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**Call #: P99 .C275 (1993) v.13**

**Book/Journal Title: RSSI :  
RECHERCHES S{U00E9}MIOTIQUES**

**Volume: 13 Issue: 3**

**Month/Year: 1993 Pages: 47-**

**Article Title: Shakespeare and the  
Bible: The Comedy of Errors.'**

**Article Author: Parker, Patricia**



## RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur montre comment Northrop Frye traite d'une des principales préoccupations des théoriciens et critiques littéraires des dernières décennies, soit la présumée incapacité du langage à faire davantage qu'un simple retour sur lui-même. L'approche développée ici reprend, dans un premier temps, l'emphase persistante mise par Paul de Man sur l'auto-référentialité du langage, le principe de négation et de non-coïncidence, et la compare avec celle mise par Frye sur les références centrifuges et centripètes des textes littéraires. L'auteur démontre ensuite comment la théorie des modes linguistiques (descriptif, conceptuel, rhétorique ou idéologique, imaginaire ou poétique, et kérigmatique) développée par Frye permet une prise en compte lucide des distinctions et interrelations entre les modes. La reconnaissance de la nature particulière, ainsi que des limites, propres à chacun des modes en relation aux autres est nécessaire pour comprendre jusqu'où les mots peuvent nous mener. Dans la pensée de Frye, et tout spécialement dans ses trois derniers ouvrages, les frontières du langage verbal sont repoussées bien au-delà du principe de négation auquel de Man accorde les critères de validité et de fiabilité.

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## Shakespeare and the Bible: *The Comedy of Errors*

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*The Comedy of Errors* is still part of the Shakespeare canon whose wider resonances have yet to be explored, despite recent attempts to rescue it from the long-standing charge of simple-minded "farce." What is particularly striking about it is that it combines a classical plot structure from Plautine comedy (doubling the *Menaechmi*'s mistaken identities by featuring not one but two sets of twins) with an extraordinary concentration of biblical echoes still largely uninterpreted. My own experience with this play, however, repeatedly convinces me of the critical importance — stressed from beginning to end in the work of Northrop Frye — of typological networks of biblical allusion as an interpretive tool, in this case in relation both to wordplay and to larger framing structures. What the greater part of this essay therefore sets out to do is to chart the multiple biblical echoes that literally "stuff" this Shakespearean "farce," in the etymological sense of the term Frye once humorously applied to his own work (Frye 1971: 7); but then, however, as an important second step, to turn from this biblical frame to its disjunctive juxtaposition with other very different discourses, in ways not simply recuperable within a hierarchical sense of the Bible as cultural monolith or authoritative single voice.

Several years ago, I suggested (Parker 1983: 38-58) the centrality of a passage from Ephesians 2 for this comedy set in Ephesus and its plot of alien and citizen, of a family separated until a final Recognition Scene. Ephesians' second chapter speaks of the Law and its dividing line between "alien" Gentile and "citizen" Jew, a division as absolute as that between alien Syracusan and local Ephesian at this *Comedy's* beginning. But it also goes on to speak of the "cross" as breaking down the "wall of partition" between the two, replacing separation, partition or division by a reconciliation in which the "twain" are made "one," the former aliens or strangers equally adopted heirs (Ephesians 2: 12-22).<sup>1</sup> *The Comedy of Errors* opens

with what Frye (1965: 73) characterized as a familiar beginning of Shakespearean comedy — a “harsh law” which here condemns the crosser between Syracuse and Ephesus to death — a “doom” (I.i.2) from which the condemned Egeon gains a day’s reprieve only after he responds to the Duke’s request that he “dilate” his narrative “at full” (I.i.122).<sup>2</sup> This space of dilation that enables the deferral of end and “doom” becomes the space in which the “comedy of errors” then proceeds to unfold, before frame story and intervening Plautine comedy finally come together at 5 o’clock, at the place of expected “doom” that turns out to be a place of “nativity” (V.i.405). In the interim, the mutual recognition of citizen and alien twins (Ephesian Antipholus and Dromio and their like-named Syracusan counterparts) is delayed by the obstacle of an actual wall or partition, before arrival at the *Comedy’s* final acts, which are filled with allusions to the biblical interim of waiting for “redemption,” traditionally described as a period of “dilation” or delay before Last Judgment “Doom.”<sup>3</sup>

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In order to chart the biblical allusions that suggest this larger structural analogue, we need to consider more concretely the play’s opening scene and what follows from it. As with many Shakespearean openings — *All’s Well*, for example, or *Twelfth Night* — it is heavy with the sense of impending end, the “doom” to which Egeon is condemned by “law” (I.i.25). Its opening is an immediately foreclosing couplet, allowing only a constricted space between (“*Egeon*: Proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall, / And by the doom of death end woes and all” [I.i.1-2]). The “doom” of this “law” is soon joined by Egeon’s own death-wish in the same closed verse form, in lines that link the duration of “words” with travail or “woes” (“*Egeon*: Yet this my comfort; when your words are done, / My woes end likewise with the evening sun” [26-27]). The scene that unfolds after the announcement of this “doom,” however, by contrast calls attention to its extended length and the putting off of threatened ends. Egeon explains how he sought “delays” from an “immediate death” (I.i.68) by the stratagem that led to the “unjust divorce” (104) of his family’s two halves. When he is granted space to tell his tale (“say in brief the cause / Why thou departedst from thy native home, / And for what cause thou cam’st to Ephesus” [28-30]), his response echoes the *locus classicus* not of a “brief” but instead of famously protracted discourse, the wanderer Aeneas’s response to the request that he dilate his narrative at full.<sup>4</sup> What Harry Levin (1965: xxix) called Egeon’s “protracted expository narration” continues even after Egeon himself asks leave to stop (“O, let me say no more!” [94]) but

the Duke begs him to continue (“Nay, forward, old man, *do not break off so*, / For we may pity, though not pardon thee” [96-97]); and it calls repeated attention to its own length (“At length [...] at length” [88, 112]). It also highlights the tension between speed, haste and immediate or premature ending and extension, postponement or delay. Only, he says, because of his wife’s impatient “daily motions for our home return” (I.i.59) did his family set out prematurely on the sea (“Unwilling I agreed. Alas! *too soon* / We came aboard” [60-61]). Of the tempest they encountered, he relates that he would “gladly have embrac’d” an “immediate death” (68-69) at sea, if the weeping of his wife and babes had not forced him to “seek delays” (74) through a device which, while delaying death, also led to their partition or “divorce” (104), the family’s division into separate halves.

Egeon’s even tediously extended narrative also contains terms which become suggestive figures for the play that ensues.<sup>5</sup> His wife Emilia’s pregnancy with twins, which he calls periphrastically the “pleasing punishment that women bear” (46), becomes, by the final act, a figure for the “travail” (the female counterpart here of “travel”) in the intervening years, as well as for the duration of the play itself before the “nativity” that reunites the family’s divided parts (V.i.401-405: Emilia’s “Thirty-three years have I but gone in travail / Of you, my sons, and till this present hour / My heavy burthen ne’er delivered”). The line’s periphrastic avoidance of more direct naming links pregnancy as one particular form of “bearing” to the manifold other kinds of “bearing” and “forebearing” to be encountered as the play proceeds.<sup>6</sup>

The delaying of “immediate death” in Egeon’s tale is also linked to the splitting that, by severing the family’s halves, leads to his errancy or wandering: “Thus have you heard me *sever’d* from my bliss, / That by misfortunes was my life *prolong’d*, / To tell sad stories of my own mishaps” (118-20). Egeon’s words here connect the earlier prolonging of life and woes with the prolonging of his discourse as “sad stories” of travail. But the dilation of Egeon’s narrative in this scene — of the loss first of his wife and eldest son and then of his youngest, gone in “quest” (129) of his twin — leads not just to a reiterating of woes but to the opening up of a space within the play’s initial sense of “doom.” The opening of the play thus contains a play on opening — as commencement, but also as the creation of a space of “dilation” in all the senses introduced in this first scene. Egeon is given a reprieve from the “doom” of death (150-154) in order to find the “ransom” (22) or “redemption” that would lift his condemning sentence, a reprieve he himself, however, is able to see only as mere “procrastination” or postponement (I.i.157-158), delay without a difference.

