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The Comedy of Errors and the Theology of Things

RICHARD FINKELSTEIN

> ABSOLUTELY FREE! In this day and time, it's not often that someone offers an absolutely free gift. Yet here is the most wonderful and precious free gift especially for you!! It has already been paid for by someone else. Please read on to find out more.
>
> ——Brochure from the Fellowship Tract League of Lebanon, Ohio, found in a used copy of Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*

Although he arrives at Ephesus feeling like a drop of water dissolved in the sea, Antipholus of Syracuse becomes a "formal man" by finding his mother and brother. That phrase, coined by his mother, marks the point at which Antipholus's fantasies—that gaining family and a wife can redeem him from being "smothered in errors"—become realities.[1] Such words from the Abbess and her son associate with a kind of redemption the exchange of an old, unbounded self for a new, delimited one. Her son's ultimate happiness argues that this somewhat abstract process creates a fulfilled, engaged self where none had existed before. However, most occupants of Ephesus define the self in more material terms. Antipholus's change read as a kind of redemption effectively critiques other characters' more mercantile beliefs, the sense that buying, selling, or trading physical things can deliver them from loss and make them feel whole.[2] But the material and spiritual paths to psychic redemption converge more than we might think.

Although it would be hard to imagine a less metaphysical play, *Comedy of Errors* draws on Christian texts that discuss

Richard Finkelstein is Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of English at the University of Mary Washington.

spirit and self in economic terms that conflate the physical and sacred. As Douglas Lanier observes, in *Comedy of Errors* "distinct identities are manifest in distinct marks," a characteristic that is evident in Adriana's attitudes toward the gold chain and her fears of "an adulterate blot." For Lanier, this fear extends to a point where characters believe that they can become possessed through knowledge or manipulation of their own physical traits.[3] Even time seems physically constructed: the unity of time organizes the action, and this unity itself derives from a physical threat only removable by hard cash. Lanier's remark adapts neo-Marxist ideas about subjectivity, such as Georg Lukács's description of people subordinated to machines: "time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality)."[4]

Lukács pessimistically believes it impossible for bourgeois societies to transcend their material substratum and decries what he perceives as the consequence: the reified world appears to them as the only possible world.[5] But Shakespeare is more optimistic in *Errors*. Like Lukács, he depicts a market that turns people into *things*, but ironically he builds his portrait by using Pauline and Protestant metaphors that conjoin desires for salvation with desires for objects, as in my epigraph. He also exploits the double nature of Ephesus—it is both a thriving pagan market city resistant to early Christianity and a beneficiary of Paul's Christian vision. The comedy playfully engages the language of grace to forge a connection between spiritual and physical capital. Rather than worry that tangible gains will subsume spiritual ones, the play imagines redemption *through* the physical.

By manipulating economic metaphors for spiritual rewards, Shakespeare invites us to consider conjointly the changes in theology and consumer economies to which such Pauline figures point. Propelled by the Reformation and by certain kinds of seventeenth–century Puritanism, early modern England saw a transition from an iconic culture to an aniconic one. Although hostile to both images and physical representations (and, of course, the presence of both in theater), the revolutionary changes brought by aniconic cultures did not change everything.[6] Even after the Reformation, physical representations did not exist in binary opposition to meaning but were often seen as providing access to meaning, as in "Church Windows" and other poems in George Herbert's *The Temple* (1633). As S. A. M. Adshead argues,

some Catholics long prior to the Reformation, such as Origen and William of St. Thierry, always understood the Eucharist as partly symbolic, while Martin Luther saw consubstantiation as synecdoche, and Huldrych Zwingli thought real "absence" was a metaphor.[7]

Because the seventeenth century saw a flood of new market goods enter western Europe, I would argue that forces beyond theology, particularly changes in consumption, resisted the triumph of aniconic cultural forces.[8] Patrick Geary, for example, argues that during the early modern period, commercial traffic actually diminished distinctions between things and their spiritual meaning.[9] Woodruff Smith and J. T. Cliffe cite records of family possessions to portray aristocratic Calvinists as not necessarily objecting to status-based rules of behavior and dress; to conspicuous consumption (related to status); or to following fashion.[10] They also owned portraits. After all, people perceived *things* then as now to be spiritually meaningful (a perception exploited by today's advertising industry) even if objects did not emerge from a sacred context. As Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass observe, "In the livery economy of Renaissance Europe, things took on a life of their own. That is to say, one was paid not only in the 'neutral currency of money' but also in material that was richly absorbent of symbolic meaning and in which memory of social relations was literarily embodied."[11]

Although there is certainly a difference between people's perception of objects associated with worship and their feelings about more secular goods, their responses to them—as kinds of fetishes—are shaped by overlapping antirepresentational discourses.[12] Because those languages condemn sacred and secular items alike for their sensual qualities, their tendency to induce disorder in the owner or spectator, and for the distractions they represent from a more ascetic way of life, hostility to one tends to bleed into hostility toward the other.

