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"This sympathizèd one day's error": Genre, Representation, and Subjectivity in *The Comedy of Errors*

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The combination of romance and farce in *The Comedy of Errors* has had a profound impact on the play's critical history. Early on, it meant that the play was dismissed as immature by critics who valued unity and coherence. Later critics have explained the play in terms of one of the genres, rather than both, which has led to opposed readings of the play's representation of subjectivity and especially of the relative importance of the play's frame.[1] Some recent discussions, however, are more explicitly concerned with the play's intermingling of genres.[2] Patricia Parker, for instance, argues that "we need to read [the play's] fragmentation and disjunction more concretely and historically in relation to its contemporary contexts."[3]

[1] For examples of readers who treat the play as immature, see Paul A. Jorgensen, introduction to *The Comedy of Errors*, in *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), 55–58; Francis Fergusson, "*The Comedy of Errors* and *Much Ado About Nothing*," *Sewanee Review* 62 (1954): 24–37; and Larry S. Champion, *The Evolution of Shakespeare's Comedy: A Study in Dramatic Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1970), 13–25. Critics who have read the play mainly in terms of its romance frame tend to emphasize the play's religious themes. The most important example of this type of reading is Arthur F. Kinney's "Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and the Nature of Kinds," in "*The Comedy of Errors*": *Critical Essays*, ed. Robert S. Miola (New York: Garland, 1997), 155–81, although there are many others. For readings that concentrate on the farcical middle, see Douglas Lanier, "'Stigmatical in Making': The Material Character of *The Comedy of Errors*," in Miola, ed., 299–334; Jonathan Hall, *Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1995), 39–52; and Curtis Perry, "Commerce, Community, and Nostalgia in *The Comedy of Errors*," in *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism*, ed. Linda Woodbridge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 39–51.

[2] Barbara Freedman argues that the play's fragmentation undermines a master narrative. I concur with Patricia Parker's critique of Freedman's lack of historicizing, but I also feel that Freedman's premise represents a valuable new direction when it comes to our reading of the relationship between the two genres in the play. See Barbara Freedman, "Reading Errantly: Misrecognition and the Uncanny in *The Comedy of Errors*," in Miola, ed., 261–97. For Parker's critique, see *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996), 56–82, esp. 80.

[3] Parker, 80.

This essay explores how the play's use of two seemingly incompatible genres works and why it matters. I argue that *The Comedy of Errors* is *about* genre as a system of representation, offering a distinct lens on the world. In this play of identity's loss and recovery, Shakespeare shows that literary choices bring with them specific theoretical assumptions about subjectivity. The two genres, at least in Shakespeare's versions of them, represent contrasting perspectives: farce shows subjectivity to be the random and unstable product of material exchange, while romance locates a spiritual and physical essence at the core of identity, a core that is testable but ultimately inalienable. In farce, the material aspects of the self *produce* identity; in romance, they *reflect* identity. For most of the play, these contrasting generic perspectives vie for position, much as the twins do, showing not only their points of conflict but also their surprising kinship. Both genres are made from the same elements; this allows the two to merge at certain moments, giving the play the strange, disjunctive character described by Parker. *The Comedy of Errors* concludes with a version of romance that appears to overcome farce as it tries to accommodate the challenge of its secular materialism. Nonetheless, the vast generic shift that is needed to arrive at this ending suggests that these opposed systems of representation can only fuse by means of the suppression of one genre by another, just as two bodies cannot occupy the same space and retain their integrity.

Rosalie L. Colie has examined the genre system of the early modern period to consider the social implications of generic choices. The genres bring with them what she calls "'frames' or 'fixes' on the world," a set of "manageable boundaries" that become a kind of shorthand for a particular worldview. The "kinds," in other words, can be seen as "tiny subcultures with their own habits, habitats, and structures of ideas as well as their own forms." They may "melt into" each other or absorb one another.[4] Whether we adopt the metaphor of the family or of neighboring subcultures in order to clarify the relationship between genres in the period, it is clear that generic mixing presumes both affinity and opposition between two paradigms, which are given shape in surface elements of structure, form, and motif and in deeper elements of ethos, subjectivity, and vision.[5]

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[4] Rosalie L. Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973), 8, 115–16.

[5] Barbara A. Mowat argues, citing Alastair Fowler, for the usefulness of employing the metaphor of the family to explain relationships between genres. See "'What's in a Name?' Tragicomedy, Romance, or Late Comedy," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, vol. 4, *The Poems, Problem Comedies, Late Plays*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 129–49, esp. 134–35; and Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982). See also Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 8–9.

As Fredric Jameson argues, critical examinations of genre must combine a syntactic and semantic approach. This means that we need to explore the motifs associated with genres and the structural laws to which they adhere—laws that are, Jameson points out, both produced by a longer literary history and formulated by the individual text itself.[6] These structural elements can help us to detect the genre's significance as mode, a meaningful vision of those structural elements in historical and cultural terms. In *The Comedy of Errors*, we learn to look very carefully at syntactical elements not just as major dramatic choices like plot, motif, and structure, but also as more subtle traces and hints of genre: in this play, a single word, turn of phrase, or gesture can transport us from one generic world into another. For this reason, Shakespeare's play calls not only for the double approach advocated by Jameson, but also for a close reading of the ways in which literary form is given dramatic expression.

The Comedy of Errors foregrounds its own generic status by emphasizing the genres in separate sections of the play. As critics have long noted, the play's frame is influenced by and alludes to John Gower's retelling of the story of Apollonius of Tyre in his *Confessio Amantis*, while the middle takes its cue from Plautus's *Menaechmi* and, to a lesser extent, his *Amphitruo*. But the play is not content with straightforward generic divisions. It also places ingredients of and allusions to one genre within the space reserved for the other, giving each genre a forceful rival presence. Barbara Mowat reminds us that the term "romance" has a complex history and needs to be used with care. She does not place Shakespearean romance simply in the tradition of Italian tragicomedy but instead finds a more potent influence in English miracle plays, such as the *Digby Magdalen* and *Placy Dacy, alias Saint Eustacy*, which in turn are influenced by romance versions of the Eustace legend. There, we find the passive hero characteristic of the late plays, along with "motifs of the hero's suffering as a test or trial, the separation of the hero from his wife and children, the tracing of separate family members' adventures, and the overwhelmingly emotional reunion that concludes the drama."[7] These precursors share their motifs and overall structure, as Mowat notes in her discussion of *Pericles*, with Gower's version of *Apollonius of Tyre*, another Christianized romance narrative. To align the play's frame with romance, in other words, situates it in a complex tradition, as Shakespeare's allusions, echoes, and influences cannot adequately be understood by pointing only to Gower. If we agree with Colie in seeing genres as subcultures, then romance is constituted of many sub-subcultures, making up a radically diverse, open territory with a long, intricate history. Rather than tracing the multiple

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[6] Fredric Jameson discusses romance in more ideological terms as nostalgic in "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *New Literary History* 7 (1975): 135–63.

[7] Mowat, 137.

traditions that lie behind Shakespeare's use of romance in the frame, I am concerned here with the significance of the various generic markers of "romance" in *The Comedy of Errors*, in order to clarify what I see as the point of its curious, complicated coexistence with farce.

