cf. the closeness of these women to the crossbiting woman in cony-catching pamphlets, as discussed in chapter one (66-67).

46 Eamon Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve: Nature and Custom in *The Comedy of Errors*," *Philological Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (1980): 150-64, 151. While perceptive, I do not see the duality that informs the play as between "nature" and "custom," especially because the play constantly seems to complicate or even deconstruct this binary opposition. For Grennan, "custom" is fixed and "nature" represents human passions and other disruptive forces, but much of the language also shows the opposite to be the case, as custom can be subverted while "nature" as a rhetorical category helps to fix dangerously fluid behavior and maintain social hierarchies. At the same time, Grennan's readings of the poetry of the play and individual moments are interesting and useful.

47 Cf. Iago's remarks to Rodrigo: "For when my outward action doth demonstrate / The native act and figure of my heart / In complement extern, 'tis not long after / But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve / For daws to peck at: I am not what I am" (1.1.61-65).

48 Hutson, 205. Hutson's thesis is that Shakespeare faced the problem of representing women within the scandalous context of the Roman comic plot, and resolved this by
making his female characters “productive ... at the level of the audience’s uncertainty about their sexual intentions and desires” (190). In this context, what matters is the ambivalent effect of Luciana’s speech and our suspicion that she may be unconsciously attracted to Antipholus herself.

This, and Luciana’s representation of the eye itself as an instrument of deceit and a potential opening in the body through which the cheater can influence the other, can be situated in a post-reformation discourse on the eye and its perils, bound up with the Protestant suspicion of idolatry. The name Jack Juggler, Mary Axton has pointed out, may refer to the Catholic priest as a devious juggler. Cf. the introduction in *Three Tudor Classical Interludes: Thersites, Jacke Jugeler, Horestes*, ed. Marie Axton (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer; Totowa, NJ: Rowan and Littlefield, 1982), 15-24, 19.

In psychoanalytic approaches, the mother’s role is of course crucial in the formation of the subject, and therefore, the language of rebirth used by the Abbess in her final speech is seen as particularly apt.

Kinney stresses Emilia’s religious status but does not examine it in terms of the reformation, so that her role as a church figure in the final reconciliation becomes more important than the fact that she returns to a secular position to become Egeon’s wife.

Hunt, 53, fn. 58.


Barbara Freedman cites a 1974 Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival production in which Egeon gives his emotional speech “to a winking, snickering crowd, and at each piteous lament the uncomprehending townspeople laughed the louder.” The “uncanny” effect of this moment derives, I would argue, from the incompatibility of farce and romance. The
crowd is still in a farcical mode but the events have already become part of the romance narrative. Cf. Freedman, "Egeon's Debt," 366.

In Pericles, more consistently based on Gower, the mother is also ultimately removed from her religious life to become once again a part of the family. Lynn Enterline sees this moment in The Comedy of Errors as a male fantasy of the mother's chastity. As Douglas Green argues, patriarchy is of course deeply invested in keeping the mother chaste. Green reads the role of Emilia in the final scene rightly as a comment on the nature of patriarchy and its anxieties about the mother's word.

Freedman, "Reading," in Miola, 261.

Much of the humor in the play derives from this overall sense of dislocation. As Alexander Leggatt has noted, the characters "seem at times to inhabit different worlds, different orders of experience," in Miola, 137.

Fergusson, 27. Slights (30) quotes the Duke, who says, "These are the parents to these children, which accidentally are met together" (5.1.361-62) to highlight the role of accident, as opposed to providence, in bringing about the resolution.

See especially Lanier.

Foakes, 106.

In Plautus, the citizen decides to leave his town with his brother and has his freed slave auction off his goods. The final joke is that Messenio includes the wife among these goods, in the absence of the citizen himself, who has failed to mention his wife at all. The joke must have gone too far for Elizabethans: Shakespeare leaves it out altogether, and William Warner, the Elizabethan translator (1595), changes the moment from a public announcement of the auction by a slave into an expression of a wish by the citizen. When asked by the slave if he wants to sell his wife too, he responds, "Yea, but I thinke no bodie will bid money for her." William Warner, "The Menaechmi of Plautus," reprinted in Geoffrey Bullough, ed., Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1957), 12-39, 39.

63 Jameson, 158. He claims that this is true for Shakespeare’s late romances, but does not mention The Comedy of Errors.
CHAPTER THREE

“All your acts are queens”:

Identification and Courtly Femininity in The Winter’s Tale

In The Winter’s Tale, Shakespeare explores further the connections between identification, the social order, and performance. In both The Winter’s Tale and The Comedy of Errors, disorder is marked by misidentification and harmony by recognition. The parallel between misidentification and the suspicion of adultery drawn in The Comedy of Errors is foregrounded in this later romance. In The Winter’s Tale, misrecognition, or the failure to re-identify and acknowledge the other properly, is the cause for misidentification. Where in The Comedy of Errors, misidentification takes center stage, in The Winter’s Tale, misidentification is a consequence of misrecognition and the disorder that proceeds from a male fear of cuckoldry. In other words, in this later play, Shakespeare connects even more explicitly than in The Comedy of Errors, physical misidentification with psychological and social misrecognition, making the former the effect of the latter. Accordingly, the recognition scenes at the end take the dual form of proper identification and of the realization of the inner “truth” of Hermione.

The central question, then, is what each play presents as the underlying causes of the disorder that makes misidentification and misrecognition possible. In the farcical set-up of The Comedy of Errors, disorder seems purely a consequence of the premise of the twinned body. Yet, as we have seen in the previous chapters, we can detect deeper sources for the confusion beyond this comic premise. The play shows social relations in
the city to be already problematic. Social expectations impose limitations on how others are understood. This places limits on what the individual can convey to his or her social environment and creates the possibility of the substitution of one person for another. Social position, marital relationships, business deals, all require repeated correct performance of specified acts and exchanges to which material signs of identity are central. If one body is exchanged for another, those performances still happen. The consequences of such exchangeability are potentially disastrous. The fluidity of this urban environment is evident in the behavior and speech of women; in farce, women speak more than they should and their speeches become, regardless of their intention, sexual. In substituting one twin brother for another, the play provides us with an enactment of the husband’s nightmare: the idea that his wife does not distinguish between her husband and other men. This fear is closely linked with the fear of a loss of social position.

The move from an urban environment to a courtly one entails an intensification of performativity. The status of the royal family is supposed to be fixed, and the performances at court should be ornamental, reflecting the power of those in charge rather than producing it. But in this play, performance is so central that even the position of king and queen are not guaranteed. Performative courtly speech gives rise to a dangerous lack of difference between individuals. The resulting misrecognition is given dramatic shape in Leontes’s suspicion and in moments of misidentification. There are no actual twins in the play, but a powerful rhetoric of twinning is associated with the two kings, parents and children, and lovers. This rhetoric is initially used to put forward the comforting notion of kinship and similarity, but later to contemplate a threatening
exchangeability and loss of boundaries between individuals. The misrecognition of Hermione in turn generates the need for the identification of the royal children. Leontes "deciphers" them to see whether their bodies perfect copies of their father's and therefore confirmations of the queen's fidelity. His suspicions are the source of two central scenes in which he misidentifies Perdita. The first leads to her "banishment" and the second almost wipes out the fragile harmony at court sixteen years later.

Shakespeare uses these scenes of misidentification and misrecognition to explore the contradictory constructions of gender and class that also emerge from early modern representations of the court. Courtesy literature highlights the importance of performance and contains a contradictory set of representations of female speech, which is necessary in a courtly context, yet inevitably associated with sexuality. Similarly, the play begins by showing the court to be a place where identity is constructed through public, rhetorical performance. The importance of performance at court is evidence of a slippery environment. It allows the queen to speak with a high degree of freedom, a sign of disorder matched by the excessive speech by the women in The Comedy of Errors. The connection between speech, promiscuity, and misidentification, brought out in The Comedy of Errors, becomes a catalyst for a crisis in The Winter's Tale when even royal power is opened up to question.

In the scenes of recognition, The Winter's Tale reconstructs order at court through a reformation of courtly performance. The generic shift we have seen in The Comedy of Errors is equally necessary for the reformation of the Sicilian court, but romance recognition and pastoral are already courtly forms, so that the disjunctions between the opening and the closing are less overt than in the early comedy. The
reformations of the urban and courtly space at the end of these plays are both idealistic and nostalgic. In *The Winter's Tale* too, language gains a different function, and gesture becomes crucial. Even more clearly than in *The Comedy of Errors*, the problem of class in an arena that thrives on public performance is "solved" by having women relinquish their former, courtly voice and accept the limitations imposed on gender at court. This does not mean that the court is no longer ruled by performance in the end. By highlighting gesture over speech, the type of performance we witness in the two recognition scenes is presented as mystical, natural, and a manifestation of true essence.¹ Unlike the verbal performances in the opening scene, the final statue scene is authorized by the king and experienced by the entire court. The response to Hermione's performance as a statue can only be of clear recognition. As such, her presence at the end contrasts with the highly verbal scenes at the opening of the play, which open up the individual speaker to the court's interpretation and therefore to potential social mobility.

In presenting us with this shift in performance, *The Winter's Tale* uncovers a complicated, reciprocal relationship between gender, class, and identification, suggesting why the issue of female speech haunts the courtesy literature of the period: female courtliness is a measure of social mobility at court. If women are allowed to speak too freely, then social position also lacks firm grounding. The same is true for identification. Misidentification at court suggests that social position has become insecure. Autolycus is a central figure to the play because he helps us to see the connection between trickster and courtier, early modern city and court, revealing the power of performance in both and manipulating processes of identification in cony-
catcher and courtier fashion simultaneously. Rather than comparing him with Leontes, as some critics have done, I feel that Autolycus needs to be seen in relation to Hermione and Perdita, all of whom are subjected to "deciphering" in the course of the play. The significance of these themes has not been noted in criticism of the play. Feminist critics have studied the female presence in the play, but not in its specific courtly context. The recent, mostly new historicist effort to establish contemporary political contexts for the romances has resulted generally in a concentration on the issue of kingship and contemporary views of James I, without making a connection with the gender issues at stake.

When Shakespeare used the Sicilian court as his setting for *The Winter's Tale*, the paradoxes of courtesy theory inevitably came into play. The popularity of tragi-comedy as a genre among theatergoers in the first decades of the seventeenth century suggests a nostalgic appreciation of Greek romances and their Christianized versions in medieval courtly narratives. Leo Salingar recounts a host of medieval dramatizations of "persecuted queen" stories as a background for the later romance plays. A Jacobean representation of a Sicilian court would evoke not only these "old tales," but also the courtly ideals of the Italian courtesy books. The most important of these, Castiglione's *Il cortegiano* (1528), Guazzo's *La civil conversatione* (1574), and Giovanni della Casa's *Il galateo* (1559), had all been translated in the second half of the sixteenth century, although they were also read in their original. While the number of editions of *Il cortegiano* and Thomas Hoby's translation suggests that these books were not as tremendously popular in England as, for instance, in France, a wealth of contemporary references shows that they were widely known, especially among the upper ranks.
These influential texts on courtly behavior and conversation offer valuable insight into early modern perceptions of the mechanics of social identity and self-presentation at court, both highly relevant topics to the question of identification and its importance. Whether we choose to read *The Winter's Tale* as an artistic rendering of a "foreign" court or as a dramatic representation with connections to the English court, courtesy books provide us with an important cultural context for the play, known to the more privileged of the theatroers at the Globe and especially to the play's audience at the court of King James.\(^6\)

Courtesy literature of the period highlights the importance of performance at court. King James's court, with its reputation for corruption and its large contingent of powerful Scottish courtiers, was perceived as very different from the more ordered Elizabethan court. The honors and titles sold by James in an attempt to bind the political elite to him and improve his finances, along with the career possibilities for individuals of less than aristocratic birth at court, meant that to many Jacobins, the court seemed a highly unstable arena where social degree was not so much determined by birth as by money and royal whim. David Starkey characterizes James's personal "managerial" style as "participatory," that is, "marked by the rapid rise and fall of councillors and favourites, repeated crises and more or less open faction war."\(^7\) Linda Levy Peck argues of the Stuart court that "corrupt practices ... became a matter of increasing concern in the early seventeenth century."\(^8\) At the same time, James's absolutist emphasis on the Divine Right of Kings countered this impression at least in the case of the king himself with a notion of royalty as ordained by God.\(^9\) The ostentation of the court therefore
fulfills two functions at once, the confirmation of the king's unique position and the advancement of the individual interest of ambitious courtiers.

Shakespeare's play shows us that this contradiction makes such an understanding of royalty difficult to maintain. The importance of performance continually raises the question of whether behavior reflects or produces social position and whether those who speak well of the king do so because they are expressing how they feel or because they are acting out of self-interest. As soon as a performance becomes noticeably a performance, suspicion is aroused with regard to motivation. There is a conceptual link between identification and performance in that the same question applies: is identification a means of assigning identities already in place or does identification create identity? Just as language and performance produces the misidentification of Margaret in Much Ado About Nothing, in a courtly environment, language and performance can bring an audience to (mis)identify or recognize a person as inherently courtly. This means that performance can no longer simply be seen as evidence of courtliness, just as identification may not be the last word on identity. For misidentification to become a problem, rather than a temporary aberration, we have to find ourselves in an environment in which performance gives rise to position and in which rank is not simply a matter of birth, blood, and body, but a combination of manner, material evidence, and language. In order to explore the reasons for the misidentification and misrecognition in the play, we need to begin by examining the mechanics of social relationships at court, gauging the representation of male and female courtliness in the play.
1.

In *Ambition and Privilege*, Frank Whigham writes that courtesy theory fulfilled a double function. For the Elizabethan elite, he argues, courtesy books helped formulate an exclusionary identity to alleviate concerns about social mobility. Their descriptions of courtliness as an inimitable ideal widened the gap between the aristocracy and the upwardly mobile. However, the general circulation of these books made them open to consumption by ambitious young men, who could use the detailed descriptions of life at court to emulate aristocratic behavior. As position at court became more a question of merit and less of aristocratic birth, courtiers faced what Whigham calls, "a rhetorical imperative of performance" to establish and maintain their social position. At the early modern court, Whigham writes, "Elite status no longer rested upon the absolute, given base of birth, the received ontology of social being: instead it had increasingly become a matter of doing and so of *showing*... The principal strategy of self-manifestation in such a frame is the ostentatious practice of symbolic behavior taken to typify aristocratic being."\(^{10}\) This emphasis on performance creates a setting in which the question of hierarchy becomes a pressing one. If position is grounded in repeated performance, then this may lead to a loss of position due to ineffective performance. Extraordinary authority is accorded to the audience, as everyone self-consciously poses in front of others, and everyone watches everyone else. Effective performers rely on their audiences to adjust their behavior in accordance with the response they receive. Count Annibale Romei writes in *The Courtiers Academie* (1585): "to be acceptable in companie, we must put of as it were our own fashions and manners, and cloathe our selves with conditions of others, and imitate them so farre as reason will permit ...
touching the diversitie of the persons with whom we shall be conversaunt, wee must alter our selves into an other."