Conversely, attraction toward one tends to build comfort with the other and thus impedes the aniconic insistence on divorcing spirit from image and thing. Scholars whose work reflects the new history of consumerism all recognize that with the growing prevalence of commodities, *things* were increasingly perceived as containing meaning (although historians differ with regard to the epistemological processes that determine it).[13] Such meaning can also feel spiritual. As Simon Schama imagines the Reformation, it tacitly consented to prizing physical things and their sensuous qualities as long as its authority remained unthreatened: "if the

detail of the Creation was the means through which God made himself manifest, then its accurate and detailed discernment was not merely a permissible, but an indispensable instrument of spirituality."[14] Shakespeare's play draws on a cultural tension between aniconic forces that imagine the physical qualities of things impede the sacred—and changes in the consumer economy that promote an elision between such qualities and the spiritual.

Longings for things in *The Comedy of Errors* mingle with longings for a spiritualized version of the self. This materialist farce suggests that receipt of things, persons, and their images may actually enhance revelation. Like some of Thomas Middleton's city comedies, the farce playfully exploits contemporary tensions between the rapidly proliferating presence of commodities and the increasing theological hostility to seeing meaning in icons, images, and things. Its means for exploring these tensions is rooted in a tradition at least as old as Paul's rhetoric of grace. The play asks us to smile at metaphors associated with deliverance when it gives characters real money and tangible gains.

I

Foundational Protestant texts beginning with Paul generate these figures and frame the question about the role of things in revelation. Although Paul's neo-Platonist binaries inform his emphasis on revelation and the free gift of grace that makes him a touchstone for Protestants, in fact his Epistles often employ physical, even mercantile metaphors such as the one that underlies my epigraph. These tropes mediate between materially directed desires and spiritual longings. These languages are particularly evident in Ephesians, long recognized with Acts 19 as a source for Shakespeare's depiction of Ephesus.[15] Each of Paul's Epistles lays out somewhat different parts of his theology and each is rhetorically shaped for the audience he addresses. For example, Hebrews presents Christ as High Priest; Stoicism dominates Romans; antithesis is a dominant trope in 1 Timothy where, for example, Paul contrasts Christ as a "*ransom* for all men" with women he criticizes for wearing pearls, gold, or costly apparel.[16]

Ephesians uses a metaphysical language that diminishes 1 Timothy's opposition between material and spirit. It courts citizens of a flourishing market city by deploying metaphor to negotiate between visions of capital acquisition and those of salvation.[17] Paul tells the mercantile community that in Christ people will gain "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according

to his *rich* grace: Whereby he hath been *abundant* toward us in all wisdom and understanding" (Eph. 1:7–8, my emphasis). Trust in the word and the gospel follows from being sealed with the "holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of our *inheritance* until the redemption of that liberty *purchased* unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13–4). These riches are simultaneously the signs of grace and exposition of the Word: to the Apostle is "this grace given that [he] should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). Dominating Ephesians (and not other Pauline epistles, except the related Colossians) is an incarnational language in which the marketplace becomes an image of Christ's actions, and mercantile terms enhance the rhetoric of the Word.

Although Paul is certainly not suggesting that Ephesian commodity trading points the way to salvation, his figuration rhetorically elides market economies with the sacred, material goods with spiritual ones, riches with *logos*. His language invites a writer of comedies to tease apart his metaphors. In *Errors*, physical things may both invoke and possibly *be* sources of release from the present self into a better one, as people escape from the physical world of death into a "newness of [eternal] life" (Rom. 6:4, 23). Feeling "smothered in errors," Antipholus hopes that if he luxuriates in Luciana's hair, he may "[gain] by death" (III.ii.51). The "fates have marked / [Egeon] to bear the extremity of dire mishap" (I.i.140–1) unless, of course, he can "ransom" himself with 1000 marks, using a term perhaps borrowed from the antithesis in 1 Timothy, noted above, between Christ as ransom, and gold. Antipholus imagines that he will lose yet gain a self if he discovers a drop of water that shows his reflection:

> 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.
>
> (I.ii.35–40)

This image subtly links his desire for a new self to the acquisition of commodities because it emerges as he imagines himself in an "ocean" during a "quest." Given the discussions in scene one of hostility between sea trading nations, this journey also invokes mercantile missions.

Although the Reformation brought with it a radical devaluation of images, hostility to transubstantiation, and continual controversies about the use of "papist" artifacts and vestments in religious ritual and the expression of faith, it nonetheless preserved Pauline metaphors that blur strict distinctions between desires for *things* and for spiritual salvation. Although John Calvin is radical in his division between the outward self and works—which play no role in salvation—and the "inner man," like Paul, Calvin borrows the metaphor of Matthew 5:5: "The point of our quarrel ... is this: they teach that the Israelites deemed the possession of the Land of Canaan their highest and ultimate blessedness, and that after the revelation of Christ it typified for us their heavenly *inheritance*. We contend, on the contrary, that in the earthly possession they enjoyed, they looked, as in a mirror, upon their future *inheritance* they believed to have been prepared for them in heaven."[18]

