Humanist Marriage and *The Comedy of Errors*

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Résumé : *Cette étude du mariage et de l'amitié examine une gamme de textes proto-modernes, d'autant religieux que séculaires, pour conclure sur une nouvelle lecture de la Comedy of Errors de Shakespeare comme révélation comique de l'instabilité de l'idée de représenter le mariage en termes d'amitié tout en gardant la rhétorique orthodoxe de la subordination et de l'inégalité. La pièce, propose l'auteur, pousse la rhétorique du « deuxième soi-même » et d'« une chair » jusqu'à des extrémités exposant non seulement les auto-contradictions de chaque orthodoxie, classique ainsi que chrétienne, mais aussi les difficultés qui en découlent lorsqu'elles sont confondues.*

The contentious arena of “Shakespeare and Religion” has been extensively surveyed by Donna Hamilton’s piece, “Shakespeare and Religion,” in the 1999 *Shakespearean International Yearbook*.¹ Three general sorts of scholarship on the topic exist and I begin this essay by explaining which sorts this study of Shakespeare is not. First, this essay is not interested in “Christian readings” or “Christian understandings” of Shakespeare’s plays, except in the sense that virtually all of the plays’ first witnesses would have thought of themselves as Christians. Frequent contributors to *Christianity and Literature* use phrases like these to claim that Shakespeare’s plays teach Christian doctrine.² I agree with Debora Shuger that this claim is “either a red herring or twice-cooked cabbage”³: the plays do not preach Christianity. Sometimes the phrases “Christian readings” or “Christian understandings” refer to the sorts of readings that modern evangelical Christians perform on Shakespeare’s plays, readings that recruit Shakespeare as an ally in today’s culture wars and pay little or no attention to the culture wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What follows here

is not that sort of reading. I agree with Dympna Callaghan that much of what passes for critical study of “Shakespeare and Religion” represents “a reactionary move designed to clear away all those recent issues that have so troubled the traditional critical paradigm,” that is, race, class, gender, and sexualities, to name a few.⁴ Such a “covert return to business as usual” tries to treat religion as the essential intellectual ether of the age, rather than a set of discursive practices through which issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality were negotiated. We do well to remember that one of the accomplishments of Christian humanism was to make it seem natural to the best minds of the age that Turks and Jews were less than fully human.⁵

This essay also is not directly concerned with establishing Shakespeare’s own confessional status, though I admit that this is an interesting question. I agree with Stephen Greenblatt and others that it now seems reasonable to believe that Shakespeare “was probably brought up in a Roman Catholic household in a time of official suspicion and persecution of recusancy.”⁶ There is no reason to believe that Shakespeare did not conform, in worship at least, to the Church of England, but such conformity does not mean he did not remain interested in the doctrinal and ideological differences that set Christian against Christian, child against parent, and sister against sister. It also does not mean that he harbored a special disdain for Catholicism and Catholics; Shakespeare was not a Puritan or even a militant Protestant.

Debora Shuger defines her concern with Shakespeare and Christianity this way: “The issue is . . . how religious ideology, understood not as a uniquely privileged ‘key’ but as part of a cultural system, functions in these plays.”⁷ My critical concern with the *Comedy of Errors* is quite similar, though I also am interested in how religious ideologies fail as systems, how they collide with and parody each other, and how the play calls comic attention to such failures.

I have also learned from Stephen Greenblatt that it is good to take a break from the sometimes necessary but almost always inconclusive task of identifying the tell-tale traces of specific doctrinal formulations and pinpointing sectarian commitments and alignments. We do well if we step back and consider more broadly the imaginative forces at work in religious discourses and the poetry that engages them, forces that shape attitudes and recruit commitments affectively as well as rationally. Shakespeare’s plays evoke imaginative and affective responses across sectarian and doctrinal divisions. They often recast religious issues in unfamiliar forms, forms that require imaginative rather than argumentative attention. I shall try to attend to those forms.