In a courtly arena, performance overrides individuality, and so behavior and speech, as Romei shows, are no longer reliable indicators of inner truth.

The opening dialogue in The Winter's Tale presents the problematic effects of the imperative of performance at court. The courtiers use a double discourse, the language of money, tied to the present situation, and what we might call the language of romance, to describe the idealized, nostalgic past. The prolonged presence of a foreign king and his entourage has intensified the need for elaborate verbal exchange. This causes, in terms of the courtly hierarchy, a dilemma: if there are two kings, then the rhetoric of uniqueness that harnesses the king's power has to be applied to two people. In the context of hospitality, the speech of the courtiers serves to alleviate the sense of potential difference between the two kings and therefore between themselves, using words to establish and maintain social position. Their conversation is an intricate exchange in which Archidamus repeatedly humbles himself to show gratitude for the hospitality received, in response to which Camillo repeatedly raises him up to a level of equality. Reversing Archidamus's suggestion that the guest owes a debt to his host, Camillo proposes that the host himself incurs a debt to his guest in the form of a visit. Archidamus responds with even more humility, "Verily I speak it in the freedom of my knowledge. We cannot with such magnificence—in so rare—I know not what to say.—We will give you sleepy drinks, that your senses (unintelligent of our insufficiency) may, though they cannot praise us, as little accuse us" (1.1.10-14). As Charles Frey has pointed out, Archidamus admits to a lack of sophistication in Bohemia, not only by
referring to it, but also by displaying difficulty in expressing himself. That does not make him any less effective as a courtly speaker. Paradoxically, by showing himself at a loss, Archidamus is rhetorically effective, in that his gratitude exceeds what can be put into words. Polixenes' later claim, “Time as long again / Would be filled up, my brother, with our thanks, / And yet we should for perpetuity, / Go hence in debt” (1.2.3-6), is a more sophisticated version of the same rhetorical move. Whereas the speech devalues language as a form of repayment, he employs words with virtuosity to suggest an appropriate measure of gratitude for hospitality received.

Stanley Cavell has first drawn attention to the many uses of words from the realm of money in the play. The opening scene makes clear that words like “pay,” “debt,” and “owe,” have a specific use at court: they sustain the fiction that gifts of hospitality are returned in exactly the right proportion to put forward the social equality of host and guest, so that the actual return of the gift of hospitality can be delayed. The repeated recourse to these words shows that they have acquired the function of symbolic currency, and that dialogue is used to acknowledge symbolic debts and payments, establishing and maintaining the status of the speaker and hearer. Cavell suggests that the abundant presence of commercial terms is related to the “thought that the very purpose of language is to communicate, to inform, which is to say to tell,” to indicate a relationship between communication and counting, a relation that is born out in the opening of the play. For Cavell this relationship is of a universal philosophical significance, but the type of language used in the first scene should also remind us of the specificity of the courtly setting and the ways in which it places value on words as markers of social hierarchy.
This use of commercial language ties the court to the marketplace. In Stefano Guazzo's *The Civil Conversation*, the two perfect courtiers, William Guazzo and Anniball Magnocavalli, discuss courtly conversation in similarly monetary terms. William, who suffers from courtly melancholy, compares courtly conversation with exchange of money, making verbal expression a salable commodity that can be used for self-advancement, rather than as evidence of noble birth. He expresses a distaste for the crowds in the royal courts, at places of judgement, and on the market place. Moreover, he likens the court, where “an infinite number of Courtiers assemble together, to talke and devise of many matters,” to the city with its “numberlesse multitude walking upp and downe in every place, keeping a continuall mercate, where there is no other talke but of buying and selling.” The only reason that traders and courtiers alike engage in conversation, he says, is to “maintain and increase their wealth, and to mend their estate.”¹⁶ The two agree that courtly speech has been subjected to rhetorical inflation. William remarks that “Many Courtiers carie that little piece of sugar in their mouthes, and it may bee saide, that their money seemeth to bee Golde, although in touche it is found to bee silver, or baser metal.”¹⁷ This means that the listener can no longer take words at face value, but has to assess whether the words are themselves counterfeit, proving the upward mobility of the speaker. Paradoxically, then, the use of eloquence to distinguish the courtier from the “vulgar sorte” has made words into unreliable means of assessing the social identity of the other.¹⁸

Employing the language of money, Camillo replies to Archidamus’s humble admission of the debt he has incurred as a guest, “You pay a great deal too dear for what’s given freely” (1.1.15). In saying this, he does not, as Peter Erickson claims,
"remove entertainment from the realm of calculation ... to view it as pure generosity and love."19 Instead, like Guazzo’s courtiers, Camillo shows his awareness that courtly language has taken on the function of currency, keeping the rhetoric firmly in the economic sphere even as he denies that there is any question of “calculation.” This is how verbal performance creates and upholds hierarchies among the members of the royal household.

The stilted speeches in the opening scene serve to advance the position of the individual speaker, but what gives them a moral grounding is that they also confirm the status and authority of the royal family. At the same time, the very fact that the equality of the two kings needs to be openly attested to, in spite of their royal birth, sets the narrative at the outset in a situation of potential conflict, as has often been noted in criticism of the play. Whether this is a perpetual aspect of courtly life or because of the presence of the royal guest, the position of the royals needs to be repeatedly confirmed in dialogue. Their (theoretically) unquestionable sovereignty thus becomes subject to interpretation. This may well be seen as the cause for the emotionally charged language used to describe the king’s son. The “unspeakable comfort” (1.1.29) associated with young prince suggests that the courtiers may feel that the absolute royal authority of their kings has been undermined. The representation of the people as physically weak and on crutches, yet living only in order to see the prince, displaces this unease onto the bodies of the anonymous multitude outside the court.20

To counter these anxieties, the courtiers speak a different language especially in the second half of the scene. Their courtly praise of the kings is symbolic and visually oriented. It draws on the image of childhood friendship to deny the possibility of
competition and difference, as “Sicilia cannot show himself over-kind to Bohemia” (1.2.18). Even with the mediation of diplomacy and the “interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies” Camillo imagines the separation of the kings as physical proximity: “they have seemed to be together, though absent; shook hands as over a vast; and embraced as it were from the ends of opposed winds” (1.1.24-27). The courtiers imagine the “affection” between the kings nostalgically in the form of a wordless tableau, in childhood and in the long time of absence. Yet their apprehension about Sicilia’s prolonged hospitality and Camillo’s slightly nervous assurance that the kings’ affection “cannot choose but branch now” (1.1.20-21) shows that the need for performance places tremendous pressure on the courtiers. Two verbal registers, therefore, mark this opening dialogue: the discourse of monetary exchange, which implies difference, ambition, and substitution, and the language of romance, which implies essence, mystical sameness, and eternal affection. The ideology that harnesses monarchical power is juxtaposed with the language of performance and money, a type of discourse that Guazzo’s courtiers associate with places of social mobility, like the marketplace and the city. The nostalgic language that underpins royal position is threatened by the need for courtly performance, a situation that, as we shall see, introduces the possibility of misrecognition and misidentification.

The silent proximity of the two kings in Camillo’s speech contrasts with the scene immediately following. The royals are involved in courtly dialogue themselves. Their conversation revolves around the same concerns but it is a more open playing field than that of the courtiers. They are acting in accordance with the logic of courtly self-presentation. Because theoretically they do not depend on endorsement by their
superiors for social advancement, the performative element of their dialogue is not
tempered. Guazzo's Anniball cautions against the dangers of courtly eloquence: “for
that we are so much the more esteemed of, by howe muche our Civilitie differeth from
the nature and fasions of the vulgar sorte, it is requisite that: wee inforce our tongue to
make manifest the difference in two principall thinges: in the pleasant grace, and the
profound gravitie of woordes.” Eloquence harnesses social position but may also
undermine exchange itself.

The elaborate speeches by Polixenes illustrate what happens when courtly grace
has become more important than gravity. His description of the childhood of the two
kings constructs an idealized image of twins boys, “Two lads that thought there was no
more behind / But such a day tomorrow as today, / And to be boy eternal” (1.2.64-66).
In courtly fashion, Hermione asks Polixenes for a more elaborate performance, teasing
him with the idea of her husband as “the verier wag o’th’two” (1.2.68). Polixenes
engages in playful exaggeration to counter the suggestion of mischief:

We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i’th’ sun,

And bleat the one at th’other. What we changed

Was innocence for innocence. We knew not

The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed

That any did. Had we pursued that life,

And our weak spirits ne’er been higher reared

With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven

Boldly, 'Not guilty’, the imposition cleared,
The general view of this passage is that Polixenes presents female sexuality as ending a male childhood of comforting sameness. Janet Adelman has convincingly shown how these courtly speeches work on multiple levels, prominently featuring sexual references that resonate with Hermione’s pregnant state and conveying the culture’s underlying anxieties about female sexuality. She writes that the female body becomes the sign of disruption in this “idealized male pastoral,” a formulation that neatly sums up the critical consensus on the speech. 22

While Polixenes’s joke hints at a serious male unease about female sexuality, the passage should also be read for its significance to courtly performativity. In anticipation of the crisis to follow, the speech shows how the importance of rhetorical performance undermines royal power and social stability, both in sexual and in non-sexual ways. Drawing on the type of language Camillo uses in the opening scene, Polixenes presents the kings in childhood as twins. Reminiscent of the comforting similarity of the twins in the final scene of The Comedy of Errors, the speech seems to present on the surface a fantasy of perfect equality. Physically, socially, and rhetorically, the two are indistinguishable. Childhood is presented as a time of perfect, because tautological communication. The two lambs bleating at each other merely exchange innocence for innocence, that is, one word for the same word. The language of children is presented as devoid of meaning and therefore of rhetorical purpose. As is the case in the recognition scene in The Comedy of Errors, language here is emptied of difference—without using any substantive words, it merely signifies the establishment
of perfect relationship. The speech is also comparable to Adriana's nostalgic memory of courtship in which husband and wife are engaged in perfect exchange.

The use of such an image suggests that the current situation is less than ideal. Pastoral childhood contrasts with the implied "fall" into courtly rhetoric paralleled by the sexual fall of man. By setting up an opposition between a presexual, prelinguistic childhood and the present dialogue, the speech captures the ways in which courtly conversation is corrupted. The sexual, flirtatious content of the passage itself, of which Polixenes and Hermione are clearly aware, is shown to be acceptable in courtly conversation. That this is true for the court at large, and not just for Polixenes and Hermione, becomes clear when we witness the exchanges of Mamillius and Hermione's ladies. Graham Holderness has pointed out that the boy is engaged in sexually charged talk with the ladies, who "invite Mamillius with sublimated licentiousness into the sexual games of courtly love." The pervasive sexual undertones of dialogue between men and women at court even includes the young prince, whose behavior belies Polixenes's notion of royal childhood as innocent.

The sexual nature of courtly conversation is the subject of the speech but also displayed by it. In form and content, the speech makes clear that courtly performance threatens to undercut the ideology that supports the royal position of unquestioned authority. Polixenes draws on the very imagery of childhood that is used by the courtiers in the first scene to idealize the monarchs. In doing so, he gives it socially strategic rather than moral and political significance, using the concept for entertainment value. Leontes will, moments later, employ the notion of childhood again, this time to intimidate his audience. The "twinned lambs" image is frequently read as
evidence of Leontes's state of mind with respect to the ideal male relationship, although
the king never refers to childhood in those terms.24 Instead, he depicts it as a time when
he was "unbreeched, / In my green velvet coat; my dagger muzzled, / Lest it should bite
its master, and so prove / As ornament oft does, too dangerous" (1.2.157-60). For
Leontes, childhood is marked by barely contained phallic violence. Clearly, royal
childhood has lost the political value it had in the opening scene. It has become a
conveniently open construct, employed to prove sexual and social dominance in the
rhetorical battle that is such an important part of courtly pastime. The fact that
childhood is used to score points rather than to underscore the symbolic stature of the
kings means that the imperative of rhetorical performance that governs the court alters
the discourse that is at the basis of royal power.

The "twinned lamb" speech, in content and effect, shows the perfect equality of
the two kings in childhood to be disrupted by sexuality. It comes to suggest to Leontes
not so much a fantasy of mutuality and perfect communication as a nightmare of
indistinguishability, a lack of individuality which has lead to Hermione's supposed
substitution of one for the other. When Leontes finally accuses Hermione, their
confrontation makes this clear:

HERMIONE Should a villain say so,

The most replenished villain in the world,

He were as much more villain. You, my lord,

Do but mistake.

LEONTES You have mistook, my lady——
Always aware of the social dynamics of the court, Hermione assures the king that his "mistake" does not affect his position. Leontes's response succinctly uncovers the parallel between misrecognition and misidentification. His pun on "mistake" supersedes his own potential "mistake" with her "mistake," creating a connection between his misrecognition of her and her error in substituting Polixenes for Leontes. He presents her adultery as the result of a lack of difference between husband and friend in her eyes.²⁵ If Hermione is suspected of simply "mistaking" Polixenes for Leontes, her sexuality must have made her indifferent to their individuality. Brian Gibbons has pointed to "this central concern with twins as a challenge to the exclusive union of man and wife" as the main connection between *The Winter's Tale* and *The Comedy of Errors.*²⁶ The reason that this "challenge" is given the form of twins can be found in the thematic parallel Shakespeare sets up between misidentification, female promiscuity, social mobility, and misrecognition, all of which undermine individual identity, rank, marriage, and order. Overdetermined, performative, and sexually charged courtly conversation is the catalyst for the disorder to follow, in which all of these forces play their part.

*The Winter's Tale* presents courtly conversation as a highly ambiguous mode of communication. The contributions of the queen to the conversation locate the disruptive quality of courtly behavior in terms of gender. The play reveals that the way in which social position at court is determined allows women to speak with a degree of freedom that conflicts with patriarchal notions of femininity. *The Winter's Tale* makes the
duality of the position of the queen by marriage crucial to the crisis that unfolds. The importance of rhetorical performance to the court permits Hermione to contribute with remarkable freedom to the conversation of the two kings. The playfulness allowed in these circumstances leads to an impressive demonstration of the queen's verbal mastery. Her comments are suggestive of the ways in which courtly exchange offers women the opportunity to transcend their fixed status in the male-dominated hierarchy of the court by means of speech, even if they have to be commissioned to perform by the man in charge. The social equality afforded in courtly exchange becomes evident when the queen makes her famous claim, “a lady’s ‘verily’ ’s / As potent as a lord’s.” In the spirit of rhetorical contest, Polixenes’s reference to man’s fall as a result of Eve’s sin does not offend Hermione. She reads the remark as a challenge and responds to the patriarchal charge with another challenge: “Th’offenses we have made you do we’ll answer” (1.2.85). In jest, the queen is able to refute the apparatus of patriarchal discourse summoned up (equally jokingly) by Polixenes.