Syntactically, *The Comedy of Errors* shows a trajectory common in Christian versions of romance: characters lose themselves in wandering but eventually return to their proper place within a divinely ordained order.[8] Leo Salingar discusses some of the connections between Egeon and Apollonius, showing that playgoers would have recognized the telltale signs of romance in the play's opening scene. Moreover, listening to Egeon's extended story of family separation, "a moderately literate or experienced playgoer" would have pinpointed Shakespeare's romance more precisely. He or she could have heard, says Salingar, echoes of the Apollonius story as told in Gower, who changed his sources mostly by Christianizing the ancient narrative, much as other English romances cited by Mowat turn from Fortune to Providence as the guiding principle behind a seemingly random plot. Salingar distinguishes this form of romance from ancient Greek romance by adding the useful adjective "exemplary," to indicate how Gower and others turned these stories into Christian exempla.[9]

The story of Apollonius is only one of many narratives told to Amans by Genius in the *Confessio Amantis*, and it is intended to illustrate the specific sin of incest as a manifestation of the deadly sin of lechery. All the same, Egeon and Apollonius suffer a similar fate, typical of the exemplary romance. Both are stripped of their social identities, making them representative of fallen man. Neither is personally responsible for his loss of position and separation from family; both regain their former status and sense of self in a conclusion affirming a collective harmony. Gower ends by restoring patriarchy, as expressed in proper father-daughter relationships and in rulership, which is cleansed of tainted sexuality (Antiochus's incest) to be affirmed once again by Providence.

[8] What Jeremy Dimmick notes of Gower's many stories in the *Confessio Amantis* is also true of this type of romance and *The Comedy of Errors*: "Variations in the middle of the narrative aside, there is a shared basic structure, convoluted in its disposition of reiterated or inverted episodes, but ultimately circling back to an optimistic and seemingly inevitable closure in which families are reunited and just political rule re-established." See "'Redinge of Romance' in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," in *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance*, ed. Rosalind Field (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 125–37, esp. 133.

[9] Leo Salingar, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1974), 59–67, especially 62, 64. See also Russell A. Peck's introduction to his edition of John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 2000–2004), 1:1–64. For the complex history of the story of Apollonius of Tyre, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991). Archibald argues that Gower's main alteration of his source material was to present the story "explicitly as a moral *exemplum*, albeit in a style which owes much to romance conventions" (192).

Incest has a marginal presence in *The Comedy of Errors*, originating not in Gower but in Plautus's *Amphitruo*. The possibility of Antipholus of Syracuse's sexual intercourse with Adriana, technically defined as incest in the early modern period, is comically suggested and avoided.[10] But like Gower, Shakespeare is interested in immoral substitution, not of father for lover but of brother for brother. Like Apollonius, Egeon is a scapegoat for the sins committed by others. Egeon's misfortune seems to be related to the mercantile hunger for profit embodied in the cruel, arbitrary trade laws of the two cities, which falsely substitute people for money.

Beyond these connections between Egeon and Apollonius, the opening of the play also refers to Gower's frame. Richard Hillman has shown this to be the case for *Pericles*, and I believe that his argument may be extended at least partially to *The Comedy of Errors*. Finding thematic connections between the gradual process of self-recovery and redemption of Amans and the psychological trajectory of Pericles, Hillman concludes that we must see the relationship between Shakespeare's late play and Gower's work in terms of source study and a more complex intertextuality. For Hillman, the dream-vision narration in the frame provides the story of Pericles with additional meaning, seen in the play's explicit focus on loss and recovery of identity and given specific form in a moment of self-naming, which Hillman relates to Amans's self-naming as "John Gower" at the end of the *Confessio Amantis*.[11]

The Comedy of Errors is equally interested in selfhood and psychological renewal. The opening of the *Confessio Amantis* reveals Amans's misguided infatuation and need for spiritual and physical restoration. Venus famously asks him, "What art thou, sone?" to which he responds, "A caitif that lith hiere: / What wolde ye, my ladi diere? / Schal I ben hole or elles dye?"[12] The question that begins Amans's story in Gower begins Egeon's; he is in a similar life-or-death situation at the outset of *The Comedy of Errors*. The story that follows is, to use Russell Peck's term for the *Confessio Amantis*, a "psychopharmicon" for Egeon and the community he represents.[13] Egeon's response to the Duke's request to tell his story is an extended confessional narrative, which, although uttered in a secular, public setting, follows exemplary romance in its sketchy motivation, emphasis on pathos, and prominence of wonder. "What art thou?"

[10] Intercourse with one's sister-in-law was legally defined as incest. Michel Grivelet emphasizes the possibility of incest in "Shakespeare, Molière, and the Comedy of Ambiguity," *Shakespeare Survey* 22 (1970): 15–26. See also Thomas H. Luxon, "Humanist Marriage and *The Comedy of Errors*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 25.4 (2001): 45–65.

[11] Richard Hillman, *Intertextuality and Romance in Renaissance Drama: The Staging of Nostalgia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 106–23.

[12] Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, 1:103–4 (book 1, ll. 154, 161–63).

[13] Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, 12.

is, in the end, the question the play asks, not merely of its characters but also of its audience.

Even though the opening of the play is dominated by romance while the middle is dominated by farce, there is a complicated engagement between the two genres in the spaces reserved for each. Kent Cartwright has used the term "oscillation" to describe the relationship.[14] To my mind, such a neutral word choice does not cover the full range of generic interrelationships in the play. Syntactically, the basic elements of the two genres are surprisingly similar. Semantically, these similarities place the two genres in competition, as the shared elements are seen from contrasting perspectives and allusions to the other genre are made in a spirit of disapproval and mockery. The various aspects of subjectivity—obvious social categories like gender, marital status, and rank, as well as larger aspects of selfhood such as language, community, ritual, and exchange—are all given this twofold treatment. The two genres present us with subjectivities made up of the same components but ask us to evaluate these components in opposed ways. At isolated moments, something more complex happens: a space between farce and romance is created in which the audience is momentarily transported from one mode to the other and back. The audience is left in what may be best described as a liminal state, a state that highlights the violence with which this play brings farce and romance together and alienates the audience from the two genres in order to enable self-conscious reflection on their cultural implications.

These different uses of genre are present from the outset. In romance terms, the opening scene establishes the initial separation between the protagonist and his former social identity, to prepare him for the test of faith that must follow. The play places Egeon in the mercantile setting expected in farce or other types of urban comedy. But hints of a secular dramatic setting and comic plot are offset by the language. Egeon opens with a line that ends in the loaded word "fall" to set the tone: "Proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall, / And by the doom of death end woes and all" (1.1.1–2).[15] The Christian theme of original sin, the alliteration ("doom of death"), and the finality of the rhyme show how religion informs language, and thus identity, in the frame. Egeon's first words are poetic, somber, unequivocal, and infused with spiritual meaning. Language, this moment suggests, has a one-on-one relationship with the world in romance— for it to have proper religious significance it must claim to describe the world

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[14] Kent Cartwright, "Surprising the Audience in *The Comedy of Errors,*" in *Re-Visions of Shakespeare: Essays in Honor of Robert Ornstein*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004), 215–30, esp. 215.

[15] All references to Shakespeare's works are taken from Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed., *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 2008).

perfectly, but the opening shows that it does not so much describe a preexisting world as *create* one. The Duke's immediate response seems curiously, even comically, out of touch with these lines: "Merchant of Syracusa, plead no more" (l. 3). The play's first strange moment of generic merger occurs here: the Duke believes he is in a different generic world, one in which deceitful merchants try to talk their way out of an execution. It is not until Egeon's second response is given in a style similar to his first words that the play moves more decisively into romance. Egeon's narrative represents a break with, and can only be uttered in disregard of, the legal situation in which he has been placed by the trade laws of Ephesus.