What this opening reprieve leads to in the second scene is the “comedy of errors” proper, a Plautine comedy of twins whose length

is prolonged by a new form of severance — the fact that the twins never appear simultaneously on stage — but also by the duplication or doubling occasioned by the proliferation of lookalikes bearing the same name. Egeon's romance errancy or wandering — his tale evocative of Aeneas or Odysseus and drawn from the Apollonius narrative of Greek romance — is iterated in the arrival in Ephesus of the alien or wandering Antipholus of Syracuse (Antipholus Erotes in the Folio, suggesting "Erratus" as well as "Eros"), come to Ephesus to seek his twin. This second wanderer is advised as soon as he appears to avoid seconding the fate of the Syracusan already condemned for crossing the dividing line between the cities, by disguising his place of origin (I.ii.1-2). His subsequent decision to "wander" through the city unwittingly echoes the wandering of his Syracusan father, ordered to search through Ephesus for his "ransom," but this time with a less directed sense of envisioned "end" (I.ii.30-31). This is the twin whose wandering, through this "town" full of "cozenage," "Dark-working sorcerers," "Soul-killing witches," "Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks, / And many such-like liberties of sin" (I.ii.95-102) — in lines that recall the Ephesus of Paul's New Testament wanderings — becomes the error or "fallacy" this second Syracusan decides to "entertain" (II.ii.184-186) in a space that becomes the unfolding but also the darkening of a Plautine comedy.

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Egeon's opening story of the "unjust divorce" (I.i.104) of his family's halves — a division or partition that echoes the initial barrier between Syracuse and Ephesus — gives to the play the tension implicit in the Platonic myth of halves whose severance prompts desire for reunion, and its incorporation into the figure of the androgynous Adam that makes the "one flesh" of marriage (Ephesians 5:31) not just a union but a *reunion* of divided parts. In the intervening comedy of errors, this marital "one flesh" appears in the subplot of Adriana's "waiting," "fasting" and "starving" for her absent husband (Ephesian Antipholus) and the counselling of this wife to "patience" in scenes that directly recall the counsel to wives in Ephesians 5.

Adriana's speech on this "undividable" (II.ii.122) union in Act II, with its double-meaning "estranged from thyself" and its argument that, as her "flesh," her errant husband communicates his "harlotry" to her, invokes in its "two" made "one" (142) the marital counterpart of the "twain" made "one" from Ephesians 2. Within this echo-chamber of a play, Adriana's "deep-divorcing vow" (138) explicitly recalls the "unjust divorce" of Egeon's family's two halves,

just as its "drop of water in the breaking gulf" (126) echoes the "drop of water" to which the severed twin Antipholus had compared himself (I.ii.35-40). Echoes such as these, however, thickening as the play proceeds, not only create verbal affinities between the different plots but also begin to establish structural parallels: Dromio's punning on a "thousand marks" (I.ii.81-82) — both currency and signs of beating — links the money entrusted by Antipholus of Syracuse to his Dromio, the amount needed to ransom Egeon (I.i.21), and the beatings suffered by this second Dromio, who is expected to "bear" them "patiently" (I.ii.86), just as Adriana is counselled by her sister to wait patiently for her husband's return in lines echoing Egeon's periphrasis on the travail of pregnancy as the "pleasing punishment that women bear" (I.i.46). The sense of structural affinity continues, in a plot that strictly observes the unities of place and time, as the deadline set for Egeon's ransom, the time at which Antipholus of Ephesus is to pay *his* "debt" (IV.i.10-11), and the final payment of the waiting Merchant all converge towards the single appointed hour of five o'clock. This framed middle or mean-time of multiplied "errors," whose severing of twins, by deferring recognition, extends a play that might otherwise more quickly reach its Recognition Scene, underscores its own delays so insistently as to affect even as apparently minor a detail as the naming of a ship in Act IV, as "the hoy *Delay*" (IV.iii.40). And it is in this protracted, "erring" middle that the *Comedy's* increasingly prominent biblical echoes begin to suggest the analogy between the play's delaying of its end and recognitions and the delaying of the "Doom" and ultimate Recognition Scene of the Apocalypse, also a reunion of a divided family, a "redemption" that puts an end to Error, and the delayed return of a Bridegroom or Spouse (Matthew 24-25).

The first dramatic error occurs when Ephesian Dromio, mistaking the "wandering" Antipholus for Antipholus of Ephesus — the "tardy master" who delays his return to *his* wife — announces that they have been "fasting and praying" for his return (I.ii.51, 89-90), in lines that bear unmistakable echoes of the interim of waiting for this other Master and Spouse:

*Luciana*: Here comes your man, now is your husband nigh.

*Enter Dromio of Ephesus*

*Adriana*: Say, is your tardy master now at hand?

*E. Dromio*: Nay, he's at two hands with me, and that my two ears can witness (II.i.43-46).

This "tardy master" now "at hand" recalls the familiar biblical anticipations of Apocalypse as "at hand" or "near," in contexts alternately, or simultaneously, of joyful anticipation or the terror of impending punishment. Just as in the New Testament this End is understood as in some sense "already here," so in this play the long separation of

the brothers is, as one of its critics (Crewe 1982: 217) remarks, already "at an end, if only they could see it."<sup>7</sup>

The concentrated punning in this exchange — linking "at hand," as something "nigh" or near with the "two hands" of a punishment — depends upon an error in language with which the play compounds the errors resulting from twinned identities, a linguistic doubleness that Shakespeare's contemporaries called "amphibology" or *ambiguitas*, "when a sentence be turned both ways, so that a man shall be uncertayne what way to take" or "when we speake or write doubtfully and that the sense may be taken two wayes" ("*Luciana*: Spake he so doubtfully, thou couldst not feel his meaning? / *Eph. Dromio*: Nay, he strook so plainly, I could too well feel his blows; and withal so doubtfully, that I could scarce understand them" [II.i.50-54]).<sup>8</sup> Amphibology and punning involve two meanings competing for the same space, blocking the way to single "understanding" just as Shakespeare's redoubling of Plautine twins retards movement towards resolution and end.

As the comedy proceeds, this doubled twinning also generates the temporal illusion of a "second time." Immediately following this scene of "doubtful" speech, Syracusan Antipholus, mistaking his Dromio for the other one who earlier informed him of "a mistress and a dinner" (II.ii.18), beats him, he thinks, a *second* time ("Why first — for flouting me, and then wherefore — for urging it the *second* time to me" [II.ii.46]), when it is not in fact a "second time," but an error resulting from twins bearing the same name and assumed identity. The repeated emphasis on time, and "second time(s)" in a play whose mistakes depend so crucially on timing, produces what in Act II becomes an elaborate exchange on "Time" itself (II.ii.57-109), in lines that extend from Syracusan Antipholus's "there's a time for all things" (65) to Syracusan Dromio's argument that "there is no time for all things" (100-101). "There's a time for all things" conveys the sense, as in Ecclesiastes 3, that everything has its "season" (ironically echoed in this servant's complaint that he is "beaten out of season" [II.ii.47]). But Dromio takes it that there is not "time" for all things, and the scene that unfolds (with its punning on "hair" and "heir," on "fine" as "end" and on "recovery" as a kind of "ransom" or "redemption") becomes a pyrotechnical display of the errors of amphibology, whose punning deflections both take up time — incurring the critical assessment that the exchange is too elaborately protracted, like Egeon's dilated narrative in Act 1 — and create time by postponing its own end or "fine," paradoxically recovering time while proving syllogistically that "there is no time for all things" ("*Syr. Ant*: "You would *all this time* have prov'd, there is *no time* for all things" [100-101]). The exchange then comes to an end with yet another reference to the "world's end" or apocalyptic Doom ("*Syr. Dro*: Time himself is bald, and therefore, to the world's end, will have

bald followers. / *Syr. Ant*: I knew 'twould be a bald conclusion" [106-108]).

There is even more, however, to the dizzying allusiveness of this exchange on "Time." I have noted elsewhere (Parker 1987: 77-81) the curious reminder of Jacob and Esau — two *biblical* twins — at the beginning of this comedy, in the reference to Egeon's greater care for the elder twin while their mother was "more careful for the latter-born" (I.i.78). We might wonder why "elder" and "younger" should be stressed at all, especially in the case of twins; but this emphasis returns even more prominently at the play's end, when the servant Dromios, the two "adopted" twins, also invoke the priority of "elder" over "younger" and then drop the question of precedence altogether to walk "hand in hand" into the same "house" (V.i.423-426: "*Syr. Dro*: We'll draw cuts for the senior, till then, lead thou first. / *Eph. Dro*: Nay then thus: / We came into the world like brother and brother: / And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another").