Early modern representations of female courtly speech are notoriously fraught with contradiction. In The Civil Conversation, for instance, Anniball describes the speech of the exemplary court lady as follows: “her talke and discourses are so delightfull, that you wyll only then beginne to bee sory, when shee endeth to speake: and wishe that shee woulde bee no more weary to speake, then you are to heare. Yea, shee frameth her jestures so discretely, that in speakyng, shee seemeth to holde her peace, and in holding her peace, to speake.” While the words of the lady arouse the courtier’s desire for more, her body and its gestures help to give the impression of chaste silence. The chiasmus in Anniball’s description is a perfect illustration of the
double injunction, to speak and remain silent at the same time, placed on the female
voice in early modern representations of the court. Ann Rosalind Jones has examined
the ambiguities that pertain to the fate of the early modern court lady in conduct books
more generally.29 Courtesy literature of the sixteenth century, she argues, contains
complex attempts at handling the discrepancies between the norms of the court and
patriarchal discourse about women found in medicine, law, philosophy, and religion.
Whereas the court applauded the clever conversation of the lady, other cultural
constructions of femininity stressed women’s natural inferiority and connected chastity
with silence.30 Because of the pervasive association of female public speech with
sexuality, court ladies were advised to perform their duties with a great deal of
deliberation.31 This construction of the ideal court lady combines with a reluctance to
represent actual female speech in courtesy books. In Castiglione’s The Courtier, women
do not join in the process of prescribing courtly behavior. In the first three books of The
Civil Conversation, women are absent altogether while the description of Anniball’s
ideal courtly lady is not accompanied by any comment on the substance of her
speeches.32

To add to this duality, Hermione’s position as queen is itself beset with potential
complications. In The Interpreter (1607), the legal dictionary repressed for its overt
absolutism in 1610, John Cowell captures the duality of the identity of the queen by
marriage:

Queene (Regina) is either shee that houldeth the Crowne of this Realme by right
of blood, or els shee that is maried to the King. In the former signification shee
is in all construction that same that the King is, and hath the same power in all respects. In the other signification shee is inferiour, and a person exempt from the King. For shee may siew and be siewed in owne name. Yet that shee hath, is the Kings, and looke what shee looseth, so much departeth from the King.33

Unlike the queen by birth, the queen by marriage is a contradictory figure. She is a member of the royal household, whose behavior is material to the king’s authority. Yet, legally, she is a separate, “inferiour” subject, who may sue in her own name, but whose possessions and losses are the king’s. Her status, with its basis in marriage rather than birth, is potentially unstable. This duality of the queen by marriage, ordinary woman and exceptional wife, is denied in the rhetoric found in courtesy books.34 Her position as one of many women is not mentioned, while her exemplary courtliness and natural beauty are highlighted to serve as the justification for her place in the royal household. As a result the queen by marriage faces the task of publicly performing in a way that denies her individuality as a woman and confirms her “natural” status as queen and paragon of perfect courtliness, making her audience always identify her perfect performance as a product of her inherent nobility.35 The problem of social position at court in general, then, is reflected in the predicament of the queen.

The double injunction for women quickly asserts itself when Leontes tries to reestablish control over Hermione’s speech. On the surface, he remains in the context of polite conversation with his guest, when he praises her success in persuading Polixenes to stay, claiming that she “never spok’st / To better purpose” (1.2.90-91), except when
she uttered the marriage vow. But at court, this reminder of the female condition does not lead to silence. Hermione responds with a complicated reflection on the contradictions involved in her status of simultaneous sovereignty and inferiority, all the while speaking in the terms of playful entertainment of her royal guest. Commenting on the extent to which the relation of women to language is marked by ambiguity, she interrupts her husband’s attempt to silence her with a witty provocation:

Cram’s with praise, and make’s

As fat as tame things. One good deed dying tongueless,

Slaughters a thousand waiting upon that.

Our praises are our wages. You may ride’s

With one soft kiss a thousand furlongs ere

With spur we heat an acre. (1.2.93-96)

In his discussion of courtly counsel in the play, Stuart Kurland has overlooked this moment. Hermione makes Leontes himself face the female dilemma. She tells him both to speak and to remain silent. The queen imposes this double-bind by urging him to praise women because they are in need of moral guidance, while evoking the language of over-feeding associated with a life of luxury. Praise, she tells him, makes for good deeds and fat women. In addition, she comments on the female exclusion from the economic realm: "Our praises are our wages." The passage highlights the ambiguous relation of the queen to praise. Ostensibly, praise serves to confirm the unique position of the queen, but the term "wages" shows that it also keeps her dependent on male
endorsement for her livelihood. The phrase resonates with the recurrent use of the language of money at court. As silent receivers of praise, women are not allowed to engage in the exchange of symbolic currency in the network of male host-guest relationships. Implying that praise helps to maintain male authority over women, this representation of women as domesticated animals and silent consumers of language is of course contradicted by Hermione’s own virtuosity in constructing the metaphor.

Once allowed to speak, Hermione is not only in a position to engage fully in a rhetorical competition with men, but she is also permitted to question her own status in full view of the court. She shows that praise of women is open to alternative interpretation, that its use is ideological and political, and that it helps to keep her, as a woman, in her rightful place. In doing so, she deliberately fails to distinguish between praise of herself as a queen and as a woman. Consequently, she deprives praise of the queen (along with praise of women in general) of its “natural” place in courtly discourse. The danger of engaging in courtly conversation for the queen is not merely that she may be subject to suspicions of promiscuity by virtue of the fact that she speaks and performs in public, but also that she has been allowed to offer an interpretation of her own position that is not sanctioned by the ideology of the monarchy. In doing so, she herself has given the precedent for the exposure of her body and voice to other cultural constructions of femininity.

The lack of privacy at court increases the emphasis on performance. In Othello characters repeatedly engage in private conversation, and the play ends in the bedroom, but The Winter’s Tale dramatizes a private crisis in a court devoid of private space. In this respect, the play diverges from its source. In Robert Greene’s Pandosto, it is the
very possibility of crossing the boundary between hospitality and “too private familiarity” that brings on the king’s jealousy. Bellaria, who is described as “the flower of courtesy,” is described as “oftentimes coming herself into his bedchamber to see that nothing should be amiss to mislike him. This honest familiarity increased daily more and more betwixt them ... Bellaria would walk with him into the garden, where they two in private and pleasant devices would pass away the time to both their contents.”

By contrast, the garden in *The Winter’s Tale* is a place where Hermione and Polixenes offer to “attend” the king (1.2.179). Whigham’s discussion of the lack of privacy for the Elizabethan courtier rings true for this dramatic setting, where royals are always in the presence of others: “With this scarcity of unwitnessed behavior, the sense of reliable access to others’ subjectivity withers, so that plausible evidence is sought ever more energetically. The result here can be the total degeneration of epistemology.”

During one of his rare conversations alone with one person, Leontes obsessively questions Camillo about the knowledge his courtiers have of Hermione’s indiscretions. Imagining himself excluded from the circulation of sexual rumor at court, Leontes finds in Camillo’s denial a further confirmation of his inability to gain access to the unofficial goings-on. The “total degeneration of epistemology” that follows is Leontes’s famous “nothing” speech, in which, as Janet Adelman has pointed out, the King’s understanding of the world is made fully dependent on his wife’s adultery.

2.

Leontes’s suspicious outbursts create a parallel between identification and recognition. Both are, after all, attempts to interpret and represent the other in the form of speech
acts that involve a larger set of social relationships, emotions, and psychological acknowledgment. In the early stages of The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare shows Leontes in the process of “deciphering” Hermione. In scenes of identification, individuals are read for what their bodies and manner can reveal about them. Leontes’s misrecognition takes the form of a “re-identification” of the bodies of the supposed lovers. His passionate outbursts combine a fear of performance and a desperate, misguided attempt to determine the lovers’ true state of mind through the body. He feels not only excluded from the rumors at court but also from the secret code of love-making that allows the conveyance of messages in public performance. In Castiglione’s The Courtier, Julian de Medici gives advice on how to express love to a lady in spite of the lack of privacy:

In case you will needes write or speake to her, do it with such sobermoode, and so warilye, that the woordes maye firste attempt the minde, and so doubtfullye touch her entent and will, that they maye leave her a way and a certein issue to feine the understandinge that those woordes conteine love: to the entent if he finde anye daunger, he maye draw backe and make wise to have spoken or written it to an other ende, to enjoye these familiar cherishinges and dialiances with assuraunce, that oftentimes women shouwe to suche as shoulde take them for frendshippe, afterwarde denye them assone as they perceyve they are taken for tokens of love.⁴⁰

The courtier capitalizes on the ambiguity of language, turning it into a subtle instrument of seduction that is open to multiple interpretations. In The Courtier and The Civil
*Conversation*, words are frequently used deliberately for their ambiguity or purposefully misconstrued. Courtly conversation is presented as a highly sophisticated medium of exchange in which messages are conveyed on different levels and by means of private as well as public codes, meant to speak to specific audiences and elude others within the court itself. This means that the very language used to establish social hierarchies is undermined by sexual, or potentially sexual, meanings.

Leontes's rereading of the courtly exchange between Polixenes and Hermione imagines the lovers in a perversely encoded, public performance of illicit sexuality. As if reidentifying them, he relies on the evidence of the bodily fragment, in which he believes he sees a dangerous closeness between the lovers. Looking for material evidence of adultery, he focuses on the body parts that are frequently associated with sexuality in the period, the "paddling palms and pinching fingers." \(^{41}\) Courtly performance has become sexualized. Similarly, Iago tells Rodrigo the truth about Cassio's gallant behavior to Desdemona: "Didst thou not see her paddle with the palm of his hand?" (2.1.245-46). Rodrigo objects, "that was but courtesy," but Iago tells him, "Lechery, by this hand; an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts. They met so near with their lips that their breaths embraced together" (247-50). These "mutualities" (251) are images of indistinguishable sameness. Iago's gaze, shared with the audience as is true for Leontes, identifies acts of courtesy as the index of lechery. Like Iago, Leontes urges Hermione on in asides, picturing his wife and friend, "making practised smiles / As in a looking-glass" (1.2.118-19). Seeing their performance as rehearsed, he conjures up a spectacle of the fearful, intimate twinning of man and woman. Julian's advice makes clear that in deliberately cultivating ambiguity
for safety’s sake, the courtier is in the realm of the feminine, doing what women
“oftentimes” do. In Leontes’s phrase, Polixenes is incorporated into the effeminate
realm of courtesy, the kind of incorporation Richard III refuses when he claims he is
“not made to court an amorous looking-glass” (Richard III, 1.1.15). The notion of the
lovers smiling “practiced smiles” at each other is suggestive of courtliness, sexual
intercourse, the absence of hierarchical differentiation, and a loss of individual identity.
Carol Thomas Neely has pointed out that from the moment his suspicions are sparked,
Leontes never refers to Hermione or Polixenes by name again. He adheres to his own
identification of the two as nameless lovers and refuses to identify them by the names
that remind him of their former position.

Having watched his wife’s sexual “entertainment” (1.2.120), Leontes turns to
his son to ask him the cuckold’s perennial question, “Art thou my boy?” (1.2.122). The
need for identification has become pressing in light of his fears. The idea that his son’s
nose is a “copy out of mine” (124) does not give the king comforting proof of
Hermione’s chastity. Instead, language is spinning out of control, overriding any
certainty the body might give him and twisting physical evidence so that it matches his
suspicions. The idea of their physical twinning, father and son being “Almost as like as
eggs” (132), is suddenly seen as the observation of false women, who will “say
anything” (133). Does Leontes realized the formula is merely a convention, designed to
alleviate concern on the part of the husband? Every observation becomes more evidence
of the truth of Hermione’s disloyalty. Cleaning up the boy’s nose, Leontes’s remark that
noses must be “neat” leads punningly into thoughts of horned animals and cuckolding.
The failure of identification to prove anything but his wife’s adultery culminates in the
suggestion that Mamillius go “play,” which brings on the realization, “Thy mother
plays, and I / Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue / Will hiss me to my grave”
(188-90). The physical similarity that is comforting in the idealized language of the
courtiers and Polixenes’s pastoral image of childhood has been superseded by the
language of adultery and sexual performance.

The “disgraced” part that Leontes plays excludes him from the sexualized court
and turns him into an ordinary man, one of a large group of cuckold. That the king
should find comfort in this idea indicates the extent to which royal position is suddenly
subject to questioning. This is not only true for Polixenes, who, like a courtier and not
like a king, finds that his “favour begins to warp” at court (1.2.366), but also for
Leontes himself, who is momentarily addressed with the informal “thee” by Camillo in
a way that has puzzled editors.⁴³ Leontes imagines his own kinship with other men,
claiming, “many a man there is … holds his wife by th’ arm, / That little thinks she has
been sluiced in ’s absence / And his pond fished by his next neighbour” (1.2.193-96).
Leontes, Polixenes, and Hermione are all brought down to the level of ordinary
subjects. The self-perception of the king has become dependent on his ability to control
his wife’s sexual behavior. This imagined loss of status comes at the end of an elaborate
scene of courtly display, not as a moment of intense contrast, but as the effect of the
logic of courtly self-presentation.

In a dark version of the final statue scene, Leontes puts Hermione on humiliating
display to enforce a collective identification of her body as adulterous, reminiscent of
the way Claudio presents his reading of Hero’s blush as evidence of guilt in Much Ado
About Nothing. In an act of verbal tyranny, Leontes aims to destroy her position as
queen, which would prevent the general confirmation of her adultery. Effectively renaming her, Leontes addresses her again without using her name, in an attempt to resume control over social position at court:

O, thou thing,
Which I'll not call a creature of thy place,
Lest barbarism, making me the precedent,
Should a like language use to all degrees,
And mannerly distinction leave out
Betwixt the prince and beggar. (2.1.84-89)

He places his wife outside of the linguistic realm of the court, and therefore outside the realm of courtly exchange, by refusing to name her in the manner that is consonant with her true “place” (that of the prostitute). This act counters the use of language to establish position at court, making the construction of hierarchy a royal prerogative. It recalls the argument King James made before Parliament in 1610, when he asserted the power of kings “to exalt low things and abase high things, and make of their subjects like men at the chess: a pawn to take a bishop or a knight, and to cry up or down any of their subjects, as they do their money.”