Generically, Egeon's speeches construct the realm of Christian romance, a realm in which Egeon's status as a merchant must be discarded before his gradual redemption can begin. Although he is labeled "merchant" in the opening scene in the First Folio,[16] Egeon's self-presentation is much more conflicted about his social status than his citizen-son's and, as seen in the Duke's initial response to him, out of touch with his legal situation, which identifies him only on the basis of his economic position. Egeon comes to Ephesus as a father, not a merchant; his goods are never again mentioned in the play. While his impending execution results from an unexplained failure to access his capital, we can infer that even if he had the money, he would forego the opportunity to buy his way out. His sense of doom precedes the family separation, we learn, since he says that he "would gladly have embraced" (l. 69) death during the storm, if not for his weeping wife and children. Douglas Bruster suggests that merchants' complex relationship to property gave them "a special reputation for anxiety" in drama.[17] Yet Egeon's sadness indicates that there are other forces at work beyond the purely secular mechanics of trade and law, forces that will test him on a deeper level of faith and patient suffering. Thus, his melancholy connects his presence to the medieval consolation genre that inspired the frame of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, rather than his version of *Apollonius of Tyre*. The Boethian model, Peck explains, begins with a situation that perfectly describes

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[16] *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* (London, 1623), fols. 85–86 (sigs. H1r–v). By Act 5, Egeon's speech tags in the First Folio have been changed to "Father" (fol. 99 [sig. I2r]).

[17] Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 67. See also 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 (1996): 19–37, esp. 20; and Perry, 41–42. For a very different psychoanalytic discussion of melancholy, see Lynn Enterline, *Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 189–241. Jonathan Gil Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2004), explores the varying perspectives on commerce offered by Egeon and the Duke in the opening, as well as in the play as a whole (32–34).

Amans's state and, I would add, Egeon's: "There will be an opening description of the narrator's physiological confusion and spiritual inertia, his displacement and alienation. His psychological turmoil will be presented as an illness he suffers within Fortune's domain. Usually the illness will manifest itself in some form of death-wish." [18] It is a state from which the protagonist can only be released through the mechanisms of digression and the Christian redemption that will follow.

Egeon's lengthy confession to the Duke transforms the dramatic space from a marketplace into a vaguely religious location. His references to a range of geographic settings and times place us outside the Aristotelian dramatic configurations usual in farce. In the space that Shakespeare designates as the world of romance, who you are is not determined by the secular, material elements of wealth, social status, and legal position, but by your response to natural disaster, impending doom, and tragic loss.

The impact of Egeon's predicament also extends to the Duke. His impersonal mode of address, "Merchant of Syracusa" (1. 3) is appropriate in a legal context, but jars with the first line of the play, in which Egeon calls the Duke by his first name, Solinus. In a scene that asks to be staged as a highly ritual confrontation between ruler and subject, Egeon's use of the Duke's name already points to a romance plot in which Egeon's trial is not really instigated by the Duke but by forces beyond his control. Throughout this scene, the Duke wavers between his official, secular role and his personal conscience. Egeon's speech, which starts by positing a distinction between man and institution, is reinforced by the Duke's admission of a conflict between his soul and his rulership:

> 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.
>   (ll. 142–45)

His words, like Egeon's confession, replace the actual legal situation with a religious metaphor: the soul can only sue as advocate before God at the final judgment. The Duke's conflicted identity, then, is not a sign of his inadequacy as a ruler, as we would expect in farce, but a sign of his straddling of two genres and, in romance terms, of his potential for redemption. Egeon's parting couplet rejects the Duke's temporary reprieve and sounds dark and archaic: "Hopeless and helpless doth Egeon wend, / But to procrastinate his lifeless end" (ll. 157–58). These lines emphasize the play's own belatedness. As Mowat argues,

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[18] Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, 21.

Shakespeare's late plays tend to highlight "the moldiness of the tale."[19] Here, that function is performed by Egeon's use of "wend," an archaic word found often in Gower (nine times in book 8 of the *Confessio Amantis* alone) but only infrequently in the sixteenth century.[20]

In the world set up by the play's opening, subjectivities are shaped by the traditional Christian terms of conscience, fall, and guilt. This means that the secular, social components of identity must be temporarily set aside, and authentic selfhood is found in trial and suffering. Interiority is not central to this conception of subjectivity, nor is there a place for individual agency in language. Egeon does not set out to change the scene's meaning through language, but romance, along with its worldview, speaks through Egeon, creating a network of religious references to override non-Christian visions of the self. The circumstances of storm and family separation that have led to his loss of self are not in themselves important; they only matter as expressions of the inscrutable will of Providence, a will that cannot be properly understood until the end of the play. In the process of individual redemption, ritual will play an important role as a dramatic expression of selfhood. For the self to be properly constituted, ritual must determine individual identity in disregard of any interiority that would exceed it. However, since this is only the beginning of the play, ritual, in the form of "solemn synods" (l. 13) and promised execution, is still corrupted by trade in Ephesus. In romance thus conceived, virtuous characters, forced into situations of extreme deprivation, suffering, and mourning, point us toward questions about faith and morality that are not normally asked in a comic setting. Their

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[19] Mowat, 140.

[20] Most of the instances in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) are medieval (with the majority of definitions showing only one or a few instances after the medieval period); see the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., J. A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, prep., 20 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), s.v. "wend, $v.^1$." The primary transitive and reflexive senses are almost entirely medieval, going back to the earliest usage in 888. The intransitive usages show more early modern instances; in *The Comedy of Errors*, the word is used in the sense expressed by definition 10, "go off, away or out, to depart," for which the *OED* lists nine medieval instances and five later ones. Gower's *Confessio Amantis* occurs five times in this entry, for usages ranging from "to turn (one's mind, thoughts, will, etc.) in a new direction" (2a) and "to change the character of" (3a) to "of events, etc., or impers. with *it*: To have or take a certain course; to take place, happen, or come about" (5). Gower also uses the term with the meaning of "depart," for instance at the crucial end of the *Confessio Amantis*, when Venus takes her leave of Amans, now named John Gower, saying "Adieu, for y mot fro thee wende" (8.2940). Shakespeare uses it on two other occasions: in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon says, "back to Athens shall the lovers wend / With league whose date till death shall never end" (3.2.373–74), a usage that connects it with finality and death. Shakespeare gives the word a more prosaic context in *Measure for Measure*, in which the Duke instructs Isabella to carry a letter to Friar Peter ("Wend you with this letter" [4.3.137]) when she despairs about her brother's fate, although the Friar may be aiming to give Isabella a vaguely spiritual sense of her practical task.

test of faith will bring about a reformation of the larger society, which will reconstitute itself out of renewed ritual and religious conceptions of identity. In the opening scene of *The Comedy of Errors*, the dramatic materials—the solemn language and pace, the length of the speeches, and the wonder produced in audiences both on- and offstage—formulate the play's take on romance and link it to a medieval, Christian conception of comedy.[21]

The shift from opening to second scene, however, is so pervasive that it escapes the umbrella created by romance's digressive tendencies. We move to a different source text, a new protagonist (or twin set of protagonists), a different kind of setting, a different set of values, and a different outlook on everything presented so far. In this play of false starts, we suddenly hear that individuals can simply "give out" (1.2.1) that they are inhabitants of another city to avoid the execution that awaits Egeon so mercilessly. Where Egeon's doom seems mysteriously and inextricably tied up with individual identity and his community's corruption, we now find that one origin can be substituted for another through a simple speech act, something that for Antipholus of Syracuse goes unpunished and is considered unremarkable. From the metaphysical dramatic space of the opening, we shift into the everyday working world of merchants, dinners, nagging wives, and troublesome servants, the world of Plautus's *Menaechmi*. In the case of farce, too, Shakespeare's choice of source is a complicated one. Like Gower's romance, Plautus's farce is not lacking in ambiguity and layering. As Katherine McCarthy argues, Plautus deploys different types of comedy in his plays and juxtaposes a more cynical, subversive form of farce with a type of romantic comedy that espouses "socially conservative values" and "support[s] existing hierarchies."[22] In using Plautus, Shakespeare relies on a mode of playwriting that thrives on generic blending and the juxtaposition of contradictory worldviews.

Shakespeare's mingling of Gower and Plautus makes clear that farce, like romance, is driven by digression. It, too, begins by upsetting individual social identity, creating a loss of self for both merchant and traveling twin. Substitution is a key motif in farce: individuals take each other's place much as misplaced objects do. Moreover, Shakespeare brings farce closer to romance in eliminating

[21] See Kinney's argument (n. 1 above) on the importance of a Christian concept of comedy to the play (158–59).