Allusion to "elder" and "younger" at the end of this comedy of alien and citizen twins, and in the unmistakable echo at its beginning of Jacob and Esau, the twins on whose rivalry so much biblical history depends, involves yet another dimension of the play's relation to Ephesians and its "wall." In the New Testament Epistle, Esau and Jacob, Gentile and Jew, are finally reconciled by the union that makes both equally "adopted" heirs of the same "house" (Ephesians 1: 5; 3: 6), the former "aliants" (as the Bishops' Bible puts it) "no more strangers and forreiners: but fellowe citizens."<sup>9</sup> In *The Comedy of Errors*, "alien" and "citizen" twins from divided cities are kept apart, both by their alternating appearances upon the stage and by the wall that divides and postpones their recognition in Act III. But even in the early lines describing the mother's and father's greater "care" (I.i.78-85), the Jacob-and-Esau sense of parental preference is attenuated by a chiasmus or crossing of sides in which each parent is left with the twin *other* than the one "most car'd for"; and the rhetorical crossing of Egeon's later lines ("My youngest boy, and yet my eldest care, / At eighteen years became inquisitive / After his brother" [124-126]) evokes a brotherly seeking more suggestive of the Joseph than of the Jacob narrative, even as the crossing of the boundary between Syracuse and Ephesus by Egeon and his "wandering" son anticipates the ultimate reuniting of the family's divided parts.<sup>10</sup> The play's closing exchange between the adopted Dromios on the subject of elder and younger, and their final abandoning of priority and precedence, concludes *The Comedy of Errors* in a way evocative, once again, of the Epistle to the Ephesians. "Alien" and "citizen" twin are reunited when (as Bottom puts it in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) the intervening "wall" is finally "down"; and it is the two "adopted" servant twins whose abandoning of elder and younger, Jacob-and-Esau rivalry concludes the *Comedy's* own reconciliations and Recognition Scene.

When we return from these echoes of Jacob and Esau at the beginning and end of the play to the exchange on "Time" in Act II, we can begin to see much more in its dizzying puns on the redeeming of time, on "hair" and "heir" and on "fine" and "recovery." "Fine and recovery" is a phrase taken from the legal lexicon of primogeniture, part in Shakespeare's day of the fierce contemporary rivalries of elder and younger, the principal means of curbing the power of elder sons through recovery to bar entails.<sup>11</sup> Echoes of Jacob and Esau, the quintessential biblical elder and younger sons, begin to be unmistakable here too as the punning on "recovery" moves to "hairy men," "plain dealers" and mention of a "blessing:"

*Syr. Dro:* There's no time for a man to recover his hair that grows bald by nature.

*Syr. Ant:* May he not do it by fine and recovery?

*Syr. Dro:* Yes, to pay a fine for a periwig, and recover the lost hair of another man.

*Syr. Ant:* Why is Time such a niggard of hair, being (as it is) so plentiful an excrement?

*Syr. Dro:* Because it is a blessing that he bestows on beasts, and what he hath scanted men in hair, he hath given them in wit.

*Syr. Ant:* Why, but there's many a man hath more hair than wit.

*Syr. Dro:* Not a man of those but he hath the wit to lose his hair.

*Syr. Ant:* Why, thou didst conclude hairy men plain dealers without wit.

*Syr. Dro:* The plainer dealer, the sooner lost; yet he loseth it in a kind of jollity [...] (II.ii.72-89).

The usual glosses on this "bald Time" are to the baldness of *Occasio* (or time as "season") and the "bald sexton Time" of *King John* (III.i.324); and the punning on "lost heir" and "lost hair" usually referred to the familiar consequences of sexual "jollity" and the civil war in France (as in Peter Quince's "some of your French crowns have no hair at all"). Echoes of Jacob and Esau also, however, hover around the edges of this discussion of whether something lost — an "heir" as well as "hair" — can ever be "recovered." "There's many a man hath more hair than wit" and "Not a man of those but he hath the wit to lose his hair" could be said, for example, of Esau, the "hairy" man who, outwitted by his usurping twin, loses his right as the elder son or "heir." This Genesis story of a father with two twin sons, then, could yield the mock-learned conclusion here ("thou didst conclude hairy men plain dealers without wit"). Jacob, the younger twin whom medieval texts like the *Cursor Mundi* called "bald" in contrast to Esau's "hairy," becomes the rightful "heir" by covering himself with the "lost hair" of "another man." For this Esau there might be said to be "no time to recover" (in Hebrews 12: 17, deprived of his "blessing," he finds "no place to repentance," as the Geneva Bible puts it), a situation which suggests the absence

of the space and time for repentance or "recovery" which is the principal reason for the period of delay or reprieve before the "world's end" or "Doom." The lost "heir," however, like the exchanged foundling, is a staple of the New Comedy formulas on which this play depends; and in *The Comedy of Errors*, the elder twin or "lost heir," initially severed from his father's greater "care," is finally recovered, after the protracted time or delayed "doom" which is the comedy itself.

On closer inspection, there is even more to be unpacked in this densely concentrated punning. The description of lost "hair" evokes not just Esau the hairy elder but Jacob, the "plain" man in the sense of "smooth" or "bald," the twin who usurps his brother's place in Genesis but who, in the subsequent history of these rival twins, loses his "hair" as a consequence of "harlotry" (Isaiah 3: 24), a loss linked to losing his children or "heirs" as well (Micah 1: 16). The Jacob who is Israel outwits hairy Esau to win a "blessing"; but because of his harlotries loses his hair and his status as rightful "heir" in turn. The New Testament then celebrates the Gentile Esau (who in this sense "recovers the lost hair/heir of another man"), and Paul hopes for the redemption of the Jews, the "lost" as opposed to the "adopted" heir. Both "Not a man of those but he hath wit to lose his hair" and "The plainer dealer, the sooner lost" could, then, in the context of this larger biblical history, apply to both outwitted hairy Esau (who had "more hair than wit") and to Jacob, the simultaneously crafty and "plain" (or smooth) twin. The question of whether there is "time to recover," or "redeem the time" (Ephesians 5: 16), would apply equally to both of them as well, as figures simultaneously implicated in the punning amphibology of these "doubtful" lines. This extended exchange on "Time," with its echoes of twins whose exchanges of position before a "wall of partition" (Ephesians 2) is finally down chart so much of the history between Genesis and Apocalypse, is part of the movement from the play's opening recall of the Genesis Jacob and Esau to the final lines where the rivalry of elder and younger, alien and citizen, is abandoned by the adopted servant Dromios, as the separation between cities and the family's two halves is replaced by recognition and reunion in a dramatic ending filled with echoes of biblical Endtime or Apocalypse.

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Before this end, however, the multiple biblical echoes that fill this exchange on "fine and recovery" in Act II become even more insistent, as the "errors" of the play both deepen and proliferate. We have already observed the ambiguity or doubleness that links the "tardy

master" now "at hand" (II.i.44) to the returning Master and Spouse of that Apocalypse; but not yet the links between the play's repeated references to "harlotry" and the biblical metaphors of harlotry for the threshold or betrothal period of error and wandering before this final Doom, the "marriage" of the New Jerusalem as Bride of that Bridegroom whose coming is delayed. The comically fantastic form this compound takes in *The Comedy of Errors*' own extended middle is the hyperbolic description of the impending "marriage" of the "kitchen wench" to the Dromio she wrongly claims and terrifies in Act III:

S. Dro: Marry, sir, besides myself, I am due to a woman: one that claims me, one that haunts me, one that will have me.

S. Ant: What claim lays she to thee?

S. Dro: Marry, sir, such claim as you would lay to your horse, and she would have me as a beast; not that, I being a beast, she would have me, but that she, being a very beastly creature, lays claim to me.

S. Ant: What is she?

S. Dro: A very reverent body; ay, such a one as a man may not speak of without he say "Sir-reverence." I have but lean luck in the match, and yet is she a wondrous fat marriage.

S. Ant: How dost thou mean a fat marriage?

S. Dro: Marry, sir, she's the kitchen wench and all grease, and I know not what use to put her to but to make a lamp of her and run from her by her own light. I warrant, her rags and the tallow in them will burn a Poland winter: if she lives till doomsday, she'll burn a week longer than the whole world.