By withholding Hermione’s name, Leontes pretends to uphold the social order, declaring that her explicit identification as an adulteress would destroy the distinctions between beggar and prince. Her sexual behavior has done way with the social boundaries he claims to uphold.
Leontes’s repudiation of Perdita also takes the form of misidentification: “This brat is none of mine” (2.3.93). This speech act marks the fracturing of the royal family and the downfall of its potential heirs. Leontes’s refusal to identify his daughter as his own amounts to a violation of religious, political, and familial norms. Royal birth no longer guarantees position and has, for Leontes’s children, become a liability. Rather than sidestepping Leontes’s assumptions, Paulina tries to “cure” the king by building on the logic by which suspicious fathers examine the bodies of their children. She attempts to persuade him of Hermione’s loyalty by properly identifying the child as his through the details of the body:

Behold, my lords,

Although the print be little, the whole matter
And copy of the father: eye, nose, lip,
The trick of ’s frown, his forehead, nay the valley,
The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles,
The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger. (2.3.98-103)

The materiality of the baby’s body is the focus of her presentation. She uses the language of printing and copying to make her point and forces the courtiers to examine the body of the child not as a whole but in its details, comparing the eye, nose, lip, frown, forehead, chin, cheek, smiles, hand, nail, and finger to Leontes’s bodily details. Such fragmenting of the body is, as we have seen, characteristic of Leontes’s suspicion, but open to personal interpretation. He has used body parts of Hermione and Polixenes
as evidence of adultery and discounted their significance in the case of Mamillius. The idea that the child can be an exact copy of the father, or, in the words of Don Pedro in *Much Ado about Nothing*, that the child “fathers herself” (1.1.90), is itself too clearly a product of representation rather than real reflection, a fantasy that covers up a nervousness about female sexuality. The body of the child, it seems, is subject to competing interpretations and not a transparent source of truths about the parents’ sexual behavior.

What makes Paulina’s speech harmful rather than curative is the way in which she stages her comparison. Without asking for royal permission to speak, she assumes the authority to read the body of the child as a copy of Leontes’s, reproducing his form exactly. She fails to show the deference to authority that characterizes her later behavior. Instead, she directs herself towards the courtiers present, to persuade Leontes by means of the opinion of the court. While she seems to want to stage a recognition scene, with its conventional focus on the details of the body that “prove” identity, she ends up putting Leontes on display, humiliating him. She is doing to him precisely what he has done to Hermione two scenes earlier. Paulina makes the courtiers direct their gaze towards Leontes, to compare the two, rather than making Leontes see himself reflected in the child. She continues on what is almost comically presented as the wrong tack:

> And thou good goddess Nature, which hast made it
> So like to him that got it, if thou hast
> The ordering of the mind too, 'mongst all colours
No yellow in’t, lest she suspect, as he does.
Her children not her husband’s. (2.3.104-08)

Paulina is either unaware of the potential effect on Leontes, so certain of her success with the other courtiers that she feels confident enough to humiliate the king, or too angry to care. Such a remarkable assumption of authority by a woman reveals the depth of the disorder caused by the king’s misidentification of his baby daughter. In Leontes’s eyes, this is of course another instance of the ineffective husband’s inability to control the public speech of their wives. The statue scene will remedy this painfully inadequate attempt at persuasion; there, Paulina is responsive to her royal audience, authorized by the king to speak, displaying Hermione in a manner that counters these painful moments earlier on.

Much as in Henry VIII, every interpretive shift at court is marked by a female public performance to confirm the collective nature of the consequences. Graham Holderness writes, “The experience of tragic suffering, which folds Leontes into a tormenting subjectivity, draws Hermione out towards performative communication”45 But we have to remember that these are forced performances in front of increasingly larger groups of men, which confirm and intensify the degeneration of female courtliness. At each of these moments of humiliating display, Hermione tries to gain control over the public’s view of her behavior, sidestepping the king and addressing the rest of the spectators directly. At trial, she points out the incongruity between her position as a queen and her exposure to a general audience, identifying herself as “A fellow of the royal bed, which owe / A moiety of the throne; a great king’s daughter, /
The mother to a hopeful prince" (3.2.36-38). The attempt to recover her former position involves a reestablishment of her own dual place in the patriarchal hierarchy as sexual partner and wife, daughter, and mother, combined in each instance with the royal status attached to these conventional categories of female identity. Her efforts to acquire some measure of control over Leontes's court recalls Queen Katherine's behavior in Henry VIII. Similarly refusing to show feminine tears, Katherine decides she will not be forced to perform in a court ruled by Wolsey, telling him, moments before walking out, "I do refuse you for my judge" (2.4.116). Hermione shows more concern for her general audience as she appeals to divine spectators who will confirm her innocence. In doing so, she places those present in the famous dilemma of the Jacobean subject: whether to obey the king if he abuses his royal prerogative and acts in disagreement with the religious beliefs that are at the basis of his position.46

Ironically, the king's attempt to exclude Hermione from the court enhances his own isolation, for the courtiers remain committed to the rhetoric of nobility and chastity with respect to the queen. Antigonus shows his perfect courtliness, when he declares that he will "geld" his daughters if this accusation is true (2.1.149). Unable to reconcile Leontes's discovery with normative praise of the queen, he can only deduce that if the queen is untrue, all women must be—the reversal of Leontes's suspicion. This reluctance brings Leontes to the realization that he has now made himself subject to the judgment of the court. Guazzo's Anniball argues that the deeds of monarchs are "altogether without the compasse of our judgement, and alwaies mistaken of us."47 The need for such a statement makes clear that in actual practice such judgment is frequently made. The addition of the proviso that this is only true for rulers "by nature" rather than
“by violence” indicates that Anniball grants absolute authority only to the monarch whose status is derived from birth. It is significant that George Pettie chose to insert his praise of Queen Elizabeth just before this passage, suggesting that the translator felt the need to establish her position beyond question before the possibility of judging a ruler is even touched on. Leontes has suffered a loss of the prerogative of royal birth once he has made himself subject to courtly judgment. From a ruler “by nature,” he becomes a ruler “by violence.” The culmination of the monarchical crisis is his rejection of the oracle. It heralds the complete secularization of his government and therefore a loss of the divine endorsement that underpins his authority. The courtly emphasis on performance has resulted in extreme social fluidity. In this situation, identification and recognition of the royals has become a source of further chaos and political instability.

3.

The oracle is the first sign that order will be restored at court. In contrast with the ambiguity of courtly conversation, the oracle provides the court with a text in control of its own meaning: “Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the King shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found” (3.2.131-33). The oracle performs a number of functions at the same time. First, it breaks with the playful nature of the courtly language heard in the first act. In contrast to what we may expect from oracular speech, the language of the oracle is entirely transparent, with the exception of the final riddle. Second, it assigns absolute identities, renaming each of the royals and identifying them in an unequivocal manner. Everyone takes on a fixed stature, losing
individual agency in self-presentation or interpretation of others. They are placed beyond signification in any other way than that already contained within the text. In other words, the oracle is a recognition scene in written form, using the type of language seen at the end of *The Comedy of Errors* and preventing further misidentification and misrecognition. Although Leontes tries to claim it is false, once Mamillius's death is announced, the oracle asserts itself as an unavoidable frame of reference for the explanation of future and past events. From here on, royal position at court is grounded in the truths stated in the unchangeable text.

Having explored the near-tragic consequences of uncontrolled performativity, the play shifts, as does *The Comedy of Errors*, into a different generic mode to help achieve a restoration of harmony. Although such a shift is less unexpected in romance, the transition is noticeable and deliberate, as if the playgoers are meant to consider why such a shift is necessary to eliminate the causes of disorder. *The Winter's Tale*, so close to tragedy, even requires two generic shifts. At the end, the play moves into a type of theater that is markedly different from the opening scenes yet inherently courtly. It has frequently been described in terms of the Stuart masque. Pastoral, the traditional courtly reprieve from artificial performance, and the place for contemplation rather than action, is positioned in the middle of the two types of courtly representation. As is clear from the opening of Act 4, the world of Bohemia is not a traditional pastoral one. The shepherds are not as unspoiled as we may expect, a number of the pastoral figures are royalty in disguise, and the countryside is open to the trickery of Autolycus.

Our introduction to Bohemia, once the bear has made his exit, takes the form of another misidentification of Perdita. The old shepherd has his own insights into courtly
society and its sexual transgressions. He remarks, on finding the child, "Though I am not bookish, yet I can read ‘waiting gentle-woman’ in the scape. This has been some stair-work, some trunk-work, some behind-door-work" (3.3.69-71). His assumption that the court is a place of illicit sexuality, is what has caused Leontes’s suspicion. The old man’s identification of the child as the off-spring of a “waiting gentle-woman” is both in sexual and in class terms beside the mark. Neither the king nor the shepherd can see the essential truth of Perdita’s royalty in her physical presence. Yet, the shepherd’s assertion that he can “read” the baby as if her class and sexual origin are written on her body is an important sign of what is to come. The reversal of this loss of status will take the form of new, correct readings of Perdita’s body and manner as natural products of her royalty.

In the pervasive critical tradition that sees the Bohemian scenes as a benign and liberating transformation of the Sicilian scenes, Paul Alpers has described the fourth Act of The Winter’s Tale as a reworking of the crisis at court. Its purpose is, he argues, to save “the possibility of exchange” or “the possibility of action and utterance that establish connections between separate persons.” Indeed, as we have seen, exchange at court has come under pressure because of the way it is organized, and so we can approach the Bohemian scenes by asking how they contribute to the eventual restoration of harmony in Sicilia. Alpers finds in the pastoral scenes a freedom of exchange that contrasts with the stifling atmosphere at court. At the same time, he points out that it is important to distinguish between the actual pastoral figures and those who are merely temporarily seen to be such, in varying degrees, ranging from Perdita’s pastoral upbringing to Florizel’s disguise. The notion of pastoral as courtly self-representation
rather than a separation from courtly life beg the question whether these scenes involve a liberating suspension of courtly identity, as Alpers argues, or an equally mediated and overdetermined mode of representation, used to reconfigure courtliness.

Even if courtly codes temporarily give way to pastoral ones, Alpers’s reminder of the close ties between pastoral and court help us to see that, in their own way, the Bohemian scenes contribute to the play’s reformulation of the feminine courtly ideal. They do so through the representation of Perdita and her speech on the one hand, and through their scenes of identification and misidentification on the other. Hermione’s speech marks the fluidity of the court because of its performativity, which makes misidentification possible. The character of Perdita serves to restore a “natural” order, and so it is important that she is presented in a manner that makes identification of her person and her royalty seem unavoidable. Identification needs to transform from a mode of representation into a manifestation of the inner truth through the outward signs of identity, so that outward and inward seem in perfect harmony with each other. Perdita’s voice contributes to this transformation.

Perdita’s speeches signify a move away from the courtly spirit that allowed for an insistence on female equality in the first act. Instead, she is unaware of her own ancestry and therefore of her true place in the social hierarchy. With all the obvious pointers in the direction of her noble birth, Perdita is firmly convinced of her lowly status. Her modesty amounts to a transformation of the female voice. Unlike the highly sophisticated court lady, who has to give the impression of chastity while calculating the effect of her behavior on her audience, Perdita combines the image of modesty, obedience, and chastity with a new type of courtly display: a physical and pastoral
performance that denies that is a performance, presenting the audience with social behavior that is the result of "being" rather than "showing." Her rhetoric is highly effective because it hides its own rhetoricity. Perdita’s declaration of love for Florizel at their betrothal begins with, "I cannot speak / So well, nothing so well," something we cannot imagine Hermione saying in the first act. But she goes on to add, "no, nor mean better" (4.4.366-67). The lines delicately assert Perdita’s chastity, modesty, and silence, even as it puts forward a moral equality between the two young lovers.

Perdita’s humility in speech and manner is always paired with a natural superiority that is noticeable to everyone. This is what makes her ultimate recognition so important to the court at large. It suggests that identification is process that works not through the active input of the observer but through the emergence of the truth about the observed. Perdita’s manner and body cannot but prove her royal ancestry, grounding her future identification in her innate nobility. Her modesty is coupled with a rejection of those material attributes of class that allow others to perform and assume a position that is not rightfully theirs. She remarks repeatedly on the inappropriateness of her dress as the queen of the feast, even though Florizel claims that they reveal the truth about her. He asserts, “These your unusual weeds to each part of you / Does give a life” (4.4.1-2), to which she reveals her deep anxiety about his lowly dress and claims that she would “swoon, I think, / To show myself a glass” (4.4.13-14). Later, he tells the disguised Polixenes that she does not care for the trifles and knacks others buy for their lovers. This, of course, positions her favorably in comparison with the unbridled and clearly sexual desire for the peddler’s merchandise on the part of the other women at the feast.
Similarly, Perdita firmly rejects what she calls "nature's bastards" (4.4.83), the crossbred gillivors:

I'll not put
The dibble in earth to set one slip of them;
No more than were I painted I would wish
This youth should say 'twere well, and only therefore
Desire to breed by me. (4.4.99-103)

The speech is ironic in that Perdita seems entirely unaware of its relevance to the combination of her seeming low birth and her present costume. She also appears oblivious of the significance of these words to her desire for Florizel. These discrepancies are really unimportant since we know Florizel and Perdita to be of "pure" and royal blood, and so in the end she never violates her own principles. Her comments highlight her rejection of artifice and her approval of nature, while Polixenes, the voice of courtliness in the opening act, defends artifice.

In addition, Perdita's speech shows her rejection of cosmetics. Courtesy theory advised against too much make-up; it was permitted in order to disguise natural flaws, so long as it was not visible. Court ladies could use cosmetics as an instrument of concealment to create the impression of physical perfection.\(^1\) Although Perdita's explicit connection of cosmetics with "breeding" is hardly evidence of subtle courtliness, her rejection of make-up altogether can be read as part of the adjustment of the courtly ideal offered in these scenes.\(^2\) Her refusal to enhance her appearance by
artificial means points forward to the re-establishment of birth as a primary source of beauty and nobility, and identification as a natural process rather than a form of manipulation and performance. Her distaste for “painting” compares well with Hermione’s court ladies, whose artificial blue eyebrows were so cleverly mocked by Mamillius.

In short, Perdita is distinguished from the other women in Bohemia, the lower-class pastoral figures, and from the artificial ladies of the court, through her remarkable beauty, even known in court circles, her self-representation, and her rejection of performance and illicit sexuality. Susan Baker argues that Shakespeare’s use of disguise reveals that nobility is not merely a product of birth, but also “at least as strongly” of learning. To make her case, Baker is forced to come up with an unlikely explanation for Perdita’s seemingly innate nobility. She writes, “in terms of verisimilitude it would be difficult to imagine what models Perdita could have had for courtly deportment; but given her foster parents’ standing in their neighborhood and their knowledge that her origins were rich and mysterious, it is only logical that she should bear herself in a manner suggesting high status.”53 Yet, such an assertion conflicts with the impression of everyone who meets her in the play. All who see her remark on her exceptionality. After her offstage recognition scene, the Third Gentleman highlights “the affection of nobleness which nature shows above her breeding” (5.2.33-34). To think that the old shepherd would be capable of providing Perdita with the education of a princess goes against the principle of recognition. It is clear that the play mystifies Perdita’s courtliness, leaving no room for an explanation that might leave open the possibility of learning over nature.
Florizel’s declaration of love helps construct the new ideal of courtly femininity.