Calvin's disdain for physical icons and the doctrine of works does not mean that he is incapable of imagining that spiritual elements inhere within physical representations. He does not completely dismiss "shadows," "images," and "mirrors"—his preferred terms for the failed, imprecise truths (associated with physical icons and the doctrine of works) examined by the Hebrew Bible. Calvin accords them significance because in his role as Word, Christ makes visible signs into sacred figures through a kind of sacred metaphor superior to conventional discourse: as "this mystery of Christ's secret union with the devout is by nature incomprehensible, he shows its figure and image in visible signs best adapted to our small capacity. Indeed, by giving guarantees and tokens he makes it as certain for us *as if* we had seen it with our own eyes" (2:1361). Speaking later of the dove as a figure of the holy spirit, Calvin makes a similar point: "for though the symbol differs in essence from the thing signified ... because it not only symbolizes the thing it has been consecrated to represent as a bare and empty token, but also truly exhibits it, why may its name not rightly belong to the thing?" (2:1385).

For Calvin, physically tangible, visible, and verbal figures thus underscore the inadequacy of images and things; yet during sacred discourse tangible figures can exhibit the holy thing itself. In usual practice, the inadequacy of figures arises from the fact that Satan and sin degrade the efficacy of visible signs and sacraments (2:1295). *Comedy of Errors* echoes Calvin when the two Syracuseans fear that witches inhabit Ephesus because Nell knows the many marks—one could say figures—on Dromio's body

(III.ii.138–42); and later because Adriana refers to Syracusean Antipholus as her husband. Because visible, physical signs are failing, the men conclude that satanic forces are separating them from signs of identity in their flesh.[19] We are reminded that we cannot assume that signs of things have meaning or value. But we are also reminded of the opposite—that people regularly *imagine* connections between physical signs and spirit or essence.

Concerns about the power possessed by physical signs to signify meaning emerge in part from cultural moves to erase connections to idolatrous Catholicism. But other issues also motivate Puritan condemnations of physical signs, particularly those directed at the stage. In addition to well-known objections against cross-dressing and other forms of "idolatry," some Puritan writers generally deride that which we comprehend through sight in favor of hearing.[20] For example, Anthony Munday fears that evil comes in at the ears "but more at the eies, by those two open windows death breakth into the soul … Things heard do lightlie passe awaie, but the tokens of that which wee have seene, saith Petrarch, sticke fast in us whether wee wil or no."[21] Things and commodities, embodied in props, costumes, dramatic gestures, even bodies—all of which we perceive with our eyes—are then implicitly dangerous.

Philip Stubbs seems to imply one reason for this danger: these things are false signs that can blur order and confuse comprehension. Stubbs complains about a "sorte" of people wearing "excesse of Apparell, who for the most parte so farre surpasse, either noble, honorable, or worshypfull, russling in Silks, Velvets, Satens [etc.] … with all things els, that any noble, honorable, or worshypfull Man doth, or may weare, so as the one cannot easily be discerned from the other."[22] Munday's remarks about acting indicate that *bodily* gestures provoke him into similar concerns about people being led into errors of judgment (although for him the problem relates more to moral than social regulation). He warns, "gesturing of a plaier, which Tullie termeth the eloquence of the bodie, is of force to move, and prepare a man to that which is il."[23] In his preface, Stubbs argues that he is not against exercises of pleasure, including plays, interludes, dancing, and even gaming (the "*thynges* in themselves"), but that he opposes perverted *use* of them.

Despite Stubbs's and Munday's antitheatrical vitriol, they are careful not to alienate the new consumer groups courted by Puritans: the kinds of merchants for whom Thomas Dekker and Thomas Deloney made Simon Eyre a hero—Eyre's fortunes almost miraculously grow when he has the good sense to buy and

profit from a Dutch ship laden with dry goods consumer items.[24] Their Calvinist conception of signs negotiates a divide between aniconic worship, idolatrous engagement with commodities and seen things, and plays associated with stuffs because they display goods, bodies, and images.[25] According to Stubbs, the Lord made rich ornaments so that those who have been blessed may show forth much, including the "glorie of the Lord, the Author of all goodnesse."[26] Both Stubbs and Munday attack the use and rhetorical effect of things rather than the presence of such commodities. This tendency resembles Calvin's initiative, but follows from different concerns. Whereas Calvin envisions a sacred force that at times transforms the inherent nature of objects to control the inevitable error of their signifying, Stubbs and Munday want rules to manage the use of such objects because they fear misapplication and deregulation. Like the seventeenth-century Puritan gentry, these Puritan antitheatricalists grant the regulated use of things a value. Neither they nor Calvin ascetically condemn them in every case. In fact, their concerns attest to the power of things to move people. In the context of slowly waning cultural memories and rapidly proliferating household stuffs, it is not hard to imagine that listeners embrace a kind of nostalgia when they hear Puritan depictions of things as idols. Such attacks spur audiences to imagine a spiritual realm in which, prior to the advent of devilry to which *Comedy of Errors* alludes, physical signs—goods, bodies, props, images—were not divorced from their sacred meanings. Because comedy generically delivers a world that people desire, it is especially well suited to imagining a world in which things can bring redemption.