Classical Friendship, Humanist Marriage

Shakespeare's comedies often appear to promote heterosexual marriage as the quintessential comic remedy for, or harmonic resolution of, whatever chaotic topsy-turveydom the world may dish out. This has been repeated so often that it is by now accepted orthodoxy. Not everyone, however, is prepared to agree that all of the comedies fully resolve or contain every disturbance or threatened subversion with marriage. Stephen Orgel demurs:

We are always told that the comedies end in marriages, and that this is normative. A few of Shakespeare's do, but the much more characteristic Shakespearean conclusion comes just before marriage, and sometimes, as in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night*, with an entirely unexpected delay or postponement.⁸

Laurie Shannon has recently pointed out that *Two Noble Kinsmen's* Emilia openly prefers homosocial friendship to marriage.⁹ Elsewhere Shannon marshals and interprets a range of evidence to support her argument that Renaissance articulations of nature as fundamentally homonormative and homoerotically inclined made single-sex friendship look more "natural," and certainly more distinctly human to early modern humanists. She concludes that many Elizabethan comedies, including Shakespeare's, "seem to take marriage itself as the thing that warrants explanation and accounting, rather than same-sex affects or connection. The ideological work of much comedy, then, is less to celebrate or to critique marriage . . . than to find a means to make it plausible or even thinkable in parity terms."¹⁰

Some of Shakespeare's comedies entertain audiences by satirizing the competing, oddly similar, and often contradictory "normativities" of friendship and marriage.¹¹ Both discourses claim to make one out of two: in friendship two persons are said to share a single soul, and in marriage two persons are said to be made one flesh. Classical friendship had by Shakespeare's day long been regarded as the most dignified and manly sort of human relation. Erasmus, Lyly, Lodge, Elyot, Sidney, and Spenser all, at one time or another, articulate what Shannon refers to as "the powerfully homo-normative bias in Renaissance thought."¹² Following the classical tradition forged by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Plutarch, Montaigne called friendship "the utmost drift" in the perfection of "societie," and asserted that "There is nothing to which Nature hath more addressed us than to societie."¹³ All other human relations, especially kinship relations, he regarded as "so much the less faire and generous, and so much the lesse true amities, in that they intermeddle other causes, scope, and fruite with friendship, then it selfe alone" (Florio, p. 90).

Other humanists and Protestant reformers, however, labored hard to recover wedded bliss from the anti-marriage and misogynist discourses

popular in late-medieval Catholic Europe. Often this meant rearticulating marriage using the nomenclature of classical friendship theory. Protestants and Puritans read Genesis quite literally as the story of the first man and the first woman enjoying (and then spoiling) the first human relationship. According to this logic, the only remedy for human loneliness explicitly approved, even instituted, by God is heterosexual marriage. Although reformers demoted marriage from its status as a Catholic sacrament, many of them energetically promoted it as proper for everyone, even (or especially) clergymen.¹⁴

Medieval Catholic anti-marriage attitudes rooted themselves in Paul's apparent preference for pious abstention from women and the world: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor. 7:1). When he advised the Corinthians, in an implicitly andro-centric manner, "if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn," he left the distinct impression that marriage is a second-best concession to postlapsarian lust — allowed, but hardly recommended, to those who cannot otherwise discipline their carnal desires. Catholic clergy and religious were required to refrain from marriage, living in the world but distanced from it; they were to regard themselves as already married to Christ. Marriage to Christ, it was thought, would survive into the next world; heterosexual marriage would not.¹⁵

Protestants and humanist Catholics alike worked hard to shift this doctrine, teaching that marriage is proper and necessary for most men and all women; only an exceptional few can successfully "contain" lust without it. When John Calvin paraphrases Adam's first recorded speech from Genesis 2:23 — "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" — he borrows the most familiar term from the nomenclature of classical friendship: "Now at length I have obtained a suitable companion, who is part of the substance of my flesh, and in whom I behold, as it were, *another self*."¹⁶

Calvin puts classical and humanist words into Adam's mouth here; "another self" is the Aristotelian term for a special sort of friend — a friend not for use or pleasure, but a friend for virtue.¹⁷ Cicero's term for such a friend is *alter idem*, "another the same," and it is this version that focuses Montaigne's discussion of why women are simply not qualified to be such friends to men and marriage can never hope to rise to the level of friendship.¹⁸ Aristotle allowed that some very exceptional spouses might rise to the level of friendship, but for the most part, marriage was a relationship rooted in the usefulness of procreation and political alliances and the pleasures of sex. In general, classical teaching on friendship, from Aristotle to Plutarch, insisted that the most virtuous sorts of friendships could only

grow between men similar in age, education, station, and virtue. Difference was held to be inimical to friendship.