Foreshadowing Hermione’s final performance, his praise of endless repetition of speech, song, and dance deprives Perdita’s voice of its independent power to signify. He turns her into what Maurice Hunt has called a “speaking picture.”

What you do

Still betters what is done. When you speak, sweet,
I’d have you do it ever; when you sing,
I’d have you buy and sell so, so give alms;
Pray so; and for the ord’ring your affairs,
To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o’th’ sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that, move still, still so,
And own no other function. Each your doing,
So singular in each particular,
Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,
That all your acts are queens. (4.4.135-46)

By locating female beauty in the symbolically significant daily acts, Florizel creates an ideal that is unconventional, yet inherently courtly. Whigham writes that at the Elizabethan court, the actions that seem most trivial are subject to courtly signification to enhance elite identity. Perdita’s unawareness of the grace of her acts lifts her courtliness above Castiglione’s sprezzatura, used by the courtier “to cover art withall
and seeme whatsoever he doth and sayeth to do it wyouth pain, and (as it were) not myndyng it."\textsuperscript{55} The covering of art, the seeming, and the inclusion of the phrase "as it were" make clear that \textit{sprezzatura} is itself of course a performative concept. In the 1561 edition, Hoby translates the word as "recklessness"; in the 1588 version, he makes his anxiety over the concept even clearer when he replaces "recklessness" with "disgracing."\textsuperscript{56} Beyond suggesting feigned recklessness or a pretended lack of care, the word disgrace points to the notion of grace as an attribute that requires effort and needs to be hidden from view, but it also puns on the "disgrace" involved in courtly performance. Perdita's courtliness, not a product of upbringing, is presented as true, natural behavior, lacking the deliberation involved in \textit{sprezzatura}. For that reason, her courtesy outdoes that of Castiglione's courtier in that it is not a product of performance but a grace derived from birth.

All of this works towards the inevitable identification of Perdita as a product of a royal marriage. Florizel's description of Perdita proceeds from female speech to song, and finally to the purely physical dance, to locate her queen-ness in the movement of the body. Hunt writes, "Paradoxically, Perdita's deeds become physical words unintentionally excelling not only her restrictive ways of thinking and speaking but her special 'flower speech' as well."\textsuperscript{57} Even if we do not agree with Hunt's presentation of this transformation as an artistic achievement on Shakespeare's part, his observation allows us to see that the effect of Florizel's speech is to modify the female courtly voice. Significantly, the speech comes just after one of Perdita's least courtly expressions of love for the prince, which contains an unexpectedly sexual depiction of Florizel in her arms. Such moments should remind us of the complexity of
Shakespeare's use of the pastoral genre. While that moment is remarkable in itself, it is also important that Florizel quickly "corrects" it with a representation of courtly femininity that will be more closely aligned to Perdita in the rest of the play. She follows his tribute with a correction of her own, warning him of a possible sexual interpretation of his speech and the fear that Doricles might be wooing her "the false way" (4.4.151).

The impression of stillness in movement combined with the chaste words constructs a model of femininity that is closely affiliated to Guazzo's image of the lady who "frameth her jegures so discreetely, that in speakyng, shee seemeth to holde her peace, and in holding her peace to speake."58 The Bohemian scenes represent female courtliness as both self-evident and natural, impossible to imitate and therefore impossible to question or to undermine, and, above all, physical rather than verbal. Perdita's character establishes a crucial link between nobility and birth, making misidentification less and less likely. Elite identity is no longer fluid, because it has now been firmly placed within the confines of the female body, from where it cannot be removed.59 Along with it, identification becomes a simple recognition of what is there for all to see.

As such, we might say that the entire Bohemian sequence tries to overcome Leontes's misidentification of his child. Therefore, it is all the more striking that the next moment she encounters her father, he not only fails to identify her correctly, but also makes expresses sexual desire for her. Leontes's famous incestuous swerve comes after sixteen years of penance and what are clearly incessant attempts on Paulina's part to "cure" the king. That the reformation of the king requires more than verbal correction
becomes clear when the young couple arrive in Sicilia. On meeting Florizel, Leontes
begins by complimenting his mother, who must have been “most true to wedlock,
Prince, / For she did print your royal father off, / Conceiving you” (5.1.123-25). In the
case of Don Pedro’s compliment to Hero at the outset of Much Ado About Nothing, we
can see that such remarks are customary courtly gestures, but the convention itself
betray underlying anxieties.

Once the king discovers that the couple’s presence is not authorized by
Polixenes and that Perdita is not of royal blood, he undoes all the proper courtliness he
has displayed in welcoming Florizel. Voicing highly uncourtly feelings for Perdita, who
is deprived of her royalty yet again, Leontes imagines himself turning to Polixenes, to
“beg your precious mistress, / Which he counts but a trifle” (5.1.222-23). Paulina
quickly recovers the situation by reminding him that Hermione “was more worth such
gazes / Than what you now look on” (225-26), presenting Perdita as an object less
worthy of his gaze. Neither are capable of seeing Perdita for what she is. Leontes’s
claim that he was thinking of Hermione as he made the suggestion, only partly redeems
him. It gives us a hint of a better recognition to come, but it does not fully account for
his treatment of her or its incestuous implications. The king’s possessiveness, the claim
that Polixenes considers her a mere trifle, and the danger in his sexual feeling for her
generate the need for a highly elaborate set of recognition scenes. The question of class
is also a significant aspect of his response: what do we make of Leontes’s evident
willingness to sexualize Perdita as soon as he finds out that she is not royal? A full
recognition of her natural nobility is not yet in Leontes’s reach, or if it is, he seems
desperate to possess, rather than admire her for it. The moment is a trace of Pandosto’s
fatal desire for his daughter, but it is also evaded very quickly. Perhaps the court’s (and Leontes’s) indifference to this swerve in spite of its moral and emotional significance as yet another, near-fatal scene in which Leontes misidentifies his off-spring, is a sign that his transformation is not by any means complete.

The first recognition scene centers on Perdita, who is admitted as a member of the royal family. In contrast with Cymbeline and Pericles (and other, more conventional recognition scenes), this scene is kept off-stage. The audience is not given the elaborate proof of Perdita’s identity. The Third Gentleman merely gives us a description:

there is such unity in the proofs. The mantle of Queen Hermione’s, her jewel about the neck of it, the letters of Antigonus found with is, which they know to be his character; the majesty of the creature, in resemblance of the mother; the affection of nobleness which nature shows above her breeding, and many other evidences proclaim her with all certainty to be the King’s daughter. (5.2.30-36)

The material evidence of birth combines with her resemblance to her mother and her natural nobility to confirm her nobility beyond question. We have moved away from Paulina’s claim of the baby’s resemblance to the father to a resemblance to the mother, which intensifies the court’s mourning for Hermione before she returns. Perhaps we can explain the fact that Perdita’s recognition happens off-stage by pointing to the ways in which Leontes’s incestuous misidentification may have troubled it, were we to see it staged. Another reason must be that by keeping the first recognition scene off-stage, Shakespeare increases our desire to see the second recognition scene, in which
Hermione comes to life. To prepare for the highly visual nature of the statue scene, the recognition of Perdita is only reported, frustrating the audience’s desire to see and highlighting the inadequacy of courtly language.

The emotional effect and thematic significance of the recognition of Perdita is by no means reduced by keeping it off-stage, much like the importance of the misidentification of Margaret is, if anything, strengthened by the fact that the audience has to rely on report. Perdita’s off-stage recognition is recounted to become more than anything a sign of the collective nature of the reformation of the court. Courtly language become indicative of its own inadequacy as different characters testify to a preference for gesture as a means of expression during a moment of great emotional intensity (a preference that can itself only be conveyed in language). This use of rhetoric as it expresses its own lack of consequence should not simply be seen as courtly verbal excess. The extent of the communal transformation of courtly exchange can be gauged if we compare the First Gentleman’s frustration at the expressive capacities of language with the similar expression of the inadequacy of language in the opening conversation of the two courtiers. Archidamus’s humble admission, “I know not what to say” (1.1.11-12), serves a hierarchical and performative purpose. The assertion is not a statement about language, but suggests that his gratitude exceeds what can be conveyed in words, to enhance his own position in relation to Camillo. But the First Gentleman’s “broken delivery of the business” (5.2.8) does not have an effect on his own social standing. His speech literally refers elsewhere, to a scene that is not staged. The assertion that language is inferior to sight serves a social purpose for the entire court,
which learns to redefine its relationship to courtly speech and to reappraise the centrality of the female body as evidence of social position.

The second recognition scene, the unveiling of the statue, is a re-identification not in the literal sense of establishing Hermione’s identity but in the figurative sense of reconfirming her royalty. Courtly dialogue is given a position of secondary importance to the spectacle when the female body takes center stage. As we have seen in *The Comedy of Errors*, recognition requires a reconfiguration of the material evidence of the body that was cause for confusion in the first place. The very fragments of Hermione’s body seized on the first act, and the details of Perdita’s body that failed to persuade him of Hermione’s loyalty, are now no longer open to competing interpretations. Safely frozen, the veins, lip, and eye have become signs of the exceptional beauty of the queen. To achieve the readmission of the queen to the court, her body is differentiated from other female bodies before she can be heard to speak. Abbe Blum coins the phrase “monumentalizing women” for this process, which she detects in Shakespeare’s romances and tragedies, and which “entails the relinquishment of the woman’s voice.” Blum compares the act of monumentalizing to commemorating, which, she writes, “fixes value, assigns noteworthiness, and … arises in part from a desire to possess what lies beyond possession—to render certain and permanent what is unknowable, unavailable, lost.” Likewise, recognition fixes the process of deciphering the other, presenting it as certain and permanent and making future misidentification an impossibility.

The resurrection of the queen by means of collective praise contrasts with Hermione’s witty speech on the use of praise to pacify women in the first act.
Therefore, the ceremony marks not only Leontes’s renewed recognition of his wife, but also Hermione’s own acceptance of her relation to language at court on the basis of the restrictions imposed on the female voice. In this respect, it is of course significant that the reconciliation with Leontes takes the form of a speechless re-enactment of courtship and a wordless embrace. Prompted to speak by the courtiers in order to prove that she is alive, Hermione utters her famous maternal blessing:

You gods, look down,  
And from your sacred vials pour your graces  
Upon my daughter’s head. — Tell me, mine own,  
Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived? How found  
Thy father’s court? For thou shalt hear that I,  
Knowing by Paulina that the oracle  
Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved  
Myself to see the issue. (5.3.122-29)

As readers of the play have observed, the speech is inconsistent with the events of the third act. Hermione was herself present at the reading of the oracle and did not need to hear from Paulina about the fate of her daughter. But the speech does not perform on a rational level. A blessing, Geoffrey Hartman has suggested, is resorted to (much like the curse) “when legal instruments are not appropriate or have failed.” He concludes that “it is clear that curse and blessing have a psychological aspect as well as a legal or ritual role.”61 The purpose of Hermione’s blessing is to heal the ruptures that have devastated
the Sicilian court and the royal family. In addition, as is the case in The Comedy of Errors, the law is need of reform. To undo Leontes’s travesty of the law and his secularization of government, Hermione’s blessing invokes once again the presence of divine spectators, this time firmly establishing the court as a space that is subject to supervision of the gods, who “look down” upon the sacralized space of recognition.

For these reasons, the significance of Hermione’s blessing is to be found in its restorative function in binding the courtly community together. Her questions addressed to Perdita have the same effect. Reminiscent of the lambs in Polixenes’s speech, she offers the possibility of exchange in language that is “innocent.” As her repetition of the word “preserved” indicates, her questions do not initiate a dialogue, but establish a bond between mother and daughter to bridge the gap that has opened up among the members of the royal family. The type of language needed for this purpose is singular in meaning, in contrast with the sexually ambiguous courtly exchanges of the first act. As at the end of The Comedy of Errors, then, language becomes transparent and repetitive, establishing unbreakable bonds and fulfilling the same purpose as gesture. Leontes’s final speech promises a return to verbal exchange at court, as he tells Paulina to

Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely
Each one demand, and answer to his part
Performed in this wide gap of time, since first
We were dissovered. Hastly lead away. (5.3.153-56)
It is difficult to imagine what form renewed conversation at court will take, but the king’s last words suggest that linguistic exchange between members of the royal family will no longer be limited to the public arena of the court. Now, it has become necessary to find an off-stage, private space.

Hermione’s return as a copy of herself is characteristic of the recognition scenes in romance, which enact the fantasy of substitution of the person tainted by sexuality. At the end of *Much Ado about Nothing*, Claudio briefly entertains this possibility when he identifies Hero as “another Hero.” A similar logic works in *Measure for Measure*, when Claudio, brought close to death by his sexual offense, is brought on stage muffled and introduced as another prisoner, “As like almost to Claudio as himself” (5.1.483). Such scenes reveal the power of a ritual form of theater in which identification works to purge individuals of past associations with sexuality that cannot be removed by other means. These moments of restorative re-identification counter the misidentifications and accusations that have taken place by making identification a collective process. The entire community takes part in determining true identity on the basis of outward signs that have become unequivocal signs of the truth. The “deciphering” that takes place here and in *The Comedy of Errors*, therefore, shows that communal recognition helps anchor social position and find ground for a social order that has been upset beyond what was held possible.

The recognition scene is one of the different dramatic registers employed in *The Winter’s Tale* to examine the relation between class and gender at court. Social harmony is restored by means of a renunciation of playful conversation and an appreciation of gesture and tableau as less disruptive, ideologically more effective
courtly means of confirming royal authority. Perdita's courtliness is entirely natural, and the focus on her body and its manner is conclusive evidence of this. But as is the case with the romance ending in *The Comedy of Errors*, Hermione's performance as a statue suggests that there remains a performative aspect to exchange, albeit a performance of a different kind. While performance is now made to reflect the natural order of things, the ending is marked by a sense of loss, of life, of the female voice, and of entertaining and playful conversation.

Acted in front of a royal audience, as *The Winter's Tale* was twice, the play may have constituted an act of persuasion that amounted to a reformulation of courtly ideals for the benefit of the royal family and the unstable court of King James. Whether it was seen as such or not, the play uses misidentification, misrecognition and recognition to examine the contradictory nature of the court, reflected in the courtesy literature of its day. Shakespeare parallels the disorder caused by misidentification and the suspicion of female sexuality. In *The Comedy of Errors*, the "adultery" plot is subsidiary to the narrative of misidentification, but rifts caused by the latter are restored through the former. In *The Winter's Tale*, the opposite is the case: a reconfiguration of courtly femininity is achieved through recognition, to anchor social hierarchies and harness elite identity.