II

Comedy of Errors explores the relationship between the increased attachment to things and a resistance to aniconic forces which, as we have seen, is not itself monolithic or the same in every context. Whether or not demand sparked trade or vice versa, as the seventeenth century began there was both a huge increase in the availability of consumer goods and also a shift in their origins so that Asian commodities became much more prevalent.[27] As if to declare his interest in the enhanced presence of commodities in everyday life, Shakespeare sets *The Comedy of Errors* in the city known as the capital of Roman Asia, located along major trade routes.

Activity in Shakespeare's Ephesus echoes fears, visible in Acts 19, that Paul's message will reduce the financial well-being of craftsmen; the action also echoes attacks from Puritan polemicists. On the one hand, there is an undercurrent of hostility toward merchants and thus implicitly, toward their wares. Yet on the other hand, Shakespeare gives us a world in which everyone except the Abbess seems to yearn for the stuffs and money merchants carry.

Indeed, yearning for stuffs is implicitly sanctioned by the structure of the action itself. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Egeus's hostility to rhymes, moonlit singing, stolen fantasy, and the exchange of love tokens (sensual commodities, enumerated through several verses) presents a *dislike* of things as one of the blocks to happiness. In *Errors*, enmity between the two cities is the initial block, but there are suggestions that this block in turn derives from antimercantile attitudes. According to the Ephesian Duke, the discord between the cities is caused by "the rancorous outrage of [the Syracusean] Duke / To merchants, our well-dealing countrymen" (I.i.7–8). If we believe him, a Syracusean's dislike of merchants anciently created the block. Whatever the cause, trade has been shut off ("no traffic to our adverse towns" [I.i.15]), which can only have reduced the availability of consumer goods. Antagonized by sensual commodities, Egeus might have hoped for just such a situation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Removal of the block in *Comedy of Errors* would increase the flow of commodities as well as increase the happiness—profit?—of merchants. In fact, as the play ends, Dromio asks the man he believes to be his master whether he should fetch his "stuff" from shipboard (V.i.409). He is referring to goods hidden at the Centaur lest Ephesian law confiscate them. Although Antipholus tells Dromio to wait, this detail emphasizes that modification of the comedy's initially harsh law not only helps families to reunite, but also renews people's pleasure in goods.

Because cultural and personal contexts inevitably shape the meaning of such consumer stuffs as jewelry and clothes, experiences may persuade people to assign meaning and value to them primarily based on processes decoupled from logic. For example, they may assign causative powers to items that do not possess them, or grow sentimentally attached to materials because of associations with them. Departures from logic when assigning cause and effect may thus produce and derive from a spiritual or ecstatic way of thinking about causal links. Such processes are stimulated in people when they compare their cache of lived experience with

their desires: they dwell on the gulf between their present state and a promised one. Syracusean Antipholus's ecstatic fervor when he praises Luciana is fueled not only by sexual desire, but also by a belief that she could "create [him] new" (III.ii.39), that is, reconstitute the dissolved drop of water he feels himself to be and make him reborn. Comparing lived experience with desires generates spiritual longings throughout *Errors*. In Ephesus, a market which proves frustratingly confusing and unsympathetic to human needs stirs prayers for a superior kind of empathy.

An almost fetishistic set of longings seems to drive both characters and the plot in response to the illogical appearance of Ephesus. Adriana, for example, imagines she would give up the gold chain if only her husband were to become faithful: "Would that alone o'love he would detain, / So he would keep fair quarter with his bed!" (II.i.106–7). This exclamation reveals a fantasy that giving up the necklace would magically keep Antipholus loyal forever, even if her subsequent words show that she knows it is just a wish. Throughout the play, people associate giving, giving up, or getting things and gold with deliverance from woe. The gold chain figures largely in this set of fantasies, almost as a kind of talisman. It seems to be an early version of Desdemona's handkerchief, itself functioning as a kind of religious icon.[28] When Syracusean Antipholus accidentally receives the chain from Angelo, he recognizes its real power while speaking of it in terms recalling Paul's metaphors in Romans: "I see a man here needs not live by shifts, / When in the streets he meets such *golden gifts*" (III.ii.181–2). Shakespeare elsewhere links such embrace of opportunity to the denial of logic in favor of miracle; Syracusean Antipholus's response to Adriana's proffered gifts rehearses Sebastian's response to Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, a play more explicitly associated with Christian holiday and miracle. Syracusean Antipholus declares:

> What *error* drives our eyes and ears amiss?
> Until I know this sure uncertainty,
> I'll entertain the offered fallacy.
>
> (II.ii.183–5)

When Olivia gives both herself and a pearl to Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*, we hear,

> [I am] ready to distrust my eyes
> And wrangle with my reason that persuades me
> To any other trust but that I am mad.
> (*Twelfth Night*, IV.iii.13–5)