Augustine anticipated Montaigne's opinion when he asserted that God, if he had intended wives to be partners in conversation rather than breeders of children, would have made Adam another man for a companion, rather than a woman: "How much more fitting, therefore, for living and conversing together would it be for two friends to live together equally than a man and a woman."¹⁹ Protestants like Calvin disagreed with Montaigne, but few of them, including Calvin, spent much time worrying about the contradictions implicit in regarding marriage as a friendship. He imagines Adam employing terminology once reserved for describing homosocial and homoerotic relations, and so he hedges with "*as it were* another self" (my emphasis). Is marriage to be like friendship, a relationship between equals in virtue and in birth? Will sexual difference be rendered irrelevant?²⁰

But if the partners of this dearest amity are alike in virtue, why are they not considered also equals in all things? Calvin, like most Protestant reformers, will carry this logic of marriage as a friendship only so far. In the phrase "meet for him," he believes Moses intended to express not just similitude but also "some equality" (1: 131). Nevertheless he concludes that both woman and marriage were created for the support of man and therefore "the order of nature implies that the woman should be the helper of the man," and not vice-versa: "on this condition is the woman assigned as a help to the man, that he may fill the place of her head and leader" (1: 129). Woman is not just a "necessary evil," as vulgar proverbs claimed, but she also has no claim to the perfect equality friendship doctrine insisted upon. Woman, like man, was made in the image of God, but "in the second degree" (1: 129).

The ancients praised friendship; the Hebrew Bible privileges marriage. It made sense to Reformation humanists to try to re-imagine and rewrite marriage as friendship, but only very few would allow classical notions of equality between friends to trump the Pauline teaching about women's subjection and inferiority. Being married still meant being made "one flesh" with a woman; being friends with a woman would have meant sharing "one soul in bodies twain," a relationship that supposedly transcended the flesh and lasted forever, even (especially) beyond the grave. For friendship, flesh was regarded as an impediment; for marriage, flesh seemed inescapably fundamental.

Marriage is allowed to be a friendship, is described as principally a matter of souls and only secondarily of bodies, but woman is the "weaker vessel" in this relationship, and as such she willingly subordinates herself to her husband. In this account, the "other self" of marriage is the de-privileged side of a binary distinction, rather than a true soul-twin. One cannot

love an inferior, especially an ontological inferior, in exactly the same way one loves one's self, wishing for her the same things, the same pleasures, the same joys. Loving a "weaker vessel" is not like the self-love Aristotle insisted underpins the best sort of friendship, unless the self in this equation is the body, rather than the soul. Pauline teaching implied as much: "So ought men to love their wives as they love their own bodies" (Eph. 5: 28). As souls must both discipline and care for (husband) bodies to maintain a proper *sophrosyne*, so must husbands discipline and care for what might well be termed their lesser halves — their wives. Those, like Milton, who try to avoid such disingenuousness and really proclaim marriage as the first and best gift of God and the original of all human friendships find they have an enormous task trying to avoid granting women the equality, even the full humanity, that classical friendship doctrine required of virtuous friends.

The Comedy of Errors

Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* borrows the structure of a Plautine twin comedy — *Menaechmi* — to probe the contradictions and uncomfortable corollaries implied by these competing discourses of other selfhood: the friend and the wife. The extreme case of another self, of course, would be a twin. In fact, a twin might well be disqualified as a proper friend because he is a brother or a sister, and siblings, though they answer very nicely to the traditional requirements of similarity between friends, fall short on the requirement of being similar, but not kin. Montaigne insisted that the best of friends ground their relation in nothing other than their love for each other — no blood, no contracts, bonds or formalities of any sort (Florio, pp. 90–91). His was an extreme position. Many other authors celebrated the friendships of brothers, cousins, and blood-brothers who made formal, if private, oaths of fidelity, like that between Shakespeare's and Fletcher's Palamon and Arcite in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Finding themselves in prison together, shut off from the hopes of marriage and carnal offspring, the two cousins avail themselves of classical friendship theory blended with stoicism and pledge themselves to a higher love, untouched by the feminine:

[Palamon.] 'Tis a main goodnes Cosen, that our fortunes
Were twyn'd together; tis most true, two soules
Put in two noble Bodies, let 'em suffer
The gaule of hazard, so they grow together,
Will never sincke. . . .

.....
[Arcite]. . . And heere being thus together,
We are an endles mine to one another;
We are one anothers wife, ever begetting

New birthes of love; we are father, friends, acquaintance,
 We are in one another, Families,
 I am your heire, and you are mine:
 This place Is our Inheritance: no hard Oppressour
 Dare take this from us; here with a little patience
 We shall live long, and loving: No surfeits seeke us.²¹

Arcite's speech is funny in large part because he calls attention to the anxieties lurking in the emergent humanist habit of talking about marriage as a friendship by reversing the discourse; here is a legend of classical friendship talking about friendship as if it were an ersatz marriage. The effect risks making both the humanists and the ancients appear ridiculous. Arcite and Palamon seem almost to design their friendship on Socrates' outline of enlightened paederasty in Plato's *Symposium*, except that Socrates believes noble men would always value such higher love over marriage, while Palamon and Arcite appear to have been cornered into choosing higher love by adverse circumstances making that higher love appear almost contemptible. Their love and its fruits will survive their mortal deaths. The extremity of their situation and the extremity of their rhetoric of love sets the stage for Emily's humorous entrance. One look at Emily and the friendship morphs into a bitter heterosexual rivalry.