In both plays, the question of social mobility, central to misidentification and relations between men and women, seems to be at the heart of the problem. While the final scene in *The Winter's Tale* achieves a naturalization of the female courtly ideal and a re-mystification of royalty, the question of social mobility lingers on the margins of the play. The relation of the figure of Autolycus to the main plot of *The Winter's Tale*
has been a problem that has vexed criticism of the play. One solution has been to treat
him as a parallel to Leontes. Carol Thomas Neely, for instance, calls him Leontes's
"parodic double" and claims that each of the trickster's attributes in some way
transforms Leontes's. His "tall tales" are a transformation of Leontes's "dangerous
fantasies," for instance. Neely's reading of Autolycus can be placed in the critical
tradition that sees the Bohemian scenes as a pastoral reworking of the events at
Leontes's court. But in the context of my argument on the uses of identification and
femininity in the play, it should be noted that there is a substantial conceptual
connection between the court and Autolycus and, perhaps unexpectedly, between
Hermione and Autolycus. The cultural significance of the play's treatment of the rogue
lies in the correspondences that are established between the masterless man and the
courtly female. Both disrupt the social order because of their persuasive performances,
and both are ultimately silenced, to ground the social order and minimize the potential
for social mobility on the basis of effective speech. In doing so, the play uses both
characters to show order to be contingent on an understanding of rank as a consequence
of essence and birth rather than performance.

Autolycus is not strictly speaking an urban rogue. He performs his tricks in the
different setting of the Bohemian countryside. Nonetheless, as recent criticism by
Barbara Mowat and William Carroll has shown, he is drawn from the tradition of the
cony-catching pamphlets and other representations of urban tricksters and masterless
men. David Kaula has argued that Autolycus would also have brought to mind the
writings of anti-Catholic pamphleteers and their depictions of the Catholic peddler,
selling his "trumpery" (4.4.585) and other suspicious wares in order to influence the
innocent consumers. In basing the character specifically on the work of Robert Greene, Shakespeare introduces his perspective on the urban social order, familiar from the scenes of misidentification in *The Comedy of Errors*, into his examination of Leontes’s court. As we have seen in the first chapter, the rogue pamphlets of the 1590s and beyond present the social order as unstable and social position as prone to loss and theft. This situation is not only blamed on the rogue himself but also on the nature of the urban community, in which identities can be forged and manipulated.

Autolycus is a social other in different ways, a figure of mutability, who manipulates his own identity in whichever way pleases him. He is in part successful because, much like Greene’s tricksters and Shakespeare’s twin brother, he somehow has access to material evidence needed to present himself as a member of a particular social circle. As a peddler, he wears a fake beard; as a pretended courtier, he impresses the unsuspecting rustics with Florizel’s clothes. His mutability, however, is not only based on his apparel. When giving his famous and first performance as someone who has been robbed by a rogue called Autolycus, he is capable of manipulating the significance of his apparel. He tells the clown: “I am robbed, sir, and beaten; my money and apparel ta’en from me, and these detestable things put upon me” (4.3.57-58). His success in convincing the clown that he is not what he seems relies on his ability to get the clown to ignore his clothes and believe that these are not the true signifiers of his identity.

Towards the end of the act, in another meeting with the rustics, Autolycus does exactly the opposite. There, he highlights his courtier identity by pointing to the evidence of his clothes, linked with other, less tangible evidence:
Seest thou not the air of the court in these enfoldings? Hath not my gait in it the measure of the court? Receivest not thy nose court odour from me? Reflect I not on thy baseness court-contempt? Thinkest thou, for that I insinuate to toze from thee thy business, I am therefore no courtier? I am courtier cap-à-pie, and one that will either push on or pluck back thy business there. (4.4.709-15)

In what looks in retrospect like a parody of the statue scene, Autolycus identifies himself and his own attributes as essentially courtly, beginning with the material evidence (the enfoldings), moving on to manner (his gait, his contempt), and his body (court odour, from head to toe). The trickster, in other words, can manipulate the conclusions that his victims draw on the basis of his appearance. He can point to his clothes and body as markers of his true social standing, but he can also get his victims to deny the significance of his clothes and believe that there is a discrepancy between self and outward appearance.

Simon Forman may not have been credited with great insight as a critic of the Jacobean theater, but his recorded impressions of The Winter’s Tale bring out the importance of rhetorical performance to the play:

Remember also the Rog that cam in all tottered like coll pixci / and howe he feyned him sicke & to have bin Robbed of all that he had and howe he costoned the por man of all his money. and after cam to the shep sher with a pedlers packe & ther costoned them Again of all ther money And howe he changed apparrell
with the king of bomia his sonn. and then howe he turned Courtiar &c / beware of trustinge feined beggars or fawninge fellouse.\textsuperscript{67}

Whereas Forman’s suspicion of beggars has been the subject of much critical attention, it has not been noted that his mistrust is directed equally at “fawninge fellouse” who reside, presumably, at court. It was commonplace in the period to identify flattery with courtiers. Tracts such as \textit{A Discourse Against Flattery} (1611) describe “fawning hypocrisy” as “base merchandise of words” and warn sternly against flattery at court, which endangers the commonwealth.\textsuperscript{68} Autolycus’s status as a peddler as well as an ex-courtier link the presentation of words as money in the courtesy literature and the opening scene of \textit{The Winter’s Tale} with the peddler-trickster’s ability to sell his wares and his words to unsuspecting victims.\textsuperscript{69}

Given the materiality and therefore the unreliability of clothes as signifiers of rank, an effective rhetorical performer like Autolycus is impossible to place socially. The trickster, beggar, peddler, and ex-courtier makes the most of the effective speech needed to function well in each of these professions. Even after he has been banished from the court, Autolycus continues to profit from it when the unsuspecting Florizel and Camillo provide him with the means to turn courtier again. Forman’s caution against “feined beggars” and “fawninge fellouse” highlights this thematic parallel between the trickster and the courtier. As noted in chapter one, Craig Dionne argues that performativity ties the courtly gentleman (and other new-made men) to the trickster in the underworld literature. The trickster’s ability to draw on different discourses serves as a reminder of the social mobility of others: “the true crime of the vagabond was to
remind everyone of the ephemeral nature of the social order, his presence an unpleasant symbol to those newly ‘stalled’ men in the legitimate corridors of power that their own identity was also a sham.”

In the final scenes of the play, the trickster’s social elusiveness is eliminated with the reformation of the court. The rustics become upwardly mobile, but they are harmless. The clown comically insists on his newly made upper-class birth to avenge himself on Autolycus: “You are well met, sir. You denied to fight with me this other day because I was no gentleman born. See you these clothes? Say you see them not, and think me still no gentleman born. You were best say these robes are not gentlemen born. Give me the lie, do, and try whether I am not now a gentleman born” (5.2.115-20). Reversing their earlier relationship, it is now the clown’s turn to identify himself and to interpret his apparel as a sign of his “birth.” The comic idea that his robes are themselves “gentlemen born” (119) and that he is a “gentleman born before [his] father” (124-25) stresses the impossibility of counterfeiting nobility. The rustics’ rebirth as gentlemen has become possible because the court has been reestablished as a place where power structures are divinely inspired, and real social mobility is no longer a threat. Autolycus responds to the clown’s triumphant remarks with a humble confirmation of the clown’s new status: “I know you are now, sir, a gentleman born” (121). He joins their ranks and becomes, like them, a harmless comic figure. His muted responses in this last encounter with the rustics indicate that, as in the case of Hermione, a performative voice has been transformed.

In The Palace of Pleasure (1575), William Painter includes a translation of “King Cyrus and the Ladie Panhea,” a romantic story by Bandello of a noble lady who
has the opportunity of marrying the King of Persia, and yet remains faithful to her noble husband. Before the King is introduced to her, his gentleman servant tells him how he met Panthea:

when we came into her pavilion, none of us could tell which was she, for she set upon the ground, with all her women about her, and her apparell was like unto her maides. But we desirous to know which was the maistres, beheld them all, and by and by shee seemed to excell them all, although she satte with her face covered, looking downe upon the grounde: and when we bad her to rise up, all the rest rose up also. She did farre surmounte her maides, as well in making and lineaments of body, as in good behaviour and comelinesse, although she was clad in simple apparell.\textsuperscript{72}

It is a moment of perfect identification. The noble woman distinguishes herself from other women in spite of her simple clothing and veiled face by means of her noble body, behavior, and manner. Identification is a measure of her class status. The moment seems to have been deliberately staged, but nothing in the gentleman’s account suggests an awareness of its theatricality. Instead, Panthea impresses him with her lack of deliberate performance and her simple attire that does not hide her inherent nobility. Nothing about Panthea suggests to him deliberation or a desire to impress. Although the recognition scene in \textit{The Winter’s Tale} is of a different nature, it seeks to establish Hermione’s inherent royalty through a similar dramatic process. The scene is in both plays marked by heightened emotion, though in \textit{The Winter’s Tale} it heralds the
prevention of tragedy while in Painter it is the start of one.\textsuperscript{73} As is the case with Panthea, Hermione is “unveiled” so that the audience can come to a new appreciation of her true identity. Hermione does not speak or move until called upon; similarly, Panthea’s identification begins with a prolonged silence, and she does not move until asked to rise by her audience. Both women, then, are presented as spectacle without showing a conscious awareness of themselves as acting a part. This type of spectacle, we feel, is of a special caliber, a theater of “wonder” instigated by divine providence, rather than human motives. As such, these moments counter the dangerous representations of misidentification in the cony-catcher pamphlets that inspired the character of Autolycus, drawing on the mystical to find a firm basis for the social order, marital relationships, and family bonds.

Ultimately, \textit{The Winter’s Tale} mobilizes different registers for the transformation of courtliness into a consequence of essence, associated with visual display and unequivocal language, rather than ambiguous performance. In both \textit{The Comedy of Errors} and \textit{The Winter’s Tale}, then, the fluidity of the social order is staged, explored, and linked with the ways in which our identities and positions may be a product of performance. But in the end, these plays step back from such a perspective and move into a generically different world to restore harmony. Without claiming that the possibility of misidentification and performative identity is ultimately contained or done away with, I am suggesting, in the words of Patricia Parker, “the dramatization of the very problem of containment” in these plays. In offering us such radically distinct ways of conceiving the social order, they provide an ambiguous perspective on solving the problem of misidentification and restoring harmony through scenes of recognition.\textsuperscript{74}
Notes


2 While this chapter is informed by feminist work on The Winter's Tale, it moves beyond these readings to consider the play specifically in light of female courtliness. Work by Carol Thomas Neely, Abbe Blum, and Lynn Enterline has been useful to my thinking about the female presence in the play. However, both Neely and Enterline see the ending of the play in their own ways as overcoming the limitations imposed on the female voice earlier on. Abbe Blum and others like Peter Erickson and David Schalkwijk have made the case for the play's final "containment" of female power, an argument that minimizes the ambiguity of the ending, which has allowed for such diametrically opposed views of its politics. Cf. David Schalkwijk, ""A Lady's 'Verily' Is as Potent as a Lord's': Women, Word and Witchcraft in The Winter's Tale," English Literary Renaissance 22, no. 2 (1992): 242-72, Peter Erickson, Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), Carol Thomas Neely, "The Winter's Tale: The Triumph of Speech," Studies in English Literature 15 (1975): 321-38, Abbe Blum, ""Strike all that look upon with mar[b]le': Monumentalizing Women in Shakespeare's Plays," in The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon, eds. Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty Travitsky (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 99-115, and Lynn Enterline, "'You speak a language that I understand not': The Rhetoric of Animation in The Winter's Tale," Shakespeare Quarterly 48 (1977): 17-44.

3 Some of these essays prove that Carol Thomas Neely's critique of new historicism is

4 See chapter 2 of Salingar's *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974).

5 *Il Cortegiano* was translated by Thomas Hoby in 1561, *La Civil Conversatione* in 1581, and *Il Galateo* by Robert Peterson in 1576. Whigham argues that all were considered part of a unified corpus alongside Elizabethan courtesy literature in *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984), 26-27 and fn 99, 198-99. It should be noted that Guazzò does not limit himself to the representation of ideal courtly behavior. As John Leon Lievsay writes, *The Civil Conversation* describes and prescribes civil conversation "for all levels of society in a world in the process of becoming ... Guazzò envisages civic man in his total relationships." *Stefano Guazzò and the English Renaissance, 1575-1675* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1961), 44. For specific discussions of the influence of *The Civil Conversation and The Courtier*, see Lievsay and Peter Burke's *The Fortunes of the Courtier: The European Reception of Castiglione's Cortegiano* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1995).
Court performances of *The Winter's Tale* were held by the King's Men on November 5, 1611 and during the Christmas celebrations in 1612 (E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945] IV, 125 and 127). David Bergeron speculates on the significance of these performances in light of recent events in the royal family, such as the death of Prince Henry, in *Shakespeare's Romances and the Royal Family*.


James is famous for defending the Divine Right of Kings, though he does qualify his assertions in a speech to Parliament with the observation that kings may degenerate into tyrants, in which case their power is no longer to be treated as of divine origin: "a king governing in a settled kingdom leaves to be a king, and degenerates into a tyrant, as soon as he leaves off to rule according to his laws." Cf. King James I, extract from "A Speech to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament at Whitehall," March 21, 1610, reprinted in Russ McDonald, *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents* (Boston: Bedford, 1996), 322-25, 323.

Whigham, 32-33.

Translated into English by I. Kepers, 1598, quoted in Whigham, 44.


Cavell, 201. Cavell writes, "In *The Winter's Tale*—beyond the terms tell and count
themselves, and beyond account and loss and gain and pay and owe and debt and repay—we have money, coin, treasure, purchase, cheat, custom, commodity, exchange, dole, wages, recompense, labor, affairs, traffic, tradesmen, borrow, save, credit, redeem and—perhaps the most frequently repeated economic term in the play—business”.

Although “tell” and “told” occur more frequently, the term “business” is indeed used no less than 23 times in the play. However, it has quite a range of meanings beyond the commercial among which is sexual intercourse as well as “a particular matter demanding attention” (OED iii.15). The latter is the sense in which the word is most frequently used in the play. Nevertheless, all the words mentioned by Cavell (except for repay) occur in the text to create an overall impression of the importance of commercial or financial terms. Cf. Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 200-01. See for Shakespeare’s use of the term “business” for sexual intercourse, Frankie Rubinstein, A Dictionary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Puns and Their Significance (London: Macmillan, 1984), 40.

14 It is significant in this context that the word “pay” itself stems from the Latin for pacify and peace (OED). To pay what is owed is equal to keeping the linguistic and actual peace while inequality of exchange may lead to strife.