Dromio provides another kind of illogic on the cause of such effects. He imagines them in "fairyland" and feels himself "transformed" by the magic of goblins, elves, and evil spirits (II.ii.188–94).[29] Although Dromio has it wrong, his words reinforce, through negative exemplum, a magical or spiritual interpretation of his master's exclamation. This attitude is implied even in fantasies of Adriana: that money, things, and suddenly available partners may be signifiers of a transformative magic. Dromio's description recalls the practitioners of "curious arts" with whom Acts contrasts Paul for his healing of the sick (Acts 19:11–3). We see Dromio as limited because he can only think on the magicians and their evils while forgetting that found money and things can signify something greater. His much more optimistic master aligns himself with the "rich grace," "liberty purchased," and "unsearchable riches" of Ephesians that Acts depicts in Paul's miraculous cures.

The characters perhaps excluded from redemption, and certainly excluded from reunions, are unable to think of the physical as anything more than that; unlike Syracusean Antipholus and Adriana, they do not see icons as both meaningful and as having financial worth. For example, when Syracusean Antipholus fails to deliver the chain to his brother's Courtesan, she does not compare herself to it or to its fate, as Adriana likens herself to an enameled jewel. Nor does the Courtesan imagine the chain, as Adriana does, to be an emblem that can be exchanged or sacrificed to establish fidelity and love, or even to bear the meaning of a relationship. In fact, all she can do is associate the chain with another physical icon, the diamond ring she gave Ephesian Antipholus:

> Give me the ring of mine you had at dinner
> Or, for my diamond, the chain you promised
> And I'll be gone, sir, and not trouble you.
> (IV.iii.66–8)

She continues,

> Now, out of doubt Antipholus is mad,
> Else would he never so demean himself.
> A ring he hath of mine worth forty ducats,
> And for the same he promised me a chain.
> . . . . . .
> Forty ducats is too much to lose.
>
> (IV.iii.79–94)

The Courtesan's speech is impoverished, much like the language of Shylock that marks his exclusion from a Christian marketplace that trades in metaphors as well as goods.[30] Worth for her always means market value; exchange (of which redemption is a type) generates no surplus of meaning; and things signify nothing but their financial value, and nothing of history, memory, or desire (for either economic or spiritual gain). *Not* to see more in things marks a person as unavailable for the "deliverance" promised by the Abbess at the end of the play, or even for a named identity (which the Courtesan lacks). It is as if Shakespeare wants to argue that although commodities can enfold and enable mysteries, only an elect can find them there.

As in many comedies of mistaken identity, including the *Menaechmi*, characters in *Comedy of Errors* are not only confused by the people they meet and things they find, but also about the relationship between bodies and identity. Compared to their counterparts in Plautus's play, Shakespeare's characters seem particularly confused about their own bodies. Throughout the action, they engage in a variety of means for identifying and measuring, not just things but also themselves, using a range of figurations. The drop of water to which Syracusean Antipholus compares himself, and to which Adriana then compares his brother, hints at a narcissistic problem with boundaries, as Thomas MacCary argues using a psychoanalytic context, and which Meredith Skura considers to be an issue throughout Shakespeare's plays.[31] It would be a stretch also to compare the characters' comparisons to those made by John Donne's speakers who see a universe of significance in another's eye, or a map of the world on a body. But in fact, Antipholus, Adriana, and Donne's speakers all understand themselves by cataloging the qualities of objects or lovers with which they identify. Though especially true for Donne, they all struggle for a language that makes visible signs into figures that bespeak their value, or into indices that would help them find some transcendent meaning to themselves.

As Paul does with his metaphors for grace and salvation, characters in *Comedy of Errors* identify their meaning by striking an unusual balance between physical and metaphysical assessments of value. Compared to some other plays, the kinds of measurements that people use in *Comedy of Errors* are not as market based. In *Troilus and Cressida*, for example, characters also seek themselves primarily through comparisons to others (prodded by Pandarus, Troilus compares Cressida to Helen in particular, while Cressida in turn compares Troilus to Hector and Paris); they compare them to ideals, and even compare themselves to their own reputations.[32] Characters in *Comedy of Errors* similarly use comparison to test their own worth, but they also *yearn* for more transcendent values than those pushed by Pandarus. When she first appears, Adriana, for example, sadly imagines herself an enameled jewel, with appearance and worth that always decline. But she then thinks of gold, which she believes to be an absolute standard that retains its luster when others handle it (II.i.108–14). However, both our own commodities markets and many loci in Shakespeare tell us that her character cannot attain the transcendence she imagines for gold. Gold standards, particularly when figured as women, are frequently degraded in the plays. In *Titus Andronicus* Aaron incites Chiron and Demetrius to rape while citing Lavinia's likeness to gold (consider "Lavinia's treasury").[33] Additionally, there is the bag of gold Aaron plants in the pit (itself associated with the female) to support his accusation that Martius and Quintus killed Bassianus.