Identical twins present another sort of extreme case; they are linked by birth and blood, even sprung from the same ovum. Identical twin brothers offer a limit case of the concept of a second self. One loves one's friend as one loves one's self, according to the orthodox friendship doctrine. Twins push the doctrine of similarity between friends to the asymptotic limit of absolute sameness; an absolute sameness that threatens to expose some of the problematics of identity. A twin even *looks* the same. Does he or she think the same, behave the same? Where is the threshold between the inter-subjectivity of friendship and a shared subjectivity of identity? At what point does loving one's twin friend become exactly like loving one's self? Does similarity of body guarantee similarity of soul, or virtue? Won't such a friendship slide inevitably into narcissism? The more completely one's friend meets the requirements of similarity and other selfhood, the more friendship risks appearing as a kind of sanctioned narcissism.

As humanists took to describing marriage as a friendship, even the *first* friendship in creation, similar questions arose concerning husband and wife. How literally may we understand the notion of "one flesh" from Genesis 2:24? If friendship requires full inter-subjective equality to be truly a virtuous friendship, then must not husband and wife be regarded as equal as well? If a wife is to be a friend, must we not grant wives the status of full

human dignity and equality? But then won't this conflict with traditional interpretations of 1 Corinthians 7, 14:34, Ephesians 5, and 1 Timothy 2:11–12, all of which teach women to submit to men? Shakespeare's early play takes on these issues with humor, sometimes irenic, sometime caustic.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, women take the lead in preaching marriage doctrine. One of the most effective devices of humanist pro-marriage rhetoric was to represent intelligent and interesting women articulating marriage theory, including the doctrine of wifely subordination. Erasmus's Eulalia, Edmund Tilney's Julia, Shakespeare's Katharine in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and eventually Milton's Eve — all are women we are invited to admire as the best any woman can be, and all of them embrace and endorse wifely subjection as natural, godly and satisfying. In *The Comedy of Errors*, matters are not so clear at the start. All the principal female characters — Adriana, her unmarried sister Luciana, and the Abbess — articulate familiar orthodoxies about marriage, but there is something unsettling about the way each delivers these orthodoxies. Luciana upbraids her sister's impatience (her husband is tardy for dinner and lately has appeared inattentive) with a homily on the natural and divinely ordained subjection of females to males:

There's nothing situate vnder heauens eye,
But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in skie.
The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowles
Are their males subiects, and at their controules:
Man more diuine, the Master of all these,
Lord of the wide world, and wilde watry seas,
Indued with intellectuall sence and soules,
Of more preheminece then fish and fowles,
Are masters to their females, and their Lords:
Then let your will attend on their accords. (290–99)²²

Luciana's preaching sounds more than a bit out of place for a private conversation between sisters. Adriana's sharp retort, "This seruitude makes you to keepe vnwed" (300), might well be taken to suggest that there's something unattractively servile about such abjection, however orthodox. Even more to the point, Adriana accuses her sister of speaking by the book rather than from experience:

A wretched soule bruis'd with aduersitie,
We bid be quiet when we heare it crie.
But were we burnd with like waight of paine,
As much, or more, we should our selues complaine:
So thou that hast no vnkinde mate to greeue thee,

With vrging helpelesse patience would releue me;
 But if thou liue to see like right bereft,
 This foole-beg'd patience in thee will be left. (308–15)

Audiences find Luciana's response — "Well, I will marry one day but to trie" (316) — worse than lame. She betrays such a shallow grasp of marriage that it makes her little homily on obedience, however eloquent and orthodox, sound hollow.