15 Cavell, 201.

16 Guazzo, 117. I quote throughout from a published, old-spelling version of the Elizabethan translation by George Pettie. His translation of the first three books came out in 1581; the fourth book, translated by Bartholomew Young, appeared with the others in 1586. The Civile Conversation of M. Steeven Guazzo, introd. Sir Edward Sullivan (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1925). Jean-Christophe Agnew cites part of this passage to support his claim that Guazzo chose the marketplace as the “ideal locale” of his civil conversation. This is not borne out by the text, which reviews a wide spectrum of settings. Moreover, the words quoted by Agnew to support his point come not from Magnocavalli, the advocate of civil conversation, but from the more pessimistic William Guazzo, whose description of the comings and goings of the marketplace, legal

17 Guazzo, 123.

18 Guazzo, 123.

19 *Patriarchal Structures*, 150. Erickson elaborates his views on the significance of entertainment in the play on pp. 148-72. Also, for an earlier version of his argument, “Patriarchal Structures in *The Winter’s Tale*,” *PMLA* 97 (1982): 819-29. Another critic who has related the emphasis on the potential difference between the two kings to the logic of the gift, as described by Marcel Mauss, is Michael Bristol. See “In Search of the Bear: Spatiotemporal Form and the Heterogeneity of Economies in *The Winter’s Tale*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 145-67, esp. 154-56.


21 Guazzo, 123.


23 Holderness, 203.

24 Many critics simply shift the significance of the speech from Polixenes to Leontes. In
Impersonations, for instance, Stephen Orgel writes, "The childhood world to which Leontes imagines himself returning has been described by his royal guest and inseparable childhood friend Polixenes as both Edenic and presexual" (15). In M.M. Mahood’s book on Shakespearean puns, the attribution of the passage is completely muddled: "Leontes is able to recall a primeval innocence when he was 'boy eternal'" (51). This misquotation is simply a literal form of the general critical conflation of Polixenes’s speech with Leontes’s mindset. See Shakespeare’s Word Play (London: Methuen, 1957). Also, see the Norton Shakespeare, in which a footnote confuses Polixenes and Leontes, by claiming that at 1.2.101, "Hermione may be countering Leontes’ earlier suggestion that she first caused him to sin" (2887).

Cf. fn. 38. Maus explains in a footnote why this trait makes the unfaithful woman threatening: "Her refusal to acknowledge the supposedly self-evident distinctions between man and man endangers a social order that depends precisely upon those distinctions, and furthermore upon their 'naturalness,' 'obviousness' and 'justice.' So it should not be surprising that the woman’s confusion seems most dangerous when it is most comprehensible: that is, when the structure of social distinctions is already for some reason precarious." Katherine Eisaman Maus, "Horns of Dilemma: Jealousy, Gender, and Spectatorship in English Renaissance Drama," ELH 54, no. 3 (1987): 561-84, fn. 12, p. 581.


1.2.51-52. David Schalkwijk gives an elaborate discussion of the phrase in the context of poststructuralist theory.

28 Guazzo, 241.

30 Jones perceives a shift from the feminine ideal of courtesy theory, the witty court lady who was adept at self-display, to the obedient, silent housewife of the 17th-century bourgeois marriage manual. Joan Kelly has argued, however, in her influential essay "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" that Castiglione's work already represents a setback in its depiction of the feminine ideal in comparison with the relative freedom and independence of the feudal lady as the object of courtly love. Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), 19-50.

31 In Baldassare Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier, Julian de Medici points out that the lady of the palace ought to be "more circumspect and to take better heed that she give no occasion to be yll reported of, and so to behave her selfe, that she be not onlye not spotted wyth anye fault, but not so much as with suspicion. Because a woman hath not so many wayes to defende her selfe from sclaundrous reportes, as hath a man." Castiglione, 216. Unless otherwise noted, quotations are from a published version of the 1561 edition of Hoby's translation, The Book of the Courtier, introduction by Walter Raleigh (London: David Nutt, 1900).


Stephen Orgel has pointed out that Cowell’s dictionary, although it reflected James’s absolutism, was most likely repressed because it engaged in a process of demystification, explaining what was better left unexplained. See Orgel, The Winter’s Tale, 13.

Valerie Finucci concludes from De Medici’s many examples of female chastity and his refusal to discuss the ideal queen, “In the end, all instances reiterate the emblematic value of the duchess, who sums up, with her presence, each individual woman in everyday courtly life and thus perfectly reflects the discourse on womanhood advanced by the courtiers.” Finucci, 67.

Leontes has two short soliloquies (2.3.1-9; 18-26), interrupted by a dialogue with a servant, and a very brief conversation probably alone with Paulina (although the stage direction is not clear, 5.1.114-22). At all other times, he is surrounded by numerous inhabitants of the court.


Whigham, 91.


Castiglione, 277.

1.2.117. As the Norton edition notes, hands were often seen as erotic (2887).

1.2.326. See Orgel, The Winter’s Tale, 111. We can think of the similarity between
Camillo and Kent, in this respect, who also addresses Lear in this manner when he perceives the foolish king is about to destroy his family.

44 King James in McDonald, 322.

45 Holderness, 214.

46 Constance Jordan examines this vexed issue and its discussion in Jacobean political tracts specifically in relation to The Winter's Tale in Shakespeare's Monarchies.

47 Guazzo, 203.

48 This move by Pettie is of course highly pertinent in light of Elizabeth’s own problematic status as queen "by birth." Cf. Orgel on this matter in his introduction to the Oxford edition to the play (29-31) and Lievsay on Pettie’s translation and his minor and major intrusions into the original.


50 Alpers, 221. Cf. Kurland’s insightful remark, in a footnote, that the sheep-shearing festival “is a miniature of court, with its own well-defined hierarchy, prescribed roles, traditional symbols, and elaborate etiquette” (383).


52 The stereotypical opinion about cosmetics can be seen in Stephen Gosson’s Pleasant Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentlewomen (1595). Gosson depicts painted faces as
“devised by the devil” (7) and directly related to prostitution. His cautions against women who “pretend their gentle blood” and thus ruin their husbands are accompanied by the advice that “True Gentles should be lightes and guides, / in modest path to simple ranke” (12-13). The poem has been published as *Pleasant Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentlewomen*, ed. Edwin Johnson Howard (Oxford, OH: Anchor Press, 1942). Graham Holderness calls Perdita’s mistrust of role-playing and theatricality, which is, as we have seen, an integral part of courtly display, “common critical puritanism” (227).

53 Cf. Susan Baker, “Personating Persons: Rethinking Shakespearean Disguises,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (1992): 303-16, 312. Baker tries to make a similar argument for Polydore and Cadwal in *Cymbeline*. Arguing that the two have been reared as princes by Belarius, she cites Belarius’s description of Polydore’s response to his story-telling: “even then / The princely blood flows in his cheek, he sweats, / Strains his young nerves, and puts himself in posture / That acts my words” (3.3.93-95). Yet here too, it is the princely blood that causes a “natural,” noble performance in Polydore, not Belarius’s story-telling in itself. In *Cymbeline*, it is male courtliness that is “rescued” from the evil performances of Cloten by the inherently noble princes.


55 Castiglione, 59.


57 Hunt, *Romance*, 100.

58 Guazzo, 241.

59 Cf. *Pandosto*, in which Dorastus wonders of Fawnia, “how so courtly behavior could be found in so simple a cottage,” (254).

60 Blum, 99.

61 Hartman, 131. See his fascinating chapter “Words and Wounds” in *Saving the Text:*


63 5.4.62. Hero herself agrees to such substitution of herself with a copy: “Nothing certainer. / One Hero died defiled, but I do live, / And surely as I live, I am a maid” (5.4.62-64).

64 Neely, Broken, 203-04.


68 A Discourse Against Flatterie (London, 1611), A7v.

69 Much of the language associated with money, noted by Cavell, is used in Act 4. The realm of sheep-shearing and lower-class exchange may seem on the surface to be a more appropriate setting for the language of money, but, as the play shows, the court relies on the concept of money (and words as exchange) as well. The two settings, then, are not as distinct as they might seem.


71 Ronald W. Cooley, who stresses Autolycus’s vagrancy, sees the play as incapable of
containing the rogue. His is one of the few arguments that explores the play’s treatment of class issues. “Speech versus Spectacle: Autolycus, Class and Containment in The Winter’s Tale,” Renaissance and Reformation 21, no. 3 (1997): 5-23.


73 Panthea’s husband dies in the service of the king, bringing about Panthea’s own death of grief.

74 In Henry VIII, Shakespeare would turn yet again to the subject of courtly performance and social mobility, combined with a concentration on the significance of the female presence at court to the political authority of the monarch. Voicing the feelings of many, Herschel Baker writes in his introduction to the play in The Riverside Shakespeare, “Henry VIII is very strong in pomp and pageantry ... Some of these elaborate display pieces—notably the coronation and the christening—are so frankly theatrical that they do not require the spoken word, but only sights and sounds; and others, even where the focus is dramatic, are so formal in their presentation that they have the weight and texture of tableaux.” It seems that this historical examination of the mechanics of social life at court begins where The Winter’s Tale left off. Herschel Baker, “Henry VIII,” introd. to The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth, The Riverside Shakespeare, 1022-25, 1025.
CODA

The Return of Martin Guerre

This dissertation has been primarily concerned with Shakespeare's dramatic uses of identification. The importance of identification in the cultural imagination of the period and in our own accounts of the early modern subject is not only evident in dramatic texts, cony-catching pamphlets, and conduct material, but also in one of the best-known trials of the sixteenth century. The trial of Arnaud du Tilh, which ended on September 12, 1560 in Toulouse, was frequently recounted in the early modern period. The impostor, who successfully took the place of the peasant Martin Guerre until Guerre's unexpected return during the final stages of the trial to reclaim his name and position, was known throughout Europe. There were a host of published retellings of the story, ranging from the account written by Jean de Coras, one of the judges, to semi-fictional stories and narratives by witnesses to the judgment. One of these was Michel Montaigne, who uses the case as an illustration of the fallibility of human reasoning in his essay "Des boyteux."

The story of Martin Guerre dates from the 1560s and took place not in early modern London, but in a small town in France. In spite of this cultural and historical disparity, it is important to my argument about Shakespeare's use of misidentification, for two reasons. The first is that it has turned out to be somewhat of a test case for our analysis of early modern subjectivity. The original court records are lost, and so all we have is retellings and representations of the case. The way in which it is retold is at issue: the story poses questions about subjectivity that are central to Shakespearean
narratives of misidentification. Our explanations of how and why this impostor could be so successful for so long, reveal much about our conception of subjectivity, both in terms of the historical “emergence” of the subject and our view of subjectivity and misidentification in general. The second is that the issues at stake in this case are also explored in Shakespeare’s plays: the role of the wife, who may or may not have known that the impostor was not her husband, the task of the law in establishing identity, the question of the body and whether it anchors identity or not, and the significance of performance to Arnaud’s success. As such, an analysis of the different critical and historical approaches to this narrative can point towards the historical, cultural, and theoretical significance of Shakespeare’s use of misidentification.

This case of misidentification, retold in Natalie Zemon Davis’s *The Return of Martin Guerre*, became central to critical approaches to Renaissance studies with the publication of Stephen Greenblatt’s essay “Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture.” Greenblatt argues that Guerre’s story proves the extent to which the early modern subject is pre-modern, materially constituted, and defined through the traces of the body rather than through a modern conception of inwardness, individuality, and sexual and familial history. The case shows, Greenblatt claims, that a psychoanalytic approach to identity would be “unthinkable” for the period. Psychoanalysis, he argues, is belated because it is itself the outcome of a historical development that postdates this story: “it is only when proprietary rights to the self have been secured—rights made most visible, we may add, in moments of self-estrangement or external threat—that the subject of psychoanalysis, both its method and the materials upon which it operates, is made possible.” 1 Psychoanalytic critics have pointed out the many problems with this
argument. As has been noted by Meredith Skura and Elizabeth Bellamy, Greenblatt fails to take the trial context into account and misrepresents psychoanalysis. He ignores the significance of the unconscious by claiming that even in its exposure of alienation and disruption, psychoanalysis ends up "secur[ing] authentic identity." His argument not only denies psychoanalysis, unnecessarily, the ability to historicize its own procedures, but it also leaves new historicism with a monopoly on the decentering of the subject that is usually seen as a central aspect of psychoanalysis.

More practically, Greenblatt's retelling of the story also simplifies the issues at stake in this particular sequence of events. If the legal context necessitates a focus on subjectivity as "the product of the relations, material objects, and judgments exposed in the case rather than the producer of these relations, objects, and judgments," such a focus is troubled in the judge's account of the trial and particularly in his admiration for Arnaud, whose behavior in itself opens room for agency. Davis points out that Jean de Coras's narrative, read for its gaps, contradictions, and the differences between the 1561 edition and later editions, suggests the judge's identification with the impostor—a possibility that is difficult to account for if one reads the narrative as Greenblatt does. Even if one disagrees with Davis's reading, one has to account for the judge's admiration for Arnaud. Arnaud's performance of the role of Martin Guerre so exceeds his expectations that in spite of Arnaud's lower class, De Coras compares him to a tragic hero and concludes that at the very least the case "makes it hard to tell the difference between tragedy and comedy." In contrast with what we may conclude on the basis of the final outcome, the judge's account of the trial does not so much uncover the extent to which subjectivity is the product of a collective process, as the extent to
which subjectivity is open to individual performance. Even generic distinctions based on class difference collapse in the face of Arnaud's acting. Once again, therefore, misidentification is closely linked with social mobility and with the notion that class is merely a question of effective performance.

Davis accounts for Arnaud's initial misrecognition by pointing to three different explanations:

First of all, he was wanted in Artigat—wanted with ambivalence perhaps, for returning persons always dash some hopes and disturb power relations, but wanted more than not. The heir and householder Martin Guerre was back in his place. Second, he came announced, predisposing people to perceive him as Martin Guerre. Then this perception was confirmed by his compelling words and his accurate memories. It was true that he did not look exactly the same as the Martin Guerre who had left. But then the Guerres had no painted portraits by which to recall his features, and it might be thought natural for a man to fill out as he grew older and for a peasant to be changed by years of soldiering. Thus whatever doubts people had, they silenced or even buried them for a while and allowed the new Martin to grow into his role.⁵

Each of these explanations skew the narrative in slightly different ways. The first and second point to the importance of the audience to the performance: the villagers were eager to see an empty place in their community filled and because they thought Martin was coming, they were inclined to recognize the newcomer as their own. As is the case
in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Much Ado about Nothing*, these two explanations point to the expectations and assumptions that create the conditions in which misidentification becomes likely. We might say that Antipholus of Ephesus has left his own social place empty by failing to be at home when Adriana welcomes his brother. In Ephesus, the assumption that no two identical bodies exist and the prejudice that allows for sustained misinterpretation of everyone’s words produce an environment in which misidentification does not even require the intelligence and trickery of an impostor. Likewise, Claudio and Don Pedro are predisposed to misidentify Margaret because her appearance at Hero’s window comes “announced,” while the performance is deliberately calculated to confirm their suspicions of women in general.