S. Ant: What complexion is she of?

S. Dro: Swart, like my shoe, but her face nothing like so clean kept; for why? she sweats, a man may go over shoes in the grime of it.

S. Ant: That's a fault that water will mend.

S. Dro: No, sir, 'tis in grain, Noah's flood could not do it [...] (III.ii.81-106).

The description is all the more hyperbolic for involving a figure who may never actually appear on stage (though she has been identified with that "Luce" — both "loose" and "light" — who bars the return of Ephesian Antipholus to his house in the scene just before). As a "witch" (III.ii.143), she is associated with the juggling and "sorceries" of Ephesus (I.ii.97-102), recalling as well the Circe of the Odyssean story of romance errancy or wandering who transforms a man into a "beast." Described as "fat [...] Nell" ("an ell and three quarters, will not measure her from hip to hip" [111]) and as "spherical, like a globe" (114), she also becomes linked with the "globe" or world, as Dromio proceeds to "find out countries in her" in a mock-blason that makes her body a *mappa mundi* divided into parts (116-139).

The unmistakable biblical echoes in this long description make her a strangely ambiguous or "double" female figure — a doubleness

introduced by the apparently honorific "very reverent body" and its swift corrective "ay, such a one as a man may not speak of without he say 'Sir-reverence,'" the formulaic apology for the offence here of a "light" woman, an ambiguity continued in her association both with "grease" and its homophonic double "grace" (96). When the blason that divides her body into countries suggests her link with the "globe" or world and adds to the references to "doomsday" (99) the comic detail of her "nose, all o'er embellish'd with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires" (135), this hyperbolic body begins to summon parodic associations with both female figures of that "doomsday" or world's end, the New Jerusalem (decked in precious stones and as broad as she is long), the betrothed and waiting Bride whose "error" is redeemed, and the Great Harlot or Whore of Babylon, a sorceress associated with "beasts" (Revelation 17) who sums up all the accumulated "harlotries" of biblical history before Apocalypse, a figure long linked with Circe as her Odyssean counterpart.<sup>12</sup>

Both "broad" and "swart" in her "complexion," this "greasy" female figure recalls the notoriously "uncleane" (Revelation 18: 2) associations of the harlot who will burn "for evermore" (19: 3) for her "enchancements" (18:23), anticipated by the harlot of Proverbs who calls men into her house while the "housbond" or master is away (Proverbs 7: 5-20, Geneva 1560 version) — as has happened here to this frightened Dromio. She also evokes ambivalently the principal biblical figures for the redemption of "harlotry," including the harlot Rahab whose name means "dilated" or "broad," prefiguring the period of dilation before Apocalypse, and the "black, but comely" Bride of the Song of Songs, typological counterpart of the Church or New Jerusalem as the harlot whose "errors" and "harlotries" are redeemed in the final "marriage" of the End.<sup>13</sup> The sense of redemption as "washing clean" is explicitly summoned in the surrounding lines, with their reference to a "grime" beyond the "water" of "Noah's flood," the baptism (1 Peter 3: 20-21) to be supplanted by that of burning or fire at "doomsday" (98-100).<sup>14</sup> As an ambivalent or compound female figure, she thus recalls even more strikingly both female figures of the world and "flesh" (IV.iv.154), Jerusalem the Bride to be ransomed and "redeemed" and the Harlot whose Circe-like sorceries, enchantments and "amaze" (Revelation 17: 6) are part of the period of renewed error (2 Timothy 4) before that end. Dromio makes this last association explicit when the passage ends with an echo of the vigilance necessary in this period, the "armour" and breastplate of Ephesians 6: "I, amaz'd, 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 transform'd me to a curtal dog, and made me turn i' th' wheel" (III.ii.143-146). The description of this dilated body in the extended middle of a play which calls attention to its own dilation before a put-off "doom" proceeds according to the principle of

ambiguity in which punning, double terms look two ways at once. If she does not finally appear on stage, perhaps it is because such an ambivalently symbolic body hardly could.

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What is important here, however, is also the moment in the classical five-act structure of this *Comedy* that this extraordinary set-description comes. In the scene just before, Ephesian Antipholus, the "tardy master," is barred from returning to his "house" because the alien Antipholus (with his Dromio) has already been taken in, assumed to be the long-awaited spouse. The hostile reception subsequently given to the true "master" who has to "knock" at his own "door" in Act III (i. 58) hence becomes the comic opposite of "knocke, & it shalbe opened unto you" (Matthew 7: 7); and the attitude of those within the house the corresponding opposite of the biblical servants who wait patiently for the return of their Lord ("that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately" [Luke 12: 36]). It is from this point in the play onwards that the biblical allusions to the space of renewed error, wandering and "harlotry" become even more concentrated. In the New Testament prophecies of an end that is "at hand" but not yet come, one of the features of what Church Fathers termed the "interim" age is the coming of an imposter in the name of the true Master or awaited Spouse (Matthew 24: 5-6: "For manie shal come in my Name, saying, I am Christ, and shal deceive manie [...] but the end is not yet"). The verse could equally apply to the twin Antipholuses of this comedy, made by Shakespearean alteration to share not just an apparent identity but the same name. The biblical imposter or lookalike is described as working a "strong delusion" and "lyes" (2 Thessalonians 2: 11) on those who believe him to be the true Master returned, before he is finally exposed in the Apocalypse. At this point in Shakespeare's *Comedy*, Adriana takes the wrong Antipholus to be her awaited "tardy master" now returned and invites him into "his" house. When the real Master and spouse attempts to return after he has "linger'd" (III. i.3), he (along with his Dromio) is kept out by the presence of not just an intervening wall but a usurper twin ("*Eph. Ant*: What art thou that keep'st me out from the house I owe? [...] / *Eph. Dro*: O villain, thou hast stol'n both mine office and my name" [42-44]).

This scene and the ones that follow it are filled with echoes not only of the "wall of partition" from Ephesians 2, but of other biblical walls and doors to be opened before a final recognition, revelation or ending — from the returning Master knocking for admittance in Revelation 3: 20 ("Beholde, I stand at the dore, and knocke: if anie man heare my voyce & open the dore, I will come unto him, and will

suppe with him[...]") to the story in Acts 12 (explicitly recalled in the punning "angels" sent to deliver Ephesian Antipholus from prison in Act IV), in which Peter is left standing outside the door by a maid instructed not to open it by those who think it to be his *daimon* or double, a sense of daimonic double summoned in this play of doubles when the twin Antipholuses are called each other's "genius" (V.i.333-334: "*Adriana*: I see two husbands, or mine eyes deceive me. / *Duke*: One of these men is genius to the other: / And so of these, which is the natural man, / And which the spirit?").<sup>15</sup> Through the uttering of the words "he comes too late" (III.i.48) by the maid here called "Luce" or "light," the scene recalls not only this story of movement from darkness to light but the parable of the foolish virgins who return too late, after the Bridegroom has come and the "door" is "shut" (Matthew 25: 10), and are answered, like the excluded Ephesian Antipholus, "I know you not" (Matthew 25: 12). In the context of the extraordinary concentration of biblical allusions which thickens as the play proceeds, this farcical scene of the locked-out husband — already conflating the "errors" of Plautus's *Menaechmi* with a scene of usurpation and imposture from the *Amphitruo* — manages to combine both Plautine dramatic subtexts with echoes of the biblical imposter who comes in the name of another "tardy master," takes his place, and keeps out those who "come too late."

For those inside this master's house, the space of "fasting," "praying" and waiting "patiently" for the long-awaited spouse is at this point apparently at an end. But it is not yet over for the play itself: the wall that keeps lookalike in and real master out creates only an illusory sense of resolution and end, much as what one critic calls the "false resolution" of Syracusan Antipholus's address in this Act to Luciana, whose name invokes "Light" (III.ii.29-52), prematurely suggests the illumination of "errors" and the "folded meaning" of ambiguous words (35-36). Each turns out to be a "false theophany," only anticipating something still to come (Crewe 1982: 215). What we have instead for two more acts is a deepening of error and illusion, a dramatic interim whose harping upon "patience" and "forebearance" continues to recall the New Testament counsels to both before the true apocalyptic end or "fine."