Adriana is a shrewish nag, but not entirely without some cause. Her husband, Antipholus of Ephesus, has not been the attentive lover he once was, and she is bold enough to call him on it. What sounds at first like the stereotypical nagging of the jealous wife familiar from popular medieval misogyny rapidly shifts into an articulate (if somewhat scholastic) exposition on "one-flesh" marriage theory:

I, I, *Antipholus*, looke strange and frowne,
 Some other Mistresse hath thy sweet aspects:
 I am not *Adriana*, nor thy wife.
 The time was once, when thou vn-vrg'd wouldst vow,
 That neuer words were musicke to thine eare,
 That neuer object pleasing in thine eye,
 That neuer touch well welcome to thy hand,
 That neuer meat sweet-sauour'd in thy taste,
 Vnlesse I spake, or look'd, or touch'd, or caru'd to thee. (505–13)

The time Adriana refers to was apparently a period of courtship, the time when Antipholus of Ephesus swore love to her in Petrarchan tones. That it takes nothing more than a strange look and a frown to prompt such complaints from Adriana suggests that her husband has not addressed her in Petrarchan tones for some time, long enough anyway to prompt her to be jealous on what appears to be a fairly slim excuse. He's late for dinner and apparently will not respond to any summons — this is enough to prompt Adriana to suspect that "his eye doth homage other-where" (380). She projects upon her absent husband the kind of complaints she hears that husbands make about their wives after years of marriage: age has taken her youthful fairness; her conversation and wit have turned dull (365–71). Then, without denying such flaws, she blames him as their cause:

That's not my fault, hee's master of my state.
 What ruines are in me that can be found,
 By him not ruin'd? Then is he the ground
 Of my defeatures. My decayed faire
 A sunnie look of his, would soone repaire. (371–75)

So the play offers no challenge to the conventional notion that the ardent love and devotion typical of wooers loses its energy over time, that it fades in response to a wife's fading beauty and wit. In other words, time and familiarity breed, if not contempt, at least a desire to look elsewhere for beauty and conversation. Neither does the play challenge the misogynist stereotype of the unhappy, hard to satisfy, nagging and overly suspicious wife. But it does reflect the newer humanist attitude towards marriage by having Adriana argue that the reason women get to be that way is largely men's fault. Wives turn into sharp-tongued suspicious nags because men treat them badly and fail to shine on them with the sunny looks and Petrarchan exaggerations typical of courtship rhetoric.

More to the point, humanist marriage theory implies that a husband's absolute authority carries with it the responsibility for any problems that arise. The wise husband wields his authority more like a clever parent than a cruel tyrant. He must take the same care for his apparently unruly wife that he takes for his often unruly flesh — firm discipline with love rather than severe punishment.

Adriana pushes the principle that two "shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) towards an impossibly literal sense. When Antipholus throws her a strange look, she takes it to mean not just that her husband is treating her as a stranger, but that he has become estranged from himself. Not to know her — and Antipholus of Syracuse does not know her, because he has only just arrived in Ephesus in search of his long-lost twin brother — is tantamount, she suggests, to not knowing himself, for husband and wife are one flesh. If she is a stranger to him, then he must be a stranger to himself:

How comes it now, my Husband, oh, how comes it,
That thou art then estranged from thy selfe?
Thy selfe I call it, being strange to me:
That vndividable, Incorporate,
Am better than thy deere selves better part.
Ah, doe not teare away thy selfe from me. (514–19)

Adriana's point is a strange one, for self-knowledge, as in the ancient imperative, *nosce teipsum*, is normally thought of as a largely spiritual affair. The underlying assumption is that we keep many truths about ourselves secret not only from others, but even from ourselves, and self-knowledge may be achieved only by those who can look at themselves, their inward selves, with brutal honesty. One hardly expects to gain something as dear or deep as self-knowledge by studying one's flesh. But flesh, according to a literal reading of Genesis, is the substance of wedded self-sameness — "they shall be one flesh." Genesis says nothing of one spirit.

The joke falls, initially, on Adriana, who, in mistaking her husband's brother for her husband, apparently fails to know her own flesh. But only a moment after we have our laugh at Adriana's expense, we find ourselves acknowledging that if brothers are one flesh, and twins spring from a single ovum, then is not this Antipholus, after all, one flesh with Adriana? Wasn't it precisely such one-fleshness that led Queen Elizabeth's father to abhor his first wife, Catherine, because she had been his brother's wife before? In *Menaechmi*, the stranger brother shares a meal and perhaps something more with his citizen twin's courtesan friend. *Errors* shifts the dinner scene to the citizen's own home, where the stranger eats his brother's dinner but apparently refuses his brother's wife's more intimate attentions. Immediately after what must have been an unquiet dinner, Luciana upbraids Antipholus for his unhusband-like demeanor at the board with words that pun towards the bed:

And may it be that you have quite forgot
A husbands office? Shall *Antipholus*
Even in the spring of Love, thy Love-springs rot? (787–89)

If twins enjoy a kind of fleshly sameness, why does not this Antipholus naturally desire his brother's wife? In seeking his brother, has he not succeeded in finding his brother's "better part"? His brother's flesh? And yet he not only does not recognize his brother's flesh but does not find it attractive. Instead, he finds his brother's wife's sister more attractive, and calls her "mine owne selves better part: / Mine eies cleere eie, my deere hearts deerer heart" (850–51). The erotic equation spreads the sameness over just enough different individuals to shift threatening images of illicit desire (thy brother's wife, thy brother's flesh) into something more licit: brothers marrying sisters, not their own of course, but each other's. Thus the play saves itself, but only just barely, from the very specters of incest (both hetero- and homoerotic) and narcissism it evokes. The play's humor dances awfully close to things beyond the humorous.