However, because of Shakespeare's playfulness with Paul's language of riches, purchase, and inheritance, the comedy imagines several times that gold does indeed bring redemption or deliverance. Syracusean Dromio gives his master "the angels that you sent for to deliver you" (IV.iii.38–9) and Adriana sent this money to "redeem" her husband (IV.iv.83). Unlike Richard II, who in the eponymous play dreams of having "in heavenly pay / A glorious angel" to help him triumph (while the pun calls attention to his shortage of money), Adriana has real gold coins which, were they able to reach the right recipient, *could* make a difference.[34] The use of gold can enlighten us about people whose gestures often send messages perhaps clearer than their words: Adriana's speed at sending gold to bail out her husband surprises the audience and tells us that she had more love, less rage, and more of a bond to her husband than her earlier words indicated. The gold provides a physical image and rhetorical statement of her enduring marital love. To paraphrase her husband's remark to Angelo (IV.i.25–6),

their love may last long if chained together. In Ephesus gold can make deliverance possible: return of the chain enables a renewal of Adriana's marriage and, at least temporarily, it affects both brothers' deliverance from having quite limited selves to gaining more richly connected ones.

Physical and spiritual selves unite when the Antipholus brothers finally appear together. In amazement 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?
>
> (V.i.333–5)

"[G]enius" itself means "attendant spirit," and thus underscores the sense that with the two male bodies present, we miraculously see a transparency between physical sign and the spiritual essence it represents. This is the true miracle of Ephesus: after four acts in which physical tokens *almost* deliver people, we are seemingly told that a physical body actually does.

However, because the two actors aren't really identical brothers, it isn't their bodies, but purchased things—temporary vestments, makeup, and imitated gestures—that create the twins. When the Abbess/mother declares that this recognition has saved her from her "heavy burden ne'er [before] delivered" (V.i.403), her words recall Antipholus's Puritan sense of sinfulness that, when talking to Luciana, he is "smothered in errors, feeble, shallow, weak" (III.ii.35). Shakespeare is actually undermining Puritans while using a Protestant tradition to do so. We see clothing, artifacts, icons, and stage props make a redemptive agent metaphorically though not actually present. These things effectively signify the transformative nature of another physical presence. Physical vestments, commodities, and fetishes such as the chain contribute, in the Abbess's words, to a new "nativity" (V.i.404)[35]

Part of the satisfaction we feel with *The Comedy of Errors* derives from Shakespeare's deft blending of diverse dramatic kinds and his ability to draw a unity from them by the conclusion.[36] Pleasure derives, too, from the fact that renewal of the social order in Ephesus is expressed by the disposition of goods and money; and that people emotionally satisfied with their natures get rewards that match their deliverance to happiness. The transfer of wealth anticipates Shakespeare's sunniest mature comedies: Viola will marry the Duke and her brother the wealthy Countess. With her father returned to Court, Rosalind will not only regain

wealth through him, but also from Orlando, to whom Oliver has bequeathed his fortune. With Hero, Claudio gains wealth and family connections, from which Benedick will also benefit through his alliance with Beatrice. And there is the immense wealth that Bassanio will gain by marrying Portia, whom he always knew as "a lady richly left."[37] Similarly, many characters profit at the end of *Comedy of Errors*. No one will have to spend a thousand marks to gain Egeon's life; Angelo (and then the merchant) gain their 200 ducats; Ephesian Antipholus needs no bail; and possessions are returned to rightful owners. One assumes, too, that the wealthy Antipholus of Syracuse will provide enhanced support for his father, a man who cannot himself furnish more than 100 marks against his death sentence. Perhaps Syracusean Antipholus is relatively relaxed about leaving his "stuff" on shipboard because he trusts that his Ephesian brother will help care for him; certainly he will benefit from the Duke being a "patron" of his brother. The recognition "past thought of human reason" (V.i.189) ushers in a happy fiscal settlement for all. The financial ordering signifies the nativity long awaited by the Abbess, or is the product of it.

Although *Comedy of Errors* precedes the Lord Chamberlain's Men's 1594 incorporation and the shareholders' agreement that brought Shakespeare himself great wealth, it is nonetheless the product of a man whose goals were already set.[38] As David Bevington, Stephen Greenblatt, and others describe him, Shakespeare was a man who had ambitions of all kinds: to best his theatrical competition, gain the status of gentleman, and to make a lot of money. Much has also recently been made of Shakespeare's possible Catholic affiliations.[39] *The Comedy of Errors* is consistent with this current speculation about the person we imagine as Shakespeare. It reads psychological identity through things people own or strive to get, and it assumes that appropriately directed ownership identifies a stable social order. It insists on "things" being unnecessary, as Ephesian Antipholus momentarily says at the conclusion, while at the same time portraying them as inextricably wedded to the meaning of who we are. Neither a Catholic nor a Protestant play, it gestures in both directions: to that which is beyond reason and does not need physical evidence; and, particularly in an age of increasingly available consumer goods, to the crucial importance that artifacts have in defining the meaning of self, spirit, and world. One can imagine Shakespeare smiling while reading the Epistles of Paul, Protestant doctrine, and polemics. *Comedy of Errors* uses aniconic language against itself to remind audiences that images and commodities have power.