[22] Kathleen McCarthy discovers this duality especially in the relationships between masters and slaves in Plautus; see *Slaves, Masters, and the Art of Authority in Plautine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 3. Wolfgang Riehle argues that Plautus could have supplied Shakespeare with many of the play's elements often attributed to romance; see "Shakespeare's Reception of Plautus Reconsidered," in *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 109–21. For an informative introduction to Shakespeare's transformation of Plautus, see Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy: The Influence of Plautus and Terence* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 20–38.

trickery as comedy's structural motivator, where Plautus does not.[23] Thus, in *The Comedy of Errors*, farce and romance share a conception of the world as a fluid place in which characters are subject to forces beyond their control and in which they must be deprived of their normal positions and undergo a test of selfhood. But in farce, identity has a random basis. The second scene of the play constructs a setting in which not religious redemption but economic, political, and social structures establish subjectivity in terms of superficial categories, such as "merchant" or "wife." These outward labels mask the fact that identities are actually produced in ephemeral exchanges of goods and services between individuals. This means that identity is not a core essence to be uncovered, but an unstable, unpredictable process. In the middle of *The Comedy of Errors*, power, relative social status, and subjectivity are based on access to and exchange of material goods, rather than on innate, unchanging differences between people, such as virtue or high birth. Identity is just as precarious as in romance, but loss of self is caused not by the supernatural but by everyday exchanges, revealing the instability of a materially based social order. This secular, or perhaps even atheist, view of identity is radically equalizing: social hierarchies have no moral basis, and the world is ruled by mechanisms that nobody can control. The most mundane aspects of the self—who you are, whom you are married to, whom you command, what you own—are subject to appropriation and made to look tenuous, rendering irrelevant any formulation of inwardness founded on such categories. In the farcical middle of *The Comedy of Errors*, the fragility of identity is not denounced. Instead, it is playfully celebrated because such fragility frees its inhabitants, and audiences, from moral demands. While farcical characters might still take morality seriously, or at least pretend to do so, their attitude has no bearing on the real workings of society that go on underneath. The double sense of the word "error," as inadvertent mistake and as "a departure from moral rectitude, a transgression,"[24] mirrors the contrast between the arbitrary and moralistic, or worldly and Christian, versions of farce and romance in *The Comedy of Errors*.

In the shift from frame to middle, the early modern urban playgoers are confronted with a commercial environment much like their own and are made to question the relevance of the romance perspective presented in the opening scene. As critics like Douglas Lanier and Curtis Perry have compellingly argued, the middle part of the play shows us a protocapitalist world in which material goods are everything, power resides with those who hold the purse, and long-

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[23] While Plautus too has the confusions hinge on the exceptionality of the twin body, his traveling twin is more than willing to take advantage of the unsuspecting townspeople who mistake him for his brother.

[24] *OED*, s.v. "error," 5.

standing relationships between man and wife, master and servant, merchant and consumer are easily upset. The city's reliance on materiality results in the circulation of the very objects on which identity depends—purse, rope, ring, and chain—objects that, placed in the wrong hands, lead to respectable merchants being arrested and declared mad and upright citizen wives being accused of prostitution in the marketplace. This materialism entails a performative perspective on identity that has its affinities with the Inns of Court where the play was first staged. Farce, Lanier notes, "entertains the unsettling possibility that character is perhaps never more (and no 'deeper') than a well-managed stage spectacle."[25] The play takes this idea a step further because it is not even clear that anyone in particular is doing the stage-managing, least of all a benign providence. In *The Comedy of Errors*, performativity itself is emptied of agency, so that people become objects in a larger plot that has its own logic, is set in motion by coincidence, and seems unstoppable. Another key difference between the play's presentation of farce and romance can be seen in the degree of characters' awareness of this upsetting of normality. In the frame, Egeon can only wait passively for a divine resolution of conflict; the absence of agency is made abundantly clear, and the proper response is patience. The same absence of agency goes largely undetected in the farcical sections of *The Comedy of Errors*, so that individuals comically go about their business as if they had agency, only furthering the chaos by doing so.

Substitution, the play's central interest, constructs a different vision of identity in each genre. In the opening, the substitution of individuals for money by Ephesian trade laws shows substitution's moral coloring. In the middle of the play, however, substitution becomes the unavoidable outcome of identity's precariousness and therefore has no guilt associated with it.[26] In generic terms, farce comes to substitute for romance with no indication that this substitution serves the purpose of reform within the larger framework of the play. In the brief pause between 1.1 and 1.2, language shifts from archaic and cumbersome poetry to fluid, witty prose, humorous stichomythia, and comic rhyme undercutting the serious intentions of the speaker. Unlike the singularity of language in romance,

[25] Lanier, in Miola, ed., "*Comedy of Errors*" (see n. 1 above), 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).

[26] Farce theory often treats the genre as a type of wish fulfillment precisely because of the avoidance of guilt, which allows audiences to indulge in dark fantasies. The classic Freudian statement can be found in Eric Bentley's *Life of the Drama* (New York: Atheneum, 1964). Barbara Freedman cites Bentley in order to develop a theory about the genre's repression of responsibility for transgressive behavior in "Errors in Comedy: A Psychoanalytic Theory of Farce," in *Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. Maurice Charney (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980), 233–43. However, this view underestimates farce's subversive representation of the social order, a representation that is explicit, to my mind, and not repressed.

the characteristic figure for the language of farce is of course the pun, which thrives on subversive substitution and shows that language cannot be made to mean one thing only; its meaning is determined somewhere in the relationship between speaker, hearer, and audience.[27] This has an equally powerful impact as Egeon's religiously inflected language, but its end is not harmony but disorder: if two meanings can coexist in one place, no determination of ultimate meaning is possible and order is founded on the random selection of one meaning as primary. Egeon's deep sense of doom is replaced by Dromio's joking allusions to Doomsday, which do not, as Arthur Kinney has argued, establish a stable Christian frame of reference but undercut it.[28] For instance, the Second Merchant's "You know since Pentecost the sum is due" (4.1.1) and Dromio's request for his master's "redemption—the money in his desk" (4.2.46) make clear that in the world of merchants, customers, masters, and servants, religious language is used for the practical purpose of making your master come home, getting your servant to tell you where your money is, and making your clients pay their bills. Even language's most serious register, the biblical, is open to farcical appropriation.

Nonetheless, farcical substitutions, although disorderly, are not free of logic. They enhance the relationship of rivalry between the two genres, making us witness to a struggle between two systems of representation, in which farce tends to use parody.[29] When we are in the world of farce, romance undergoes the painful mockery that is characteristic of farce's relationship to other genres more generally. Thus, in the play's middle the older romance hero becomes the younger romance hero in the wrong setting. While Egeon is a product of exemplary romance, Antipholus of Syracuse takes us into chivalric romance. The generational shift entails a change in the particular version of romance that is at the heart of false self-perception, but this does not mean that Egeon's exemplary romance is not mocked, along with chivalric romance, as ill conceived and misguided. Romance's view of subjectivity is undercut, through the idea

[27] The twins have frequently been compared to the linguistic figure of the pun. Note that Egeon's punning on "hap" is of a different kind altogether: it is not subversive but instead thrives on repetition of the same idea (1.1.37–38). See Eamon Grennan, "Arm and Sleeve: Nature and Custom in *The Comedy of Errors*," *Philological Quarterly* 59 (1980): 150–64, esp. 158; and Parker (see n. 2 above), 61.