Adriana accuses her husband of not knowing his own flesh, what she calls his "better part." In this she is unorthodox in precisely the way the popular misogyny of the period says women are apt to be — valuing the flesh over the spirit. And, of course, she is mistaken; this Antipholus is not her husband but her brother-in-law. An audience familiar with Plautus' play will anticipate, for at least a moment, a scene of unwitting incest when Adriana presses this man home to dinner, but Shakespeare's play refrains from the punch line it evokes. Plautus prompts us to ask, wouldn't a woman know, in the act of sexual intimacy, her husband from his twin? Is spouse-knowledge and self-knowledge no deeper than the flesh? Shakespeare's play puts the same question in a more progressive humanist way: wouldn't a

woman know, in the intimacy of dinner conversation, her husband from another man who looks just like him? If not, then it seems the attempt to re-invent marriage as a friendly conversation stumbles over the persistent carnality of incorporate fleshliness. Does Adriana betray herself, as Milton's Eve will later, as her husband's "outside," mistaking that corporal self for his "better part"? In feeding from home, or even worse, having carnal knowledge of another, he forgets his own flesh, his wife, his "undividable, incorporate" self, but is that truly his better part?

The play, after all is a comedy about twins; much of the broad humor rests on the premise that you *cannot* identify a man by his outward flesh. Antipholus of Syracuse looks exactly like his twin, that is to say, his body is identical. No one, not even the Ephesian Antipholus's oldest companion, Dromio, whom he refers to as his living "almanacke" (206), can detect that another man is now before them. A man is not, after all, just his body; you can know the body and not know the man. As long as marriage is considered principally a matter of being one flesh, husbands and wives remain, in the senses most crucial to friendship doctrine, strangers to each other.

The two Antipholuses are, in one literal sense, one flesh. Their identical bodies, begotten by one father, emerged from the same womb at the same time, and they have been strangers to each other all their lives. Are they one flesh in the same literal sense that marriage makes two into one flesh? A man leaves his father and mother and becomes "one flesh" with his wife. Does this mean that marriage displaces or mimics kinship? Maybe "one flesh" should be taken in a typological sense, with flesh an allegory for spirit. But this play draws attention to the problematics of marriage discourses only to invite us to laugh at how easily we ignore or deny them, not to propose dogmatic or ingenious solutions.

Antipholus of Syracuse sets out to find his long-lost brother because he feels somehow incomplete without him. He cannot be content. Because his quest for self-content has been long and unfruitful, he fears he has managed nothing more than self-loss. He expresses the depth and breadth of this loss using an image of the ocean:

He that commends me to mine owne content,
Commends me to the thing I cannot get:
I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the Ocean seekes another drop,
Who falling there to finde his fellow forth,
(Vnseene, inquisitiue) confounds himselfe.
So I, to finde a Mother and a Brother,
In quest of them (vnhappye) a loose my selfe. (197–204)

Whether Antipholus recognizes it or not (probably not) his speech puns on the word “content.” His merchant acquaintance has just taken leave with the polite valediction, “I commend you to your own content” (195), but the man in search of his long-lost brother and mother not only feels discontented but also worries that he literally does not know all the contents, the inward parts, of his being. But what has flesh to do with content or inwardness? Surely one can achieve self-knowledge without knowing one’s brother, or even mother, in the flesh. In his essay on friendship, Montaigne cites Aristippus and Plutarck in support of his disdain for carnal kinship compared to soul-sharing friendship:

There have Philosophers beene found disdainning this naturall conjunction, witnesse *Aristippus*, who being urged with the affection he ought his children, as proceeding from his loynes, began to speake and spit, saying, *That also that excrement proceeded from him, and that also we engendred wormes and lice*. And that other man, whom *Plutarke* would have perswaded to agree with his brother, answered, *I care not a strawe the more for him, though he came out of the same wombe I did*. (Florio, p. 90)

Only friendship, he claims, brings one another self one can share a soul with. Kinship remains hopelessly carnal. Montaigne thought much the same was true of all relations with women. Perhaps the emptiness Antipholus feels and the self-dissolution he fears come from regarding things too carnally. Perhaps bodies may be as like each other as two drops in the ocean, and one may be confounded trying to find either his self-drop or his brother-drop, but finding a similar soul must be another matter entirely, mustn’t it? In this drama, the quest to find a brother will also turn up a mother whose body and testimony ground the two brothers as one flesh. She is one of those from whom, along with the father, one must turn away in marriage to become one flesh with someone else. Is the “one flesh” a metaphor from the start, or a new kind of literalism?