"Patience" is specifically linked in this interim with the structure of indirection charted by the golden "chain," a material object with roots in the play's main Plautine source (see Sanderson 1975: 603-606). The chain is first mentioned at the end of the scene (II.i) in which Adriana complains of her husband's delayed return and is counselled by Luciana to be "patient" and "forebear" in lines that rhyme it with "detain": "Sister, you know he promis'd me a chain; / Would that alone a'love he would detain, / So he would keep fair quarter with his bed" (II.i.106-108). Its associations with detaining, delaying and with lingering are repeated in its second mention, this



time as excuse for the "tardy master's" delay (*Eph. Ant.*: My wife is shrewish when I keep not hours:/Say that I linger'd with you at your shop/To see the making of her carcanet" [III.i.2-4]). As such references accumulate, the chain becomes associated not just with the bonds of society, connecting characters even in their apparent separateness, but also with the detours of the circuitous plot, transforming the corresponding Plautine objects (the mantle and bracelet of the *Menaechmi*) into something linked with the errancy and delays of the comedy itself.

The chain proceeds by successive detours and deflections after it is blocked from its intended receiver Adriana when her husband is barred from returning to his house by the presence of his usurping double in Act III. When it is sent to the Porpentine, house of the Courtesan, reference is made once again to its association with detaining or delay, first as the Goldsmith Angelo delivers it to the wrong Antipholus ("Lo here's the chain./I thought to have ta'en you at the Porpentine;/The chain unfinish'd made me *stay thus long*" [III.ii.166-168]) and then in this Goldsmith's need to collect his payment so that he can discharge his debt to the Merchant who is "bound to sea" and "*stays* but for it" (IV.i.33). It thus becomes involved with unpaid "debt," linking the plotting of this "comedy of errors" to the reprieve allowed for Egeon's "ransom," when Ephesian Antipholus, arrested for non-payment for the chain, must similarly await a monetary "redemption" (IV.ii.46). Increasingly, it also becomes associated with "looking to the end" — in scenes whose *respice funem* (or "look to the rope") punningly shadow *respice finem* (IV.iv.41-43), consideration of this end or "fine."

As the errors multiply toward this end, so do the biblical allusions surrounding the chain, which finally becomes linked with the "chain" in Revelation that binds the "devil" in the final stages before Apocalypse (IV.iii.69-76). It also becomes associated with desire to know the truth "at large" (IV.iv.143), a desire finally fulfilled when, in the long-delayed recognition scene, the mother of this divided family (Emilia, now an Abbess) invites characters who have each known only in part into the abbey to "hear at large discoursed" (V.i.396) not just the whole of this "sympathized one day's error" (398) but the entire reunited family's history of "travail" (401), an echo of the Duke's earlier request that Egeon "dilate" his narrative "at full" (I.i.122). The chain, then, is not only a subtle Shakespearean transformation of the counterpart objects from his Plautine source, but a measuring of the distance of dilation and delay that created this entire "errant" dramatic interim.

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The *Comedy's* final acts are literally crammed with biblical figures for the space of error and circuitous detour before a final apocalyptic end or "fine," as well as for what in Ephesians is termed "redeeming the time." Act IV opens with the Merchant's calling Angelo the Goldsmith to account for a sum due "since Pentecost,"<sup>16</sup> ("Nay, come, I pray you, sir, give me the chain:/Both wind and tide stays for this gentleman,/And I, to blame, have held him here *too long*," a "dalliance" the Merchant says he cannot "brook" [IV.i.45-47, 59]). It is in this same Act that even the names of the ships call attention to the interposition of delay in spite of all the counsels to dispatch ("I brought you word an hour since that the bark *Expedition* put forth to-night, and then were you hind'red by the sergeant to tarry for the hoy *Delay* [...] [IV.iii.37-40]). Act IV also puns on "hours" (or "whores") that "turn back for very fear" when they meet a representative of the Law (IV.ii.56), wordplay that evokes the staying of the sun in Joshua and other biblical figures for the space of a deferred end or "doom." The punning on "hours" and "whores" comes in the midst of the sergeant's imprisonment of Antipholus of Ephesus, an arrest that leads Syracusan Dromio to seek the "angels" or gold coins for his "redemption" ("Will you send him, mistress, redemption [...]?" [IV.ii.46]), or, as F4 has it, "Mistress Redemption," an even clearer evocation of the Morality Play antecedents of these scenes). In scene iii, when this same Dromio brings the ransom to his uncomprehending Syracusan master, there follows an exchange which is truly dizzying in its compounding of biblical texts:

*Syr. Dro.*: Master, here's the gold you sent me for. What, have you got the picture of old Adam new apparell'd?

*Syr. Antiph.*: What gold is this? What Adam dost thou mean?

*Syr. Dro.*: Not that Adam that kept the Paradise, but that Adam that keeps the prison; he that goes in the calve's-skin that was kill'd for the Prodigal; he that came behind you, sir, like an evil angel, and bid you forsake your liberty [IV.iii.12-21].

All of these "verbal transmogrifications," as Harold Brooks (1961: 68) calls them, have as their single reference the Sergeant, representative of the "Law" who has arrested (the other) Antipholus and thrown him into the prison referred to in the previous scene as "Tartar limbo" (IV.ii.32). But "Limbo" understood as "prison" is traditionally not only the classical Tartarus but what another Shakespeare play calls "Limbo Patrum" (*Henry VIII* V.iii.64), the Limbo in which "old Adam" under the "Law" (whose sinfulness is imaged in the "coats of skins" of Genesis 3), along with other Old Testament patriarchs, awaits the Master whose coming will mean his "redemption," a transformation of the "old man" into the "new" (Ephesians 4: 22-24; Romans 6). The "calves-skin that was kill'd for the Prodigal" evokes yet another story of a man who, like Egeon, "had two sons" (Luke 15: 11-32), a tale of exile and return, of a "wandering"

son and brother, and an elder one displaced by his coming — a conflation of this paradigmatic biblical story of circuitous “error” and family reunion with the Plautine “comedy of errors,” made easier by the fact that this parable had already been combined with the structure of Latin comedy in Elizabethan attempts to “moralize” it. (The contemporary conflation of the story of the Prodigal exiled among swine with Circe’s metamorphosis of men into swine would also be appropriate as an echo in a comedy whose participants, as the Duke remarks, seem to have “drunk of Circe’s cup” [V.i.271]) (see Helgerson 1976: 38, 55). As representative of the Law, the Sergeant described as “he that came behind you, sir, like an evil angel” (IV.iii.20) also recalls Satan tempting Christ in the wilderness, the biblical narrative of victory over “Error” in the very space of wandering — a scene also recalled when Antipholus of Syracuse says to the Courtesan, in line 48, “Sathan, avoid,” a phrase out of the Geneva version of Matthew 4: 10. He is thus the opposite of that “good angel” who delivers the apostle Peter from prison in Acts 12, the New Testament story explicitly recalled in Dromio’s “Here are the *angels* that you sent for to deliver you” (IV.iii.40).

The extraordinary concentration of biblical allusions in these scenes — often noted in isolation by editorial glosses — are not just decorative quibbles for the sake of an isolated verbal jest but are typological and structural, creating an overlapping that summons whole stories through single texts and links the secular space of Plautine characters and marketplace “debts” to the biblical space of waiting for “redemption” from “Doom.” The Courtesan referred to in these scenes as the “devil’s dam” (IV.iii.51) is hence not just the familiar stock figure of Plautine comedy but is linked through this language (like the “kitchen-wench” in Act III) to the great “harlot” who invites men to “hell.” The recall of Satan as an “angel of light,” in the punning play on “light” (IV.iii.51-57) when the Courtesan appears, evokes that “Lucifer” who is an imposter or usurping lookalike of the long-awaited “Master” or true “Morning Star” (Revelation 22: 16), and the patron of “error” in the period of deferred Judgment, just as the echoes that finally surround the “chain” recall the binding of Satan, or the Great Dragon of the Apocalypse, for “a thousand yeres” (Revelation 20: 1-2).

The binding of Satan in Revelation is part of the period known as the “millenium,” still not the final end but yet another delaying respite before that “Doom.” Satan is bound with a chain for a thousand years, but then is to be loosed again out of his “prison” (Revelation 20: 7), a space described as coming between a “first” and a “second” resurrection. In Act IV, scene iv of *The Comedy of Errors*, when Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse appear unbound and free, after their twin Ephesian counterparts have been “bound” and imprisoned, Adriana and the others assume that the ones they bound

are “loose” and call to have them “bound again” (IV.iv.144-146). But this doubling or only apparent “second time” is, once again, the product of the doubling of identities in this plot of lookalikes, a seconding underscored when Angelo unknowingly calls Antipholus of Ephesus “Second to none that lives here in the city” (V.i.7) and Adriana complains that her husband is “much different from the man he was” (i.46).