[28] Kinney's essay prioritizes the romance frame over the farcical middle at every instance: Shakespeare supersedes "the pagan world of Plautus with his own Christian one" and aims to "direct us *away* from the farce of a world of men who are foolish in their pursuit of fortune and family when they forget about God and *toward* a sense of comedy . . . as providential confusion when wandering and bafflement invite man to contemplate wonder and grace" (157, 158–59).

[29] Cartwright distinguishes between farce and romance on the basis of the latter's self-consciousness about form (216), but this distinction underestimates farce's ability to parody other literary forms.

that such a view disregards the material mechanisms that rule individual lives. Antipholus sees himself as someone on a quest (for his mother and brother), falls in love, and learns to understand and battle the forces of evil, in the tradition of the wide-eyed young knights of romance. Like Spenser's Redcrosse Knight, Antipholus innocently walks into danger. He is confused about how to recognize others' essence, especially that of the seductive Luciana, who is either an Una-like ideal beloved or a Duessa-like threat to his "soul's pure truth" (3.2.37). In a different generic environment, Antipholus's progress through Ephesus might have been a story of moral learning about the outside world and, especially, about himself.

As critics have noted, the oft-cited speech in which Antipholus voices his anxieties about the city with its evil inhabitants (1.2.95–105) contains an important biblical echo. Paul's Acts, too, represent Ephesus as a place of superstition, referring us to yet another type of romance. [30] Antipholus's speeches summon up the elements that are key to biblical and chivalric romance—the supernatural, good and evil, self and other. But Shakespeare places these syntactical elements in a semantic context that makes them irrelevant and laughable: the speech follows on the heels of the first misidentification and reminds us that Antipholus's anxieties are not Paul's serious apprehensions, but the cowardly trepidations of a traveler in an unfamiliar city. Antipholus thinks of himself as a hero for whom chance encounters are really allegorical confrontations with good and evil; the audience knows that Antipholus is simply mistaken for his twin. Antipholus even fails to maintain his chivalric perspective. His heroism is parodically subverted by his final line in the speech: "I greatly fear my money is not safe" (l. 105). In this very un-knightly conclusion, Antipholus's sense of self is after all materially based—an assessment borne out by events that have the two brothers succeed or fail through access to and exchange of money.

In this complicated generic mixture, Shakespeare places the syntactical features of different types of romance, including the chivalric protagonist, in the wrong context. Doing so makes a mockery of a chivalric sense of self and replaces it with a farcical vision of subjectivity as fluid, amoral, and materialist. To underscore the strength of the farcical system of representation, the comic linguistic register does not exclude the language of romance but incorporates it parodically. As we saw in the opening scene, Egeon's language is out of touch with his situation but successfully transforms the dramatic space; romance language generally does not have such power outside of the frame. When Antipholus

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[30] See especially Acts 19–20, which emphasizes the paganism of the Ephesians; *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, intro. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1969), QQiiii recto–RRi verso. On the religious divisions of Ephesus, see Laurie Maguire, "The Girls from Ephesus," in Miola, ed., 355–91, esp. 361–66.

decides that he will "in this mist at all adventures go" (2.2.216), he presents himself as an innocent, courageous knight-errant, but the audience laughs at this self-representation because it contrasts with the world around him. Thus, when we look at romance's worldview through the lens of farce, we are amused by how it infuses everything with metaphysical significance.

Nell's misrecognition of Dromio of Syracuse offers another such instance. Recognition is a key measure of identity in this play, and so this moment is central to the farcical view of the relationship between subjectivity and materiality, which includes not only money and objects, but also the body. Dromio and Antipholus treat the kitchen wench as a monster with which the knight and his assistant must do battle. Nell's appropriation of Dromio's body is for that reason a source of anxiety and fear, as we see when he describes their encounter to his master:

> [T]his 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.
>
> (3.2.137–44)

Nell's minute knowledge of Dromio's body makes this a premature, and therefore false, recognition scene, such as often ends romance stories, ranging from Greek to chivalric romance. Rather than revealing the hero's true identity and distinguishing him from his alter egos, Dromio shares his mark, mole, and wart with his brother, and this bodily evidence circulates to fall into the wrong hands. We are shown that romance conclusions, for all their emphasis on spiritual virtue, rely on physical evidence to establish identity and turn it into a clue for the true, inner self beyond moles and warts. This mystificatory use of bodily details as signifiers of an underlying truth is debunked here as the Dromios inexplicably share even the tiniest physical attributes, moving us into parodic metatheater. Nell's power results in Dromio's self-imagined transformation into an animal (another romance motif), but the animal into which he is transformed—the kitchen dog used to turn the spit by running in the wheel—is comically domestic. Dromio's response is romantically appropriate: he uses this frightening moment to fortify his sense of self as a Christian knight, referring to Ephesians 6, which exhorts the believer to "take unto you the whole armour of God," made up of the believer's metaphorical weapons against the devil, such as "the brestplate of righteousnes" and the "shield of faith."[31] The religious language is comically undercut: the entire speech has a lower-class referent and

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[31] Ephesians 6:13–16; *Geneva Bible*, sig. ZZiii verso.

is irrelevant to Nell's and Dromio's actual status. We see the same at the climax of the confusion, when Antipholus of Syracuse accosts the courtesan with the incongruous line, "Satan, avoid!" (4.3.44), another biblical echo placed in a comic situation. Finally, Antipholus proceeds, according to the Folio stage direction, to walk around "*with his rapier drawn*" (4.4.139 sd). Thus, farce exposes the chivalric model of Christian masculinity as out of place in the everyday world of social exchange and as a source of confusion and chaos, rather than harmony.

Marriage undergoes similar treatment in the play's middle, as it too is shown to be an unstable institution, a flawed basis on which to formulate a sense of self. Presented as the power relationship marked by struggle we expect from farce, even a long-standing marriage is as easily upset as an object is misplaced. Plautus's *Menaechmi* ends with the resident twin auctioning off his wife—a fantasy of escape from the repressive aspects of social institutions and a suitable end to a farce. *The Comedy of Errors*, known for "deepening" the character of the wife, presents Adriana, like Antipholus of Syracuse, as a cross-over figure in terms of genre. Her presence subverts romance's high-blown representation of marriage as a union of virtuous individuals, seen in both exemplary and chivalric versions of the genre. Adriana's situation is that of the wife in farce: she complains of marriage that "none but asses will be bridled so" (2.1.14); her husband calls her "shrewish" (3.1.2); and she spends much of the play trying to get him to come home to dinner, entertaining the wrong man, and chasing her husband once she is convinced that he has gone mad. The pinnacle of her farcical power comes when she succeeds in having Antipholus of Ephesus bound as a madman. Her status at that moment is based on access to her husband's money, which enables her to buy him back from the officer, an ineffectual representative of the law.

But even as this would suggest a model of identity that attributes a good deal of agency to clever individuals, Adriana herself does not know she has upset the power relationship and believes she is acting as a proper wife. While Adriana's identity is thus determined in ways beyond her control by a social order that formulates power in material terms, her language is as much at odds with this farcical view as Antipholus of Syracuse's. Like him, she conceives of herself in serious terms—the discourses of Pauline doctrine and Christian romance inform her misguided and indeed contradictory worldview. Adriana must negotiate between opposing views of wifehood, one associated with divinity and the other with physicality. Her language shows a range of registers in accordance with her conflicted status. At times within a single speech (2.2.168–80), Adriana's language moves between comedy and gravity, as when she begins in comic mode by accusing the wrong Antipholus of "counterfeit[ing]" (l. 169) with Dromio to spoil her mood, shifts into biblical metaphor to compare