The play’s humor turns on the cognitive dissonance produced by literalizing and exaggerating the rhetoric of similarity central to both classical friendship and marriage. Both Adriana and Antipholus of Syracuse apply the same metaphor — a drop of water in the sea — to the two different discourses, Adriana to marriage and Antipholus to kinship. Here is Adriana speaking to that same Antipholus, mistaking him for her husband:

For know my love: as easie maist thou fall
A drop of water in the breaking gulfe,
And take vnmingled thence that drop againe,
Without addition or diminishing,
As take from me thy selfe, and not me too. (520–24)

Antipholus of Syracuse must find it uncanny to hear a similar, but significantly different, version of the metaphor he had used to describe himself only moments earlier. In Antipholus's metaphor, the ocean represents the great wide world outside his native Syracuse and insular Sicily. Seeking for his long lost brother and mother is like seeking individual drops of water in an ocean; spending much time wandering in the ocean of the world threatens, he feels, to dissolve his distinctness, his identity. Ironically enough, the biggest threat to his distinctive identity is not the great wide ocean of the world, but the proximity, in Ephesus, of his brother, the man who looks and sounds exactly like him, the man Adriana mistakes him for. If one's self were located merely in the body, to find his brother would be to risk losing his distinctive self, for identity would instantly give way to dual identity, or shared identity, or some other equally oxymoronic or ontologically threatening state of affairs. The equation of same body to same self would deny identical twins distinct selves of their own, except insofar as they live far apart from each other, each under the illusion that he is unique. That is the situation the play invokes with Father Egeon's opening story (40–142).

Friendship doctrine, unlike marriage or brotherhood, insists that the most "complete" or "virtuous" friends locate their similarity on a spiritual plane. Aristotle defined "complete friendship," as opposed to friendship for pleasure and friendship for utility, as "the friendship of good people similar in virtue" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b5, 212). When such friends take pleasure in each other, they seek the same pleasures. Friendship, even more than loving, is essentially a matter of the soul, for one can love "soulless things," and we do not regard this as friendship. Friendship may be understood, taught Aristotle, by reference to self-love. A virtuous person loves himself for all the proper reasons; he wishes goods desired by his "thinking part," or "his understanding part," more than for his body, and he does good deeds for the sake of his thinking part (1166a15–25). He is at peace with himself and enjoys his own company. Virtuous persons wish goods for, perform deeds for, enjoy the company of, and share pleasures with friends, just as they do with themselves. "The decent person, then, has each of these features in relation to himself, and is related to his friend as he is to himself, since the friend is another himself" (1166a30). None of this is true, he alleges, of vicious persons, so they cannot be proper friends to themselves or to others. Virtuous men are precisely those men most successful at disciplining their body's requirements, so that they never threaten undue disturbance to their reason. That is to say, in Aristotelian terms the virtuous man is the temperate, not simply continent, man, and temperance, as opposed to continence, is the result of rational discipline of bodily appetites (1151b35–1152a9). Therefore,

the virtuous, unlike the vicious, love themselves as souls rather than bodies, and they love their friends the same way.

When Adriana, then, mistakes Antipholus of Syracuse for her husband, we may justly suspect that she doesn't really know her husband, is not really friends with him at all, that although they are one flesh, their souls are strangers. It has become fairly commonplace to point out how easily the Antipholus brothers may be distinguished by their character traits. I think that these differences do more than suggest that Adriana is a shallow nag. They prompt all sorts of meditations about how selves come to consciousness, both falsely and truly, in relation to other selves. The Syracusan is restless at home and eager to find his brother; the Ephesian apparently never gives his long-lost brother a thought. The Syracusan relies on his Dromio to lighten his humor with "merry iests" and with affection calls him "trustie villaine" (184, 182); the Ephesian's Dromio apparently is accustomed to blows from his master and mistress (247–49). This leaves us with the impression that the Syracusan Antipholus remedies his loneliness by conversing with his slave, but the Ephesian Antipholus seeks companionship in marriage and never treats his Dromio as anything like a friend. Thus we are prompted to compare two forms of virtuous friendship that classical doctrine always insisted was very rare — master with slave and husband with wife.²³ And this means comparing sexual inequality to slavery. It also suggests that mistakes about other selves — wives, slaves, husbands, brothers — lead to mistakes about one's own self. Does one, indeed, *own* a self, as a master owns a slave or a husband a wife?