NOTES

An earlier draft of this essay was presented during the seminar on "Ephemeral Materials" at the 2008 Shakespeare Association of America meetings. I want particularly to thank the organizers, Elizabeth Williamson and Jane Degenhardt, as well as the respondent, Debora Shuger, for their useful suggestions.

[1] Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 5th edn. (New York: Longman, 2003), V.i.105, III.ii.35. Subsequent references to *Comedy of Errors* will appear parenthetically by act, scene, and line number, and all subsequent references to Shakespeare are to this edition.

[2] Critics do not always agree with the characters. For example, in "Marking Time: Memory and the Market in *The Comedy of Errors*," *SQ* 56, 2 (Summer 2005): 176–207, Shankar Raman says that "what seems to haunt the play is the fantasized and nightmarish threat of the market, of a space and a process of doubling, exchange, and possession, wherein people, things, identities, and attributes endlessly circulate" (p. 193). I argue in this essay that Shakespeare's view is much more sanguine. Arthur Kinney, in "Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and the Nature of Kinds," *SP* 85, 1 (Winter 1988): 29–52, describes the fine balance that the play strikes between mercantile and spiritual points of view.

[3] Douglas Lanier, "'Stigmatical in Making': The Material Character of *The Comedy of Errors*," in *The Comedy of Errors: Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Miola, Shakespeare Criticism 18 (New York: Garland, 1997), pp. 299–334, especially 307 and 310. Originally published in *ELR* 23, 1 (Winter 1993): 81–112.

[4] Gyorg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1968), p. 90.

[5] Lukács, p. 110.

[6] Michael O'Connell provides an excellent review of the ways in which hostility to images was more generally tied to hostility toward icons and *things* in general, in *The Idolatrous Eye, Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000).

[7] S. A. M. Adshead, *Material Culture in Europe and China, 1400–1800: The Rise of Consumerism* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 209–10. Unlike Adshead, who relies on literary, philosophical, and theological texts rather than on the history of trade, O'Connell describes a parallel tradition of responses to physical objects. He argues that tensions about the relationship between word and image existed from the beginning of Christianity (pp. 36–62).

[8] For important works on the growth of trade and consumption of consumer products, see Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (New York: Routledge, 2002); *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986); *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993); Carole Shammus, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation*, Ideas in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994); Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973); and Adshead.

[9] Patrick Geary, "Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics," in *The Social Life of Things*, pp. 169–91.

[10] Smith, p. 79. See also J. T. Cliffe, *The Yorkshire Gentry from the Reformation to the Civil War*, Univ. of London Historical Studies 25 (London: Athlone Press, 1969), pp. 278 and 281.

[11] Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), p. 8.

[12] Jones and Stallybrass note, for example, that Dutch Protestants associated Catholic sacramental objects with African fetishes, and "what was demonized in the concept of the fetish was the possibility that history, memory, and desire might be materialized in objects that are touched and loved and worn" (pp. 9–10). I would apply this attitude equally to both sacred and secular goods.

[13] See the historians cited in note 8. The meaning felt to inhere within objects of course varies. For example, Smith and Appardurai focus on social signification; Adshead on concepts of value and a quasi-linguistic function served by objects; and Berry on status and pleasure.

[14] Simon Schama, "Perishable Commodities: Dutch Still-life Painting and the 'Empire of Things,'" in Brewer and Porter, pp. 478–88.

[15] The only other Pauline epistle thick with similar metaphoric patterns is Colossians, long seen by biblical scholars as closely related to Ephesians.

[16] The Geneva Bible, 1 Tim. 2:6 and 9, my emphasis. All biblical references are to The Geneva Bible, accessed at *http://www.genevabible.org/Geneva.html*. Subsequent references to the Geneva Bible will appear parenthetically by book, chapter, and verse.

[17] There is considerable disagreement about the extent to which Paul was actually trained in Greco-Roman rhetoric, and also about the extent to which the Epistles are constructed as letters or according to specific rhetorical forms. See, for example, Stanley E. Porter, "Paul of Tarsus and His Letters," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330B.C.–A.D. 400*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 533–85. However, there is a general recognition that Paul tailors the appeal of each epistle to the specific community to which he is writing. See, for example, Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2007); and Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

[18] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:450. Subsequent references to *Institutes of the Christian Religion* are from this edition and will appear parenthetically by volume and page number.

[19] The perception that witches inhabit Ephesus derives from Acts 19:19 and less directly from the assertion that evil spirits wield power there (Acts 19:12–6). In the discussions that follow, I occasionally draw on remarks about *bodies* when speaking about the play's attitude toward *things* because I share Susan Zimmerman's view, based on her research into corpses, that anxieties about images shape responses to bodies. Attitudes toward physical signs and spirit surely, too, shape people's beliefs about the ways in which bodies signify. See Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2005), pp. 24–89.