The “binding” of Ephesian Antipholus, thought by his wife and the others to be “possessed” (“*Pinch*: I charge thee, Sathan, hous’d within this man,/To yield possession to my holy prayers” [IV.iv.54-55]), recalls both the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 and the “binding” of the “strong man” in Matthew 12, a passage which has explicitly to do with exorcism or the “casting out of demons.” The demon in this Gospel passage is something which possesses a man or is “housed” in him — as the imposter Antipholus’s being housed in the dwelling properly occupied by his twin leads to the daemonization of the “real” Antipholus (of Ephesus) and his binding as “possessed.” The equivalent of casting out demons, then, seems to include the final revelation of the two as two, or twins. And all of these allusive fragments — “Old Adam” waiting in “Limbo,” the exile of the Prodigal Son, the binding and loosing of Satan, the period of bondage or imprisonment before the opening of a “gate” or “door” — combine with other allusions to the period of wandering or the respite before the victory represented by the defeat of the great Dragon bound in Revelation 20, a defeat depicted on the golden *angelus* coins or punning “angels” sent to “redeem” this imprisoned Antipholus.

The period of “error,” “enchantments,” and partitions that separate this play’s characters finally reaches its end, along with the period of Egeon’s reprieve, when both frame story and “comedy of errors” converge upon the place of “doom” that becomes a place of “nativity” (V.i.405). The complex of resonances for “harlotry” also comes together in this final scene, when Ephesian Antipholus (accused by his wife of communicating his “harlotry” to her) accuses her in turn of feasting with “harlots” in his house (“This day, great Duke, she shut the doors upon me,/While she with harlots feasted in my house” [V.i.204-205]). “Harlotry” in *The Comedy of Errors* thus includes echoes of Old Testament strictures against associating with harlots as well as the familiar biblical metaphor for erring or wandering away from God, the figure already suggested in the description of the dilated body of the “kitchen wench” in Act III. Antipholus’s charge also recalls the Christ of the “new” dispensation, rebuked for feasting with publicans and harlots, who tells the story of the son who “erred” and then repented and who, like the “Publicans and the harlots,” will enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 21: 28-32) — a story whose summoning here suggests that “error” is a space crucial to pass through before “redemption.”

The play ends with "unbinding" and "re-binding." Dromio of Ephesus, in a line more Apuleian than Plautine, speaks of having "gnaw'd in two" his "cords" (Vi.290) and of being finally "unbound" (291); the "mad" Ephesian Antipholus is released from prison, and Egeon from his "bonds" by the Abbess who, as his long-lost wife, both frees and regains a "hus-bonde" in him ("Abbess: Whoever bound him, I will loose his bonds, / And gain a husband by his liberty" [Vi.340-41]). The play that forges links throughout between Egeon's deferred "doom" and the space of "error" before this release, culminates in a "nativity" that echoes St. Paul's the creation "groneth [...] and travaileth" (Romans 8: 22), a text that also makes the space of dilation and delay before this End both a space of pregnancy or "bearing" and a rebirth, a link strengthened when the period of "travail" is specified as the Christological "thirty-three years" (Vi.401). In its first recorded performance, on December 28, 1594, *The Comedy of Errors* was presented as a play for the Christmas revels at Gray's Inn. And its simultaneously commercial and biblical imagery of "debt" and "redemption" is joined in this final scene by suggestions that what is involved in coming to "identity" in this play of errors and separated brothers is also a baptism, celebrated in its concluding "gossips' — or baptismal — feast" (Vi.406).<sup>17</sup>

The final acts of *The Comedy of Errors* are filled, then, with echoes of the redemption accomplished within the dilation or deferred "Doom" that is all of pre-apocalyptic history, in ways that link the dilation of the play with the space of reprieve before that end. But what the characters are called to at the end of the play is not in fact an apocalyptic end to discourse but this "gossips' feast" (Vi.406) of yet more discourse (see Woodbridge 1984: 224ff.), as the characters go off, as so often in Shakespeare, to "hear at large discoursed" (Vi.396) much more than could be shown on stage. If, that is to say, the biblical echoes that crowd in thick and fast as the play reaches its own end or "fine" suggest Apocalypse, the play itself remains, at this end, still within the space of dilation, as of life, a space and time in which the ultimate end is still "not yet." This, too, may be appropriate to the echoes of Ephesians, as well as an early adumbration of a characteristically Shakespearean open-endedness. The Epistle to the Ephesians — with its breaking down of the "partition wall" — is in many respects the "Joshua" book of the New Testament, all Recognition Scene. Ephesians itself calls attention to this breaking down as an already accomplished "redemption." But if its summoning of the "one flesh" of marriage joins the proclamation of already achieved oneness in another text ("There is neither Jew nor Grecian: there is neither bonde nor free: there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" [Galatians 3: 28] Geneva Bible 1560), its counsel to wives to submit to their husbands as the Church is "subject unto Christ" (Ephesians 5: 24) and to servants to

be obedient to their masters (Ephesians 6: 5-9) preserves distinctions which in the meantime continue very much to involve hierarchy and subordination. And its looking still ahead, to a future "redemption of the purchased possession" (1585 Bishops' Bible; Ephesians 1: 14) and "earnest of our inheritance" (Geneva Bible) is part of the New Testament sense of an end both "at hand" (1 Peter 4) and not yet come, of a union ("neither male nor female") already accomplished and not yet achieved.

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The language and structures of this *Comedy*, then, are strikingly, even obtrusively biblical. But there is, however, more that needs to be said about this early Shakespearean saturation of Plautine plot with biblical reference. We have already noted that this "farce" is stuffed with the conflation of not one but two Plautine plays, as well as Apuleian metamorphoses and Egeon's appended narrative from Greek romance. The unpacking of its densely biblical language — and the frame it allusively constructs — is an essential part of rescuing it from its early reputation as simply unworthy of critical attention.<sup>18</sup> But it would also appear from the striking *copia* of this combinatory allusiveness that this early comedy may be deliberately playing with the etymology of "farce," a term linked in later Shakespeare with what can be "crammed" or "digested" into a more constricted dramatic time and space.<sup>19</sup>

What makes its allusiveness possible, in a plot that goes out of its way to call attention to the new dramatic economies of place and time, is the ease with which the terms and characters of its multiple subtexts combine and cross — the Courtesan of Plautine comedy with the biblical "Harlot," the "debt" and "redemption" of biblical Ephesians with the commercial exigencies of its Ephesian marketplace, the scene from the *Amphitruo* where the true master is shut out with the New Testament imagery of "doors" and "gates," and a returning Master. This combinatory power is joined by the operations within it of the ambiguous phrase or pun as semantic crossroads or contextual shift. But there is also another very different effect of this conflation and combination, and a disjunction between contexts that cannot so easily be made to fit.

Alexander Leggatt (1974: 18-19, emphasis mine) remarks that the principal comic strategy of this play is one of *dislocation*, its rude reminders of different understandings and perspectives. Part of this dislocation is the disjunction of contexts out of which its characters act and speak, making them "seem at times to inhabit different worlds, different orders of experience."<sup>20</sup> This dislocation, however,

estranges speech in another sense as well — producing something like what Althusser and Macherey have termed a “distantiation” effect, here between different contexts and different frames, setting off a particular piece of language *as* language, rather than attempting to naturalize it within the seamless garment of a single discourse. When the Courtesan enters to demand the promised “chain” in Act IV, scene iii, the Antipholus she addresses wrongly here (since he is the “alien” rather than the “citizen” twin) responds with “Satan avoid” and takes her to be a “fiend” or, in Dromio’s description, the “devil’s dam” (IV.iii.45-65). As Leggatt remarks (1974: 3), the Courtesan here “is simply living her casual, material life,” or we might say the *dramatic* life of a Plautine courtesan from a very different, non-biblical “comedy of errors,” while Syracusan Antipholus speaks a metaphysical language she takes to be simply “mad” (IV.iii.86). The dislocation is emphasized through the difference in reference as well as through radically disjunctive styles of speech.