Davis’s third explanation highlights the performance itself, and in doing so presents misidentification as we have seen it in *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Jack Juggler*, and the cony-catching pamphlets. Helped by the willingness on the part of the inhabitants of Artigat to recognize him as Martin, Arnaud gradually learns to conform to the role he is expected to play. By viewing the normal procedures of recognition with detachment, we have to assume, Arnaud was able to give the villagers what they expected to see and hear, much like a cony-catcher plays on the cony’s assumptions and habits. Nonetheless, this does not explain in full Arnaud’s ability to become Martin so fully. His performance was so convincing that even when questioned and tried he was capable of maintaining his cover.

The general inability to identify Arnaud as an impostor points to the power of performance and rhetoric over physicality and materiality. As is true for *Jack Juggler*, Arnaud’s imposture is successful not only because of his physical resemblance to
Martin, but also because he appropriates Martin's memory and, on that basis, makes the village perceive his body as Martin's. Yet, his remarkable access to Martin's memories were incomprehensible to Jean de Coras. The judge acknowledges, Davis writes, that "he could not rid himself of this opinion [that he was a magician] even though du Tilh denied any diabolic art." As is typical for the cony-catching narratives, the retellings of the Guerre story combine admiration for the impostor's performance with anxiety over the gullibility of his audience and the social environment that makes such effective performance possible.

Davis's explanations forego the possibility that there may have been two very similar bodies. Throughout, in spite of the emphasis on physical resemblance in her sources, she is careful to stress the difference in appearance of the two men as well as in their personal backgrounds and histories. In doing so, she gives each of them the individuality that is treated as the product of a belated concept of subjectivity in Greenblatt's essay. Thus, Davis prepares the reader for the ultimate resumption of proper names and places, an event that takes place as the result of what seems to have been a real-life recognition scene in which both men are confronted with each other. Martin's missing leg is the inexorable evidence of the physical difference between the false and the true Martin. Unlike in *The Comedy of Errors*, then, in Davis's account, the ultimate confrontation of the "twins" does not make the audience marvel at their resemblance but confirms their difference. That Arnaud was even after the appearance of Martin eager to continue posing as Martin and that he performed better in response to questioning about Martin's past than Martin himself is further testimony to his intelligence, but no longer disconcerting because the body has come to supersede
performance.

By highlighting their physical dissimilarity, Davis not only prepares for an effective recognition in which the true Martin Guerre can forever resume his name, but she also constructs her narrative of imposture as determined by individual agency rather than an accident of nature. Moreover, she emphasizes the historical nature of the limitations imposed on the judges in the process of identification:

how, in a time without photographs, with few portraits, without tape recorders, without fingerprinting, without identity cards, without birth certificates, with parish records still irregular if kept at all—how did one establish a person’s identity beyond doubt? You could test the man’s memory, though there was always the possibility that he had been coached. You could ask witnesses to identify him, and hope that they were accurate and truthful. You could consider special marks on his face and body, but their significance could only be established by witnesses who recollected the earlier person. You could look to see whether he resembled other members of the family. You could check his handwriting, but only if he and the earlier person could both write and you had samples of the latter’s work.7

Greenblatt argues on the basis of Davis’s book that the story presents the body as “a collection of attributes—lines, curves, volumes (that is, scars, features, clothing, shoe size, and so on)—that could be held up against anyone who claimed the name and property of Martin Guerre.”8 The very fragments of the body, however, that might give
a firmer grounding to the process of identification in the trial are, Davis claims, largely absent or inconclusive. Greenblatt aims to prove the materiality of early modern subjectivity. But the only piece of forensic evidence relevant to the case was shoe size; the village shoemaker claimed that the new “Martin” had smaller feet than the old one. Arnaud easily dismissed this claim. He simply asserted the shoemaker was in league with his uncle, who had initiated the trial. Clothing is not mentioned in Davis’s book. Scars and features turned out to be open to competing interpretations: “Some witnesses maintained that Martin … had a flatter nose and more projecting lower lip and a scar on his eyebrow that was nowhere to be seen on this impostor … Other witnesses insisted that Martin Guerre had extra teeth in his jaw, a scar on his forehead, three warts on his right hand; and each of these was discovered on the prisoner.” The focus on the bodily fragments, therefore, did not yield the results we would expect had we only read Greenblatt’s version of the case. What may be more relevant is Greenblatt’s added remark on the need for a “claim” to name and property. The question is not whether anyone could make the claim to the name and property of Martin Guerre, but how such a claim could gain authority, how material signifiers of identity can be alienated from their owner, and how performance can make such alienation possible.

With the exception of Greenblatt’s account, retellings of the story, which is all we have, usually treat Bertrande as central to the case. The debate over the uses of historical sources between Robert Finlay and Natalie Zemon Davis concentrates almost entirely on the question of the wife. Although Finlay protests the many ways in which Davis has allowed her “invention” to override a “scrupulous regard for the sources,” the “truth” about the degree of awareness of imposture on the part of the duped wife forms
for both the crux of the story. In other words, female sexuality and promiscuity is at issue in the assessment of early modern identity and the extent to which self-fashioning is deemed a possibility in the case of peasants. For Davis, Bertrande had to know what was going on; for Finlay it is evident that she remained unaware of the imposture, the position maintained by Jean de Coras as well.

The debate between Finlay and Davis shows that their conclusions about sixteenth-century subjectivity parallel their assessment of the nature of the peasant marriage. Finlay sees marriage as restricted by moral and religious sanctions of the Catholic Church and Bertrande as a “rustic” woman who was fooled. Davis projects onto the life of Bertrande the historical development from arranged, economically motivated marriage (with the real Martin) to the affective, “invented” marriage of reformed Protestants (with the fake Martin). In a wider sense, Davis argues for the pervasiveness of subtle forms of self-fashioning among ordinary people, even though self-fashioning is characteristic of upper class individuals in Greenblatt’s work. Finlay, who remarks disparagingly on the notion of the “refashioned rustic,” argues that Davis’s use of the term self-fashioning is merely “a way of elevating an interpretation of complicity between Bertrande and pseudo-Martin from the sordid reality of fraud and adultery to that elusive realm where life approximate literature.”12 Whereas Finlay wants to make this discussion an issue of “invention” versus “reconstruction,” his own assessment of the “rustic” woman, “duped and seduced by an impostor” is of course at least partly based on conjecture.13 The nature of the source texts, as Carlo Ginzburg has convincingly argued, necessitates some degree of “invention.”14 Whereas Davis reads the material as evidence of a change in sensibility among peasants that accompanied
conversion to Protestantism, Finlay limits the possibility of such religious reformation and the concomitant view of invented marriage to the elite.

Our interpretation of Bertrande is not only central for what it may reveal about marriage among peasants. If she was fooled, we must see Arnaud as successful in every respect, usurping Martin’s place in the social life of the village as well as in the marital bed; if we believe she was complicit, we must treat his success as in part a product of her coaching. Assuming her ignorance, the story becomes one of frightening mobility in all spheres of life. In this scenario, the wife’s blindness to her husband’s uniqueness and her inability to distinguish between men, so important in Renaissance drama, enables the imposture. If she helped Arnaud become Martin, what we have is either a devious conspiracy or a romantic attempt at creating a marriage of affection in a world of arranged marriages. If she did not know, then subjectivity must be seen as open to appropriation in every respect, from the public theft of name and property to the private appropriation of the marital bed. If she did know, we may admire the success of the couple’s trickery but continue to assume a uniquely individual position in the most private sphere of early modern life. In the former case, interiority itself is under siege; in the latter, the imposture is a successful performance of public and outward identity. By deciding on whether Bertrande knew or not, we necessarily draw conclusions about the nature of marriage, subjectivity, and the separation of the spheres.\textsuperscript{15}

Neither Finlay, Davis, nor anyone else I have read entertains the perhaps more complex third possibility that Bertrande’s knowledge of the imposture was irrelevant. She may or may not have known, but due to social constraints may not have been in a position to uncover the imposture until she was forced to accuse Arnaud by her uncle.
In other words, the cultural and social limitations imposed on Bertrande may not have allowed her to express her knowledge either way. This would explain her willingness to condone the lawsuit and have Arnaud be charged in her name as well as her immediate resumption of her place alongside the real Martin. It would also clarify her display of wifely affection and obedience towards Arnaud and her unwillingness to claim he was not her husband when confronted with him during the trial.

What renders her personality open to competing interpretations is that the Bertrande who emerges from the records shifts uneasily between obedience and compliance to different, competing male figures in her life. It is impossible for us to gauge her properly, to know for certain whether or not she knew, since her position as a woman made it impossible for her to show anything but ignorance. Reading the letters from Coras to his second wife, Jacquette de Bussi, Davis interprets her responses, "Your humble and obedient wife" and "Your will be done", not as conventional signs of female obedience but as "love games" in which she poses as the "pursued." The problem with such a reading is that the text written by the judge's wife is as inscrutable as the behavior of Bertrande. Our knowledge of the fact that Jacquette "runs their properties with great competence" in her husband's absence and his open declarations of love to her in his letters suggest that there may be playful posing in her letters, but the conventionality of her responses leaves us guessing.16

This crux in the interpretation of Bertrande and Jacquette points to what I have been uncovering in Shakespeare's drama, the parallel between the problem of misidentification and the problem of the wife's promiscuity. The idea that identity and social position are inalienable because they are tied to a unique body and name, is
subverted in narratives of misidentification. Instead, identity and position turn out to rely on repeated daily acts of acknowledgement, which, because they are performed, may be equally directed towards another person who successfully claims that place and name. Similarly, if marriage is not based on inward consent but on socially imposed performance of obedience, then a wife may simply transfer her obedience elsewhere. The question is what makes deciphering the other possible and what guarantees that identification uncovers a truth instead of merely constructing another representation. Both The Comedy of Errors and The Winter’s Tale juxtapose misidentification with suspicion of adultery to entertain the possibility that marital relationships and social position are not grounded by essence but maintained by repeated performance. Even if servants, wives, members of lower classes, and subjects confirm and guarantee the position of their masters, husbands, social superiors, or monarch, the mere fact that they are required to do so makes it impossible ever to assess their inner compliance. The letters from De Coras show this insecurity, precisely because of his wife’s perfectly conventional obedience. Her “Your will be done” provides him no comfort, as he persistently wonders whether he is “not so engraved in the bowels of your memory as I have always wished.” The result is a confession of the extent to which his sense of self depends on her: “I desire you and love you so much that without you I don’t exist.”

The case of Martin Guerre, Shakespeare’s plays, and other narratives of misidentification consider the possibility that control of the other is never possible. In Shakespeare’s drama, this realization leaves those in power incapable of maintaining their sense of self and their place in society. Antipholus of Ephesus is treated as mad and bound in a dark room; Leontes can no longer control his court and faces the
accusations of Paulina; Leonato contemplates murdering his daughter; Lear loses his sanity; Othello murders his wife. The scenes of recognition that conclude the plays and the story of Martin Guerre reconstruct the social order by putting forward compelling fictions of essence, natural behavior, and true performance. The body is no longer an unreliable, unstable source of evidence about the other or the self, but is placed center stage, where it is subject to collective deciphering. In their focus on the perfect truth of the outward signs of selfhood, such scenes discard the uncomfortable realization of the possible distinction between inner self and outward performance. Instead, they rely on the conventionality that marks the behavior of Bertrande and Jacquette in the sixteenth-century sources, making interiority seem perfectly congruous with outward presence.

Michel de Montaigne’s dismay at the conviction of the impostor in the trial of Arnaud proves for Greenblatt, “The crucial historical point ... that for Montaigne, as for the judge at the trial, Jean de Coras, what is at stake in this case is not psychic experience at all but rather a communal judgment that must, in extraordinary cases, be clarified and secured by legal authority.” But Montaigne’s account does not put forward legal authority as the central issue. He describes the case as “so wondrous strange and so far-exceeding both our knowledge and his owne, who was judge, that I found much boldnes in the sentence which had condemned him.” For Montaigne, the case illustrates a general lack of understanding. He contemplates language and questions the extent to which humans are able to understand the truth through reasoning. Emphasizing the inscrutability of the real, Montaigne poses a crucial question about knowledge and the truth value of language: “Our discourse is capable to frame an hundred other Worlds, and finde the beginnings and contexture of them. It
needeth neither matter nor ground. Let it but runne on: It will as well build upon emptinesse, as upon fulnesse, and with inanity as with matter.\textsuperscript{20} In severing the connection between discourse and reality, Montaigne's conclusions with regard to the case of Martin Guerre are inevitable. Identification describes and classifies a body by means of language. If language works by its own logic without being bound by the real, then identification too performs on a level of its own without a stable connection to the body. Montaigne's call for "some forme of sentence that may say: The Court understands nothing of it" is a philosophical one.\textsuperscript{21} In contemplating the multiple ways in which identification impinges on the social order, Shakespeare too forces his audience to consider identity and identification as questions rather than certainties. At the same time, whether through dramatic or emotional necessity, his plays end up asserting some indisputable knowledge or anagnorisis in the end. In staging both identification and misidentification, then, Shakespeare's plays negotiate the historical and cultural shifts of the period in dramatic form, providing us with a highly ambiguous representation of identification.

Notes


3 Greenblatt, 216. See Skura.


5 Davis, 43. Similarly, Bertrande was reported to have first recognized Arnaud as Martin when he mentioned something only her husband could know about, “the white hosen in the trunk” that she had made for him.

6 Davis, 109. For Davis, this is merely the case because De Coras so desperately wanted to maintain Bertrande’s innocence. In her view, Bertrande’s complicity explains much of what would otherwise seem impossible in Arnaud’s performance.

7 Davis, 63. She cites a case in which even with fingerprints there was uncertainty in the early twentieth century, but that such a case is not rare can be shown if we consider both present-day acquittals in the face of forensic evidence and cases where records and forensic evidence are, for whatever reason, not available (in the trial of Ivan Demjanjuk for instance).

8 Greenblatt, 216.

9 Davis, 55 and 70.

10 Davis, 67-68.


12 Finlay, 565.

13 Finlay, 565.


15 Ironically, in spite of Finlay’s clear distaste for historians who use work such as Greenblatt’s and fail to bow before the “sovereignty of the sources, the tribunal of the
documents," his conclusions are closer to Greenblatt than one might expect in terms of their assumptions about the historically different subjectivity of early modern peasants. Finlay, 571.

16 Davis, 99.

17 Davis, 98-99.

18 Greenblatt, 215. In his introduction to *The Comedy of Errors* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, Greenblatt makes a more apt use of Montaigne's response to the case, arguing that his reflections "have no direct bearing on *The Comedy of Errors*, but they alert us to the play's wholesale unsettling of the familiar" (683).


20 Montaigne, 929.

21 Montaigne, 933.
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