husband and wife to elm and vine,[32] and ends in a dark representation of adultery as a plantlike infection leading to his "confusion" (l. 180). In Adriana's hands, Paul's one-flesh model does not anchor the relationship but is a rhetorical tool for persuading the wrong brother to come in for dinner. Her violent threats about her husband's adultery and its contaminating effects on her body are as out of place as Antipholus of Syracuse's sense of self as heroic knight. As with Antipholus's view of himself, Adriana's self-presentation is undermined because her words are misdirected, spoken in the wrong setting, or misinterpreted. Due to her role within farce, her subjectivity lacks the deeper relevance she herself perceives, and her marital problems are never truly resolved. Interiority in farce, it is suggested, has no basis in real life, unless formulated superficially as a desire for power or pleasure.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare places farce and romance in a competitive relationship, showing each genre to be capable of prevailing over or incorporating the other due to their shared tendency toward digression. Yet neither is fully successful in overcoming the other, as Shakespeare also creates moments where, in Colie's words, the two genres "melt into" one another.[33] Paradoxically, these moments leave the impression not of compatibility but of disjunction. Antipholus's "drop of water" speech (1.2.35–40) and his genuine fear on hearing of Nell's identification of Dromio, even after Dromio humorously describes every part her body in geographical terms, show that farce is sometimes exceeded by romance. In the opening scene, the "unjust divorce" (1.1.104) of Egeon and his as-yet-unnamed wife is presented in the supernatural terms of wonder and melancholy, caused by the pitiless gods. Yet this treatment does not fully supersede some farcical hints in the earlier parts of his speech, which have his wife disrupting his plans and his melancholy, first making "daily motions for our home return" (l. 59) and then, once they have gone on their fateful journey against Egeon's wishes, making it impossible for him to embrace death by her "incessant weepings" (l. 70), which force him to "seek delays" (l. 74) from the inevitable end. The wife's disruptive speech foreshadows Emilia's sharp tongue later on and her farcical role as a shrewish wife and mother-in-law. In these small ways, farce and romance fail to overcome the other, as isolated phrases, hints, and gestures radically modify the generic environment. It is at these moments, I argue, that the play acquires the "weirdness" that has struck audiences and critics, suggesting the incompatibility of the two ways of thinking about subjectivity.[34]

[32] The reference to the wife as vine comes from Psalm 128:3, "Thy wife shalbe as the fruteful vine on the sides of thy house"; *Geneva Bible*, sig. VViiii verso.
[33] Colie, 116.
[34] I am referring to the famous essay by G. R. Elliott, who was the first to draw attention to the disturbing, darker elements of the play; see "Weirdness in *The Comedy of Errors*," in Miola,

The temporary merger of farce and romance can be seen in Adriana's nostalgic depiction of marital harmony, which offers the audience a romantic conception of love:

> I am not Adriana, nor thy wife.
> The 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 thy hand,
> That never meat sweet-savoured in thy taste,
> Unless I spake, or looked, or touched, or carved to thee.
>
>   (2.2.112–18)

The speech formulates what it means to say "I am Adriana," which is synonymous with saying "I am Antipholus's wife." Female subjectivity is covered by marital status and represented as a continued process of exchange: the wife provides pleasure to all the husband's senses, for which he rewards her by praise. If this exchange is necessary to enable Adriana to call herself Adriana, then her name and the label of wife are not permanent. From the perspective of farce, we might say that this speech is proof of the material basis for and the performativity of marriage, as well as the subjectivity founded within it. Marriage is open to disruption when a similar body enters to take the place of the husband's body or when the wife's place is taken by someone else, such as the Courtesan, equally capable of "excellent discourse" (3.1.110) and good cooking. But for all its potential for disruption and materiality, the speech is not unequivocally farcical. There is a disjunction between the view of marriage as a matter of the senses and consumption and the harmony that is attributed to this view, in disregard of an investment in the body over the essence of faith and spirit. In other words, Shakespeare allows romance to emerge powerfully in a scene that appears farcical in its setup: the poetic repetitions return us to Egeon's language in the opening scene and suggest a new model of marriage that is material and yet harmonious, endorsed by Christian morality as a basis of order rather than of chaos. Of course, at this point the speech is misdirected and potentially adulterous. That its romance associations should resonate, however, is signaled by its farcical revision, when Adriana meets with the Abbess.

The contradictions in the Abbess are perhaps most indicative of the play's treatment of genre, as critical readings of her significance make clear.[35] Her appearance in the beginning of the final act is radically different from her

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ed., 57–70.

[35] Kinney (163–64) reads the Abbess as a providential figure, key to establishing order in a sinful world. See also Glyn Austen, "Ephesus Restored: Sacramentalism and Redemption in *The Comedy of Errors*," *Journal of Literature and Theology* 1 (1987): 54–69, esp. 67.

presence at its ending, as her double name, Abbess and Emilia, suggests. Her status as an abbess at the Temple of Diana is itself an ambiguous one. As Randall Martin and Elizabeth Hart have shown, she is a figure both pagan and Christian, carrying a complex set of cultural resonances.[36] Gower and Shakespeare overlay a pagan view of the temple with a Christian veneer. In Gower, Apollonius enters the Temple of Diana, and "with gret devocioun / Of holi contemplacioun / Withinne his herte he made his schrifte." The temple is a place where "Goddes grace . . . was professed."[37] Gower seems to use the location to suggest the mother's nun-like death to the world. Shakespeare even fails to name the Temple of Diana in any other way than as "the Priory." These and other Christian allusions in the closing scene, including Emilia's mysterious complaint, "Thirty-three years have I but gone in travail / Of you, my sons" (5.1.402–3), place her most explicitly, it seems, in the world of Christian romance. At the same time, her entry earlier in the final act to scold Adriana vexes Christian readings and returns us to her status as a stereotypical farcical mother-in-law. In this role, she fights with Adriana for authority over Antipholus, making him a pawn in the struggle between the two women. Her berating of Adriana for her strong speech, as Carol Thomas Neely has noted, reflects comically on her own sharp tongue.[38]

The Abbess's presentation of marriage as a purely physical exchange between a woman who provides material sustenance and a man who is no more than a passive body makes perfect sense in view of how Shakespeare has farce present subjectivity. Her assertion that "The venom clamours of a jealous woman / Poisons more deadly than a mad dog's tooth" (ll. 70–71) and her allegation that Adriana's railing has led to "Unquiet meals" and "ill digestions" (l. 75), which in turn have driven her husband mad, are not satisfactorily accounted for in the terms of exemplary romance; it should not be a surprise that the

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[36] Randall Martin and F. Elizabeth Hart link the Abbess with Artemis and Diana, as well as with Mary, a startling move away from the traditional stage view of the Abbess as a Christian authority figure. See Randall Martin, "Rediscovering Artemis in *The Comedy of Errors*," in *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*, ed. Tom Clayton, Susan Brock, and Vicente Forés (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004), 363–79, esp. 366–67; and F. Elizabeth Hart, "'Great is Diana' of Shakespeare's Ephesus," *Studies in English Literature* 43 (2003): 347–74.

[37] Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, 241–42 (8.1837–39, 1846, 1848).

[38] Carol Thomas Neely calls the Abbess "a second comically punitive figure when she dresses down Adriana for flaws that she may share," adding that by the end, the play "mocks her outmoded role as Catholic healer by making her a nagging wife." See *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004), 144–45. Maurice Hunt points out, "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." See "Slavery, English Servitude, and *The Comedy of Errors*," *ELR* 27 (1997): 31–56, esp. 53n58.

Abbess's counterpart in Gower has no similar speech. Nor can her remedies for Antipholus's madness—"wholesome syrups, drugs, and holy prayers" (l. 105)—be fully explained as the conventional use of medicinal practices by a respectable religious figure. Instead, her alignment of syrups, drugs, and prayer and her presentation of the husband, not as the "wives head"[39] but as a mere consumer of what wife or mother offers him, make this a farcical counterpart of Adriana's speech. It presents us with the logical outcome of a material way of thinking about love. The physical has been deprived of a spiritual basis, sanity is lost as soon as meals are improperly digested, and religious identity is a cover for a female desire for power. That Adriana, who has been thinking of herself as a romance heroine, should end up recognizing herself in the comic stereotype of the jealous wife is evidence of the strength of farce even at this late point in the play.