The play’s semantic economy of “ransom,” “angels” and of “debts” allows the easy passage between its material setting and biblical counterparts. But the play leaves unclear what relation this biblical reference bears to the domestic and commercial world of *its* Ephesus, the place whose “normal activities,” as Joel Altman wryly observes (1978: 169n), “consist in trading, manufacturing, issuing loans, and [...] business lunches.”<sup>21</sup> The Ephesus of its setting manages to remain not only simultaneously but disjunctively the familiar seaport town of Plautine comedy, a site within its Apollonius narrative, and the biblical Ephesus of Acts and “Ephesians.” The disjunction of discourses within the play parallels the sense of the isolation of its characters in separate worlds, without making clear which is the norm.<sup>22</sup> The play’s evocation of Ephesians 5: 22-23 (“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. / For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church”) is part, for example, of its summoning of the larger allusive structure of biblical authority, in which the counseling of Adriana to “patience” with her “tardy master” draws on the familiar assimilation of “master” and “Master,” “spouse” and “Spouse,” a structure on which not only Elizabethan homiletics but frequently more modern critical ones depend.<sup>23</sup> But the disjunction of contexts and discourses in a comedy of “errors” may also force us to attend to the disjunctions within this analogical structure, just as it might to the ways in which the description of the greasy “kitchen wench” who evokes the “reverent body” betrothed to this Head does not quite fit, or is in excess of, any easily definable frame, its “grease” not finally contained by its homophonically related “grace.” The counsel to Adriana is part of an official culture informed by precisely this and other biblical texts. But in the multiplicity of discourses and realities the play both conflates and keeps disjunctively apart, it is

difficult to know precisely where to put the tonal emphasis, and the homiletic voice itself is a dramatized one, staged as the utterance of a particular character or characters.

The culture contemporary with Shakespeare was a notorious assimilator — or appropriator — of other texts and contexts, an assimilation which most often took the form of hierarchical incorporation, a subordinating of alien stories and traditions to biblical truth. Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* could not be the richly “copious” play it is without precisely such an assimilative background, including the assimilation of Latin comedy to the moralized narrative of the Prodigal Son. But the play that crucially depends on such appropriations and analogies also opens up a wedge within this hierarchy — putting the language of different discourses and different contexts on the same stage at once, calling attention to the complex negotiations between them but also to their disjunctive incompatibility. Even its calling on the providential theology of the Bible for its own dramatic structure is less theological than it is something more like Hamlet’s “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,” a source of metaphors for dramatic structure, but detached from homiletic piety or belief. I would argue, finally, with Stephen Greenblatt (1985: 181), that what we have at work in Shakespeare’s plays — even in such a densely biblical one as this early comedy — is something closer to what C. L. Barber (1980: 196) termed “post-Christian.”<sup>24</sup> What a critic of Shakespeare needs to do is, first, to recognize the complex workings of such networks — an interpretive labor which requires summoning all of the resources of this “great code” — but then, as a second interpretive moment, or divergent critical path, to examine what is being done both through this structure and beyond it.

## NOTES

- 1 For other echoes of the Epistle to the Ephesians in this play’s shifting to Ephesus of Plautus’s Epidamnium, see R. A. Foakes (1962: xxix, Appendix I), Geoffrey Bullough (1957: 1,9); and Richmond Noble (1935: 107-109). Its Ephesus also recalls that of Paul’s “wanderings” in Acts 19.
- 2 The edition of *The Comedy of Errors* used throughout here is *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Evans et al. 1974).
- 3 On early modern English “dilation” as deferral or delay as well as amplification, and on its use as the term for reprieve from a “doom,” see Parker (1987: 8-35).
- 4 See Virgil’s *Aeneid* I.753-756, and the opening of Book II, with T. W. Baldwin (1944, II: 485-87). Aeneas’s speech was a stock early modern example of amplified or dilated discourse, one which Shakespeare would use again for the request to Othello that he might “all” his “pilgrimage dilate” (*Othello* I.iii.153).
- 5 Egeon’s narrative — frequently condemned by critics as tedious, dramatically unworkable, and hence a sign of “early Shakespeare” — seems to me to involve instead a deliberate exploitation of the tension between narrative and dramatic traditions, a juxtaposition stressed later in the alternation of “show” and “tell,” dumb show and the quintessentially narrative figure of Gower, when the Apollonius story that forms the basis of Egeon’s tale returns in *Pericles*. This