[20] O'Connell, pp. 89–116, argues that as Protestantism and Puritanism gained strength in England, text rather than image became increasingly associated with divinity. Jonas Barish, although not studying Puritans *per se*, describes a Platonic-Stoic-Christian tradition that inspires a general seventeenth-century hostility to the stage from which we can also extrapolate hostility to images (*The Antitheatrical Prejudice* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985], pp. 1–190). Even Ben Jonson, certainly not a Puritan but living during an age increasingly shaped by such discourse, was uncomfortable with the power of images. Although he praises "picture," calling it "the invention of Heaven" and "most a kinne to Nature," he worries about it too: "the Pen is more noble, then the Pencill. For that can speake to the Understanding; the other, but to the Sense" ("Discoveries," *Ben Jonson, The Poems, The Prose Works*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52], 8:610, lines 1523–4, 1514–6).

[21] Anthony Munday, *A Second and Third Blast of Retait from Plaies and Theaters*, The English Stage, Attack and Defense, 1577–1730 (New York: Garland, 1973), pp. 95–6.

[22] Philip Stubbs, *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583; rprt. New York: Johnson Reprints, 1972), preface (unpaged). O'Connell, pp. 36–62, has an excellent discussion about the ways in which iconoclasm and antitheatrical prejudices derive from the relationship between word and image in the transition from iconic Catholicism to aniconic Protestantism.

[23] Munday, pp. 95–6.

[24] E. K. Chambers's point is that such Puritan complaints were rants against scurrility, rather than tracts grounded in ideas. This notion applies to Munday and John Rainoldes more than to Stubbs (Chambers, "Humanism and Puritanism," in *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923], 1:236–68, 55).

[25] The historical context would suggest that some of this tension derives from the historical transition from home production to purchases, with the concomitant change from things being associated with use value to their being associated with exchange value. This argument is made by Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 19–51. Alternatively, some argue that the increasing variety of luxury goods undermined means for managing sensuality, thus engendering profit with anxiety (Smith, p. 71).

[26] Stubbs, sig. C3r.

[27] See the historical studies enumerated in notes 7 and 8. See also John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought from Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 1–131. Werner Sombart, in *Luxury and Capitalism*, trans. W. R. Dittmar (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1967), pp. 113–36, and Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 1–130, 162–261, counter the Weberian and Marxist thesis that material culture was the prerequisite rather than the result of industrial capitalism. Prior to 1600, despite trade with Asia, such commerce was "precarious, inelastic, and opaque, featuring goods of low volume and high price." Imported commodities were not central to daily life. They gained an increasingly prominent place

with the arrival of goods from America, especially sugar and tobacco, and with the growing importance of the Dutch and English East India Companies (Smith, pp. 6–7).

[28] Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 125–55.

[29] For a thorough discussion of magic and its connection to fears of devilry in the play, see Kent Cartwright, "Language, Magic, the Dromios, and *The Comedy of Errors*," *SEL* 47, 2 (Spring 2007): 331–54.

[30] This characterization of Christians in *The Merchant of Venice* is made by Frederick Turner in *Shakespeare's Twenty-First Century Economics: The Morality of Love and Money* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), p. 86.

[31] Perhaps the most commented on image in the play, the drop of water has focused many writers on the psychological challenges faced by Antipholus or the psychological patterns examined by the play. W. Thomas MacCary's psychoanalytic analysis draws on theories of narcissism, in *Friends and Lovers, The Phenomenology of Desire in Shakespearean Comedy* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 81–90. For a Lacanian perspective, see Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze, Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), p. 79; and also see Lynn Enterline, *The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 198–200. In her study of psychological challenges faced by actors, Meredith Skura more generally exposes patterns of desire and fear in *Comedy of Errors*. The association with maternal desire and fear bespeaks Shakespeare's interest in narcissistic personalities and the boundary problems that accompany them (*Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993], pp. 137 and 205).

[32] For the last, most postmodern example, see Linda Charnes, *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 70–102.

[33] Shakespeare, *The Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus*, II.i.131.

[34] Shakespeare, *Richard II*, III.ii.60.

[35] Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 replays this dynamic by joining the discourse of deliverance to the language of riches and class, all in the context of a narcissistic recognition. As in *Comedy of Errors*, deliverance occurs when imagination transforms another man into a double and makes him present through metaphor:

> When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> *Featured like him*
> . . . . . .
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
> Like to the lark at break of day arising

From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.
(lines 1–14, my emphasis)

[36] See Kinney, who tracks the mingling of several genres within the play.

[37] Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, I.i.161.

[38] For a brief survey of London theatrical companies and the events leading to the formation of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, see Bevington, pp. xlviii–1.

[39] On Shakespeare's financial and social ambitions, see especially Bevington, *Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 6–8, 12–4, 212–36, and Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), pp. 361–9, who, like many others, support the currently accepted picture of Shakespeare as an astute businessman. Roslyn Lander Knutson, *Playing Companies and Commerce in Shakespeare's Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 1–74, 103–26, describes the organization of the King's Men that helped build considerable personal wealth for Shakespeare. In his imaginative biography, Greenblatt is a strong spokesman for Shakespeare's Catholicism, unlike Bevington.