While romance and farce have intermingled considerably at various moments in *The Comedy of Errors*, the shift from one into another at the end, as at the outset, highlights the degree of conflict between the two systems of representation. Perhaps the play's most disjunctive moment occurs at the transition between middle and ending, when Egeon returns to the stage and Antipholus of Ephesus fails to recognize him. The misidentifications that were the source of laughter in the main plot have now become fraught with emotion. Egeon's speech describing the effect that time must have had on his voice, tongue, and face (ll. 308–19) returns us to Amans, who is reminded by Venus at the very end of the *Confessio Amantis* of his age, and thus of the feebleness of the human body and his own mortality.[40] Hearing Egeon's pathetic speech from a farcical perspective, Antipholus of Ephesus feels like Dromio of Syracuse when faced with Nell— subject to a stranger's manipulation. The Duke's response that Egeon's age and trials have caused this misidentification ("I see thy age and dangers make thee dote" [l. 330]) marginalizes the father figure in a way we are familiar with from farce, where a materialist view of identity is determined by the body. But where these mistakes would have no serious consequences in a farce, in a romance they bring Egeon very close to death.[41] While the discrepancy between the

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[39] Ephesians 5:23; *Geneva Bible*, sig. ZZiii recto.

[40] Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, 259 (8.2439). See also Hillman's discussion of this moment (n. 11 above), 115.

[41] Barbara Freedman cites a 1974 Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival production in which Egeon gave 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 generic clash. The production showed that the crowd is still in farcical mode, but the events have already become part of the romance narrative. See Barbara Freedman, "Egeon's Debt: Self-Division and Self-Redemption in *The Comedy of Errors*," *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 360–83, esp. 366.

context and how a character talks about himself or herself has been a source of parody in the play's middle, the discrepancy does not work the same way here. The audience realizes that Egeon *is* in a serious predicament—the tables have turned and once more the community misreads his speech and must recognize its mistakes. Egeon's crossover into farce uneasily reintroduces pathos into the play and transforms misidentification from a sign of a general reliance on material exchange into religiously significant misrecognition. Therefore, Egeon's language represents a break with the language of the farcical section of the play, making it a reminder of genre's power to reform the stage. The audience moves abruptly back into a different generic world within which subjectivities are no longer shaped in amoral material exchange.

However, unlike at the outset, the generic shift cannot be achieved so easily this time. The Abbess has been made a comic figure, as she was introduced prematurely back onto the stage, threatening to spoil the emotional effect of her entry as *deus ex machina* figure in the final scene. To reshape Emilia into a romance character, Shakespeare utterly transforms her language and gives her a new role as maternal and wifely guarantor of identity. The change is so striking that she hardly seems the same person; I would argue that she is not. In a single instant, she must discard her role as a religious figure and return to that of wife and mother. It is the repetitive language of romance that effects this transformation:

> 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.
> (ll. 342–46)

In contrast with farce's representation of language as detrimental to order, Shakespeare now makes language a vital instrument in establishing relationships and social positions. To have this function, it must be emptied of its subversive potential, something achieved by poetic repetitions and singular meanings. [42] Emilia "loose[s]" Egeon's material "bonds" (l. 340) and reestablishes the metaphorical ones of family in this ritual speech act, a call for mutual speaking that reveals that these are unchanged and unchangeable individuals. The relationship is markedly different, of course, from the earlier presentation of

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[42] Grennan argues that "the last act is almost entirely free of puns. Language is restored to its more normal usage: words for the most part bear only one meaning and that the conventionally appropriate one." In his analysis, this signals a fusion of nature and custom he calls "grace" (162). My argument is that language is still highly conventional in this final act and is emptied out of meanings other than the ritual one of restoring community.

marriage as a source of conflict, as it returns us to Adriana's speech on courtship. In fact, its similarity to that speech suggests that individual differences in romance are eliminated by having language speak through characters, rather than being appropriated by them. Inequality between husband and wife is not examined in the end but simply set aside. The speech afforded to Luciana and Adriana in the main plot is now limited. In farce, comic pleasure is derived from the possibility of adultery and excessive female speech; in romance, female chastity must ultimately be established beyond doubt, which explains the sisters' striking silence. Considering the generic shift, it should not be surprising that Luciana is suddenly matched up with Antipholus of Syracuse in marriage even though in the farcical middle, she showed no actual interest in him and even seemed reluctant about marriage altogether. [43]

In this narrative of conceptual conflict between two genres and two views of subjectivity, Shakespeare shows us that a harmonious resolution can only occur at the expense of one or the other. Romance, in this play, confronts the challenge of farce by incorporating and thus repressing it. The major challenge to romance is farce's awareness of materiality and its centrality to the self. Its representation of materiality is essentially amoral, much as the natural world may be said to be amoral. This means that performativity is inevitable and that the social order, which relies on materiality to establish social position, is inherently weak—prone to fall apart when two identical bodies are present. In order to overcome this challenge, Shakespeare shows us, romance can no longer simply treat the material as irrelevant. Instead, he stages a transformation of the genre, as it is made to revalue the significance of materiality in a way that is akin to farce. At the end of the play, objects are almost magically infused with meaning and construct subjectivity by constituting relationships and social position. In romance, objects do not forge unpredictable or random relationships but perfectly harmonious ones:

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	
[TO ANGELO]	And you, sir, for this chain arrested me.
ANGELO	I think I did, sir. I deny it not.
	(ll. 379–82)

In the middle plot, focus on the chain showed how easy it is for a respected merchant to lose his position. Now that same chain has become a miraculous object returning individuals to their rightful places of customer, merchant, master,

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[43] Dorothea Kehler's frustration with the women's silence at the end leads her to call the play a problem comedy; see "*The Comedy of Errors* as Problem Comedy," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 41 (1987): 229–40.

servant, and prostitute. This quick exchange, unlike the chaotic explanations to the Duke that precede it, establishes perceptions of other and self in resolutely external terms. Single gestures repair relationships that appeared irreparably broken, and the individual voice is entirely ruled by the collective process of reassembling the community. The transition from farce to romance is evident in the Duke's three stages of response to the confusing events. He begins by saying, in accordance with farcical principles, "I think you are all mated, or stark mad" (l. 282). Then, on seeing the twins together, he moves on, still unsuccessfully, to romance, with an allusion to Gower: "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?" (ll. 333–35).[44] Although these lines shift from farce in attributing spiritual significance to one twin, they are misguided in that they do not point to a harmony of body and spirit but split them in two. Finally, he remarks, "Why, here begins his morning story right" (l. 347), to signal that romance has incorporated farce into a coherent whole. Identity, at this point, is not found in individual self-expression but in community and mutuality.

In Gower's version of *Apollonius of Tyre*, the virtuous characters undergo their trials passively and celebrate once they regain their sense of self; they spend little time reflecting on what has happened. Shakespeare emphasizes that in romance individual identity is not reestablished through an examination of interiority or complex emotion. At the close of *The Comedy of Errors*, those who struggled with a sense of self in the main plot are now simply wife, husband, son, mother, father, servant, merchant; their identities are confirmed by a factual reconstruction of the events of the day. For Camille Slights, this points to the play's continued secularism.[45] I argue that the ending revalues the factual and the material as a perfect representation of a sacred order. It is in this sense that romance is transformed through its confrontation with farce. Shakespeare shows romance to have continued relevance to the early modern period, a time of increasing involvement in exchanges that revolved around money and goods.