- juxtaposition of dramatic "show" and narrative "tell" is also stressed in the scene of the Dumb Show in *Hamlet*, a play whose own dramatic spectacle or show ends with the promise of an ensuing narrative to be provided by Horatio/oratio. See Parker (1993: 60-95). My argument about such moments in Shakespeare — from *The Comedy of Errors*, to *Hamlet* and *Othello*, to *The Winter's Tale*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *Henry VIII* — is that narratives that are frequently criticized as dramatic mistakes (Egeon's, for example, or the one told by Othello to the Senate) are, on the contrary, very often part of such subtle Shakespearean juxtapositions of "show" and "tell," of what can be put on stage, before the eye, and what is available only through the ear or by report.
- 6 Periphrasis is traditionally a linguistic "long way round." See Puttenham (1970 [1589]: 203), on "Periphrasis, or the Figure of Ambage."
  - 7 See also Isaiah 13: 6; Deuteronomy 32: 35; Joel 1: 15; Zephaniah 1: 7; Ezekiel 12: 23; Joel 2: 1; Matthew 3: 2, 4: 17, 10: 7; Mark 1: 15; Luke 21: 31; Philippians 4: 5; 2 Thessalonians 2: 2; Revelation 22: 10. Romans 13: 12 — "The night is past, & the day is at hand: let us therefore cast away the workes of darknes, and let us put on the armour of light" (1560 Geneva Bible version, used in subsequent references) — is a text particularly suggestive of the relation of this sense of an end "at hand" with the movement from darkness to light suggested in the "Luciana" and "Luca" of this *Comedy*.
  - 8 See respectively Fraunce (1969 [1588]: 27), and Puttenham (1970 [1589]: 267). Dromio's punning on "marks" in these same scenes (I.ii.82-86; II.i.61) is one of the standard examples of such amphibology or double speech. See also Peacham (1954 [1577]), under "Amphibology": "whether he mente a marke in mony, or a marke about the head or shoulders I know not."
  - 9 See here the text of Ephesians in the Bishops' Bible (1585), the Vulgate's "alienati," and the 1560 Geneva Bible's "aliantes from the communeweth of Israel." This passage is also part of the Epistle for St. Thomas Day in *The Booke of Common Prayer*, 1559.
  - 10 On the chiasmic or crossed placing of the sets of twins on the mast, underlined by the rhetorical chiasmus (X) of "Fixing our eyes on whom our care was fix'd" (I.i.84), see Parker (1987: 78-79).
  - 11 On the appeals to Jacob and Esau in contemporary debates over primogeniture, see Parker (1992: 191-192).
  - 12 See Revelation 21: 10-27 and the wife whose price is "far above the pearlys" (Proverbs 31: 10), with the contrast between Wisdom and the harlot of Proverbs 7. For the "dilation" of Israel, prefigurative of that of the Church or New Israel in the period of the *dilatatio patriae* or enlarging of Christendome before Apocalypse, see the Vulgate texts of Exodus 34: 24 ("*dilataverit terminos tuos*"); Deuteronomy 19: 8 ("*dilataverit Dominus Deus tuus terminos tuos*"); Isaiah 54: 2 ("*Dilata locum tentorii tui*"); and their *in malo* counterpart, the dilation or enlargement of Israel's "harlotries" (Isaiah 5: 14, "hel hath *inlarged* it self; "Propterea *dilatavit* infernus animam suam"), "harlotries" associated with a "sorceress" and "whore" (Isaiah 57: 3), and committed behind "doors" (Isaiah 57: 8-9: "Behind the doores also and the postes hast thou set up thy remembrance: for thou [...] didest enlarge thy bed — *dilatasti* cubile tuum — & make a covenant betwene thee and them [...] and didst humble thy selfe unto hel"). See also Syracusan Antipholus's "Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?" (II.ii.212), and Parker (1987: 9) on Donne's Holy Sonnet #179, which exploits the link between this harlotry and the potentially "erring" Church. In the passage in Isaiah 54: 2 that commands the redeemed harlot Israel to enlarge or dilate (Vulgate, *dilata*) her "tentes," the "husband" of Israel also compares his promise to her to the promise that there shall be no second flood (Isaiah 54: 9, "For this is unto me as the waters of Noah: for as I have sworne that the waters of Noah shulde no more go over the earth; so have I sworne that I wolde not be angrie with thee").
  - 13 On Rahab the redeemed harlot of Jericho whose name, according to the Church Fathers, is the Hebrew equivalent of *dilatatio*, prefigurative of the Church which expands to take in both Gentiles and Jews in the reprieve before Last Judgment "Doom," see Parker (1987: 8-9).
  - 14 The text of 1 Peter 3: 20-21 (which is prefaced by reference to Christ's preaching "unto the spirits that were in prison" in line 19, glossed as a reference to the descent into Limbo) further elaborates on those in this prison: "20. Which were in time passed disobedient, when once the long suffring of God abode in the daies of Noe, while the arke was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight soules were saved in the water. 21. To the which also the figure that now saveth us, even Baptisme agreeth (not the putting awaye of the filth of the flesh, but in that a good conscience maketh request to God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." For the baptisms of water and of fire, see Matthew 3: 11; Luke 3: 16; Acts 1: 4-5; and 2 Thessalonians 1: 8. The space between the baptism of "water," figured by Noah's Flood, and the baptism of "fire" or the Spirit is precisely the threshold period of "dilation" or deferred "doom" before the "marriage" to be celebrated in the Apocalypse. Typologically, it is also a new space of wandering in the wilderness, as the placing of Dante's Purgatory as a journey between "water" and "fire" makes clear.
  - 15 See Acts 12: 7 and 12: 15, with the whole of the story in Acts 12: 1-17. The term for this daemon or double in the Vulgate text of 12: 15 is also *angelus*. The Geneva 1560 version of Acts 12: 15 is "But they said unto her, Thou art mad. Yet she affirmed it constantly, that it was so. They said they, It is his Angel." "Angel" is also the term in the corresponding Bishops 1585 text. That Peter, imprisoned by Herod, is also "bound with chains" (Acts 12: 6) means that this story continues to have resonances throughout the final acts, in the binding and imprisonment of Ephesian Antipholus.
  - 16 Ephesians 1: 13-14 speaks of the space between being "sealed with the holie Spirit of promes" at Pentecost and the final apocalyptic "redemption of the possession purchased," a language of "debt" and "redemption" assimilated here to the Ephesian marketplace.
  - 17 Multiple allusions such as the description of the alien Antipholus as "In Ephesus [...] but two hours old" (II.ii.148) suggest echoes of the newly baptised as a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5: 17) and a "stranger in the city." Other passages recall the theological imagery of baptism as a wedding to the Bridegroom Christ, as movement from the Old Man to New, as an exorcism or casting out of Satan, as a casting off of "error" and the fallen Adam's "coates of skinnes" (Genesis 3), and as the return of the Prodigal Son. For this baptismal imagery, see Daniélou (1979: 19-26, 72). When one of the servant Dromios complains of his "marks" as forming a "cross" ("And he will bless that cross with another beating" [II.i.79]), there is also an echo of the "mark" of the "cross" (Daniélou 1979: 54ff.) placed on the forehead as a baptismal sign or "seal" of the promise of final "redemption" (as in Ephesians 1: 14). This link is especially suggestive when we recall that this "mark" was traditionally also the mark of slaves or servants and that a text such as Galatians 6: 17, for instance ("I beare in my bodie the markes of the Lord Iesus"), could easily be linked with Ephesian Dromio's complaints of the "marks" his own "tardy master" places on him. For the social implications of the juxtaposition in this play of the radical biblical tradition of the "high" brought "low," from medieval religious drama, with the Latin comedic model associated with the new elites, see John D. Cox (1989: 67, 80).
  - 18 See Thomas Marc Parrott (1949: 107), with J. Isaacs, quoted by E. C. Pettet (1949); Marc Van Doren (1939: 33); and G. B. Harrison (1948: 271). Barbara Freedman reviews criticism of the play that dismisses it as inconsequential farce in both an article (1980: 360-361), and in her more recent *Staging the Gaze* (1991: 81-83), in the context of a powerful discussion of its disjunctions and its resistance to structures of "mastery."
  - 19 See, for example, *Henry V* (II. Chorus. 31-32): "we'll digest/Th'abuse of distance; force a play," where "force" (related to "farce") means "cram" or "stuff."
  - 20 Leggatt (1974: 3) cites Adriana's speech on the marriage bond in Act II, dislocated when its addressee (the wrong Antipholus) responds uncomprehendingly "Plead

- you to me, fair dame?" (II.ii.147) and confesses himself "As strange unto your town as to your talk" (149).
- 21 On the importance of this play's urban setting, see Gail Kern Paster (1985: 186-194).
- 22 For criticism of the play which stresses, though very differently, this divergence, see E. M. W. Tillyard (1965: 71), and Barbara Freedman (1991: 78-113).
- 23 See, for example, Harold Brooks's conclusion (1961: 66-67) that "Adriana's envy of a husband's status contravenes principles of order that for Shakespeare and orthodox Elizabethans extended through the whole cosmos," and that "revolt against a wife's place in the cosmic hierarchy is the original source of discord in Adriana's marriage."
- 24 On the problem of analogy in relation to Frye, see Terence Cave (1988: 281)

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## ABSTRACT

This essay begins from the Bible as what Northrop Frye, following Blake, termed the "great code," a kind of key for interpreters of the literature it influenced. It takes as its example *The Comedy of Errors*, an early Shakespearean play frequently dismissed by critics as simple farce. Arguing that this play's densely concentrated biblical allusions set up important metaphors for its situations and structures, Parker first seeks to illuminate ways in which this biblical network suggests possibilities for the interpreter. But she then moves, as a crucial second step, to the ways in which this early play — by mapping biblical allusions onto the marketplace setting and Plautine plot — also undercuts the authority of the Bible, or of any single cultural model, as monolithic authority or hegemonic voice.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article prend comme point de départ la conception de la Bible de Northrop Frye qui, à l'instar de Blake, l'a qualifiée de "grand code", une sorte de clé pour les critiques de la littérature influencée par la Bible. L'auteure utilise l'exemple de *The Comedy of Errors*, une des premières pièces de Shakespeare, qui est souvent rejetée par les critiques et considérée comme une simple farce. En affirmant que les nombreuses allusions bibliques de cette pièce mettent en place des métaphores importantes vis-à-vis ses événements et ses structures, l'auteure cherche d'abord à éclaircir les moyens par lesquels ce réseau biblique suggère des possibilités concernant l'interprétation de la pièce. Dans un deuxième temps, elle aborde les moyens par lesquels cette pièce — tout en appliquant des allusions bibliques à une scène de marché et à une intrigue plautienne — sert également à diminuer l'autorité de la Bible, ou de tout modèle culturel unique, en tant qu'autorité monolithique ou voix hégémonique.

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## Northrop Frye and the New Historicism

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When Northrop Frye formulated his poetics in *Anatomy of Criticism* in 1957, he was reacting against historical critics for whom a literary work was a document that passively reflected its immediate historical context while he saw it actively shaping an extended cultural context. He was also reacting against the New Critics who, themselves reacting against historical critics, set a literary work apart from any context. Their close reading fashioned a work as a well-wrought urn while he saw it actively shaping an extended literary tradition. Since 1957, changing critical methods have brought the ascendancy in the late 1960s and 1970s of the Deconstructionists who reacted against the New Critics on the grounds that their close reading was not close enough for them to realize that poetic language was so irreducibly metaphorical that their well-wrought urn was totally fragmented. In the 1980s the New Historicists wanted to go beyond the Deconstructionists but include them by first placing a literary work "in a vast chaos of *écriture* where there are no boundary lines between literature and anything else in words" (Frye 1990a: 235-236), and then placing it within a radically politicized culture. For them, the Old Historicists were not sufficiently historical because they failed to recognize that there are multiple socio-political histories and refused to acknowledge their own historicity. But already in the 1990s, we seem far beyond such contesting — and perhaps unreal because largely uninhabited — critical positions.

All this while, Frye all but ignored what was happening in criticism except to refer in passing to "the present plague of darkness" and "the wasteland of critical theory" (1990a: 236, 93), or to complain that the present-day reader "is involved in the Herculean labors of misreading and deconstructing his text" (1990b: xxi) and that "much critical theory today has relapsed into a confused and claustrophobic battle of methodologies" (1990a: 19). He kept on rewriting the *Anatomy* as though the clock had stopped in 1957. In an interview in 1986 he admitted that "I'm totally out of fashion, and I think I'm