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[44] The importance of Gower as a source has not always been acknowledged. T. W. Baldwin, for instance, writes, "I have suffered through Gower's *Confessio* entire again, but hear no echoing agonies in Shakspere"; see *On the Compositional Genetics of "The Comedy of Errors"* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1965), 365n. Evidence of a blind spot is that editors gloss the word *genius* simply as "attendant spirit" without any reference to Genius as the spiritual confessor who tells all the stories in the *Confessio Amantis*. See Greenblatt, gen. ed., 5.1.333n; R. A. Foakes, ed., *The Comedy of Errors* (London: Methuen, 1962), 5.1.332; G. Blakemore Evans, gen. ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 5.1.333n; and *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, gen. ed. David Bevington, 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 2003), 5.1.333n.

[45] On the role of accident, as opposed to providence, in bringing about the resolution, see Camille Wells Slights, *Shakespeare's Comic Commonwealths* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993), 13–31, esp. 30.

It is the task of romance conclusions to foster the illusion of individual
uniqueness through wonder. In *The Comedy of Errors*, this mystificatory view
of identity rigorously displaces the farcical view. I see the continued confusion
about the twins not as a sign of persistent insecurity about identity and social
position, as Lanier argues. Instead, in the romance frame, it is comforting proof
of all eyes seeing alike. The exceptionality of twins ensures that what Emilia calls
"this sympathizèd one day's error" (l. 399) is shared by all. [46] Her description of
the confusion in these terms is crucial in that it dispels concerns left over from
the preceding events. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) cites this as the
only instance for a specific meaning of the word "sympathized," which it defines
as "compounded of corresponding parts or elements, complicated." [47] The idea
of complication and compoundedness in the *OED* is partly based on the claim
that this is the sense in which Shakespeare uses the word in *Love's Labor's Lost*.
There, Moth jokingly remarks on "A message well sympathized—a horse to be
ambassador for an ass" (3.1.42–43). Modern editions of the play gloss the word
usually as "shared in by all equally." [48]

But these explanations do not convey the full richness of the word
"sympathized." Its primary meaning, at least within the frame of romance,
is closest to the usage in *The Rape of Lucrece*. There, it points to similarity
and profound emotion as well as decorum: "True sorrow then is feelingly
sufficed / When with like semblance it is sympathized" (ll. 1112–13). For
this more mystical sense, we should turn to the *OED*'s definitions of the word
"sympathize," which go beyond the neutrality of "share" to suggest deep emotion,
similarity, and harmony: "To suffer with or like another . . . to be similarly or
correspondingly affected"; "To have an affinity; to agree in nature, disposition,
qualities, or fortunes"; "To agree, be in harmony, accord, harmonize." [49] The
early modern understanding of sympathy differs from our modern definition
in highlighting a mystical affinity leading to a correspondence of experience,
as well a natural fellowship. Emilia's declaration thus posits a spiritual order
based on kinship and similarity, to overcome the chaos caused by kinship and
similarity in the main plot. Error is now collective, not based on the specifics

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[46]   Steven R. Shelburne claims that this moment moves away from the individual instances of
error toward a collective understanding of it. See "The Nature of 'Error' in *The Comedy of Errors*,"
Explorations in Renaissance Culture (18): 137–151, esp. 138.

[47]   *OED*, s.v. "sympathized," *ppl. a.*, a.

[48]   The Foakes, Bevingon, and Riverside editions all gloss the word in *The Comedy of Errors*
as "shared in by all equally." It is a neutral phrase that moves away from the *OED*, just like
the Norton edition's simpler "shared" (Greenblatt, gen. ed., *Comedy of Errors*, marginal gloss
to 5.1.399) or its choice of "matched" as a marginal gloss for Moth's use of the word in *Love's
Labor's Lost*, 3.1.42.

[49]   *OED*, s.v. "sympathize, *v.*," 1, 2a, 2b.

of social relationships between and the interchangeability of individuals. The physical similarity of twins is symbolic of this new type of error. That such a romance-like harmony may ultimately itself be an artificial production, the conclusion we could draw from the word's use in *Love's Labor's Lost*, is a subversive idea that is unavailable within the conceptual framework of romance but that perhaps becomes available to the audience, which has been invited to witness the final transformations of the characters, the setting, the language, and ultimately romance itself. At the end of the play, similarity is accepted as a source of harmony and means a hollowing out of individuality—the emptying of character that Shakespeare shows to be central to his version of romance. Retrospectively, it appears that the flawed self-perceptions of characters like Adriana and Antipholus of Syracuse were at least a source of variation between individuals. By the play's conclusion, this variation is gone.

In the final conversation of *The Comedy of Errors*, which serves as a kind of coda, Shakespeare shows once again how romance overcomes farce. The conversation begins with a return to the type of exchange that led to disorder in the main plot: Dromio of Syracuse's practical request—whether or not he should gather his master's belongings from the ship—is misdirected to the citizen twin. But now such misunderstanding has no real consequences and is immediately rectified by Antipholus of Syracuse: "I am your master, Dromio" (5.1.413). Left by themselves, the younger Dromio proposes to his elder brother the option of determining the hierarchy between them through chance, a farcical possibility that reminds us of the ending of Plautus's *Menaechmi*. Rejecting this option, the elder Dromio instead decides that they will "go hand in hand, not one before another" (l. 427). The tableau of mutuality and natural kinship with which we are left confirms social concord and affinity. The brothers seem to overcome the vexed inequalities and power struggles that attend any form of hierarchy. In fact, however, this is only possible once the proper relations of authority between master and servant and between elder and younger brother have been affirmed. It is a moment of evasion that characterizes the romance ending perfectly.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare uses farce to contemplate the extreme instability of a social order based on material exchange. Urban growth, emerging forms of trade, increased social mobility, and the position of women are all reflected on in this farcical destruction of certainties. Critics have done much to map the ways in which the play must have appealed to and played with the anxieties of Elizabethan audiences. But what do we make of the romance frame and its transformation of Ephesus from a disordered city into a harmonious setting in which everyone is recognized and properly identified? Curtis Perry and Shankar Raman have argued, from different angles, that the romance frame, what Perry calls a "celebration of kinship over commerce," is characterized by

nostalgic escapism from the confusing world of early modern London.[50] Their analyses offer support for Jameson's theory 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."[51] To be sure, the ending of the play constructs an ideal community in which individuals are assigned permanent positions, and "error" only happens in the exceptional case of twins. Romance has traditionally been accused of escapism, and the accusation appears to be relevant in this case, too.

At the same time, however, Shakespeare stresses that in order to counter the power of farce, romance must transform everything, from characters and objects to space and language, while romance itself must be transformed by endorsing a reliance on the material as key to subjectivity. In the end, the poetic and ritual nature of the exchanges and the complete transformations in character we witness can make the reunion seem contrived and artificial, another instance where identity is produced through a performance of some kind. It is a real question whether in the genre of romance it is possible to break away from the farcical idea that identity is performative, just as it is a question whether in the rivalry between romance and farce one succeeds in overcoming the other. Farce has the advantage of parody—any trace of romance in its domain is undercut as out of place. Romance has the advantage of its elasticity. During the long middle, romance can accommodate almost any kind of narrative. But in *The Comedy of Errors*, as in Shakespeare's late plays, there is also a strong push for closure; in this play, romance is not so much found prior to the end, as it is seen in the problem of getting to that end. Rather than claiming primacy for one or the other genre, *The Comedy of Errors* deliberately presents us with conflicting genres to suggest a possible way of bridging the gap between ways of thinking about subjectivity, in the moments where we are transported strangely between them. In the end, the play returns us to its sources, Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and Plautus's *Menaechmi*, to remind us that they, too, contain a multiplicity of ways in which the self may be understood and that in spite of their many points of conflict, romance and farce may always exist in conversation with each other.

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[50] Perry (see n. 1 above), 48; and Shankar Raman, "Marking Time: Memory and Market in *The Comedy of Errors*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005): 176–205, esp. 203–4.

[51] Jameson, 158. He specifically cites Shakespeare's late plays.