Other symmetries prompt similar comparisons. While the Syracusan volunteers to a merchant information about his relationship with his slave, the Ephesian, with little prompting, lets the goldsmith know he thinks his wife is "shrewish" (620). The Syracusan has, it would seem, lived in a homosocial world until he arrives in Ephesus. He lived with his father Egeon and for companionship turns to his Dromio. But in Ephesus, he is taken for a married man, and one result of this mistake is that his relationship to Dromio begins to look more like the Ephesian's with his Dromio — frequent basting. Failing to find companionship in his wife, the Ephesian turns for solace, not to his Dromio's "merrie iests," but to "a wench of excellent discourse, / Prettie and wittie; wilde and yet, too, gentle" (770–71). A homosocially oriented Antipholus finds himself dropped (pun intended) into the heterosocial world of the Ephesian Antipholus' marriage, while the Ephesian Antipholus is driven nearly to madness by the errors precipitated by his twin brother's proximity. The mission one brother undertook to find his other self threatens utterly to undo both selves. We cannot help recalling that at the end of Plautus' play, the married twin plans to flee the heterosocial

world, sell his wife and home in Epidamnum and return to Syracuse with his brother. Shakespeare's play "corrects" this trajectory in its resolution. The homosocially oriented Syracusan will stay in Ephesus and probably marry his brother's wife's sister, thus becoming successfully heterosocialized. But the path is not smooth; self-loss and madness threaten at almost every turn.

Adriana balks at the doctrines of wifely submission. She has not cultivated the habit of suiting her discourse and behavior to her husband's moods, as marriage manuals recommended and as the Syracusan's Dromio does for his master. She does, however, subscribe to a very literal understanding of Genesis' one-flesh doctrine. Husband and wife, she reminds the bewildered Syracusan Antipholus, are "vndiuidable, Incorporate" (517):

How deerley would it touch thee to the quicke,
Shouldst thou but heare I were licencious
And that this body consecrate to thee,
By Ruffian Lust should be contaminate?
Wouldst thou not spit at me and spurne at me,
And hurle the name of husband in my face,
And teare the stain'd skin of my Harlot brow
And from my false hand cut the wedding ring
And break it with a deepe-diurcing vow?
I know thou canst, and therefore see thou doe it.
I am possest with an adulterate blot,
My bloud is mingled with the crime of lust:
For if we too be one and thou play false,
I doe digest the poison of thy flesh,
Being strumpeted by thy contagion. (529–39)

Adriana's notion of married union is decidedly carnal, but its carnality might well be said to agree perfectly with what one gospel records as Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:4–12. The first text is part of the famous Sermon on the Mount. Jesus tries to turn attention toward the inward aspects of sinful behavior. Not only killing, but anger is a sin; not only adultery, but the lust that prompts it. But Jesus's apparent concern with inwardness turns sharply outward when he recommends plucking out eyes that look with lust and cutting off hands that itch to kill or to touch another's wife. If he urges us to regard the heart and will as inward sites of sin, he also appears to recommend avoiding inward sin by disciplining the body. In Matthew 19:12, male genitals join eyes and hands on the index of potentially offensive bodily members one should consider cutting off to avoid sinning in one's heart. What's more, Jesus says that a woman unjustly put away — that is, divorced for any reason besides carnal fornication — cannot marry another without committing adultery. Her inward innocence and righteous-

ness count for nothing if she marries someone else; in doing so she and her new husband both commit adultery (Matt. 5:32 and 19:9). The heart may be the site of sin, but avoiding sin is, according to this teaching, a very outward bodily discipline.

Adriana carries the Gospel's concern with the discipline of corporeal members ("pluck it out," "cut it off") and punishment of bodies ("cast into hell") to a satirical extreme. Because she is as indivisible from Antipholus as one drop of water is from another, because they are, as Genesis puts it and Jesus repeats, "one flesh" (Matt. 19:5), her husband's adultery poisons both their bodies at once. Adriana's doctrine also agrees with Jesus's in specifically indicting an otherwise innocent wife for a husband's injustice. Even where hearts have fallen apart, no man may "put asunder" bodies joined by God (Matt. 19:6).

Jesus and Adriana both present the state of matrimony as quite a bodily affair. The drop of water lost in the ocean represents the threat of being lost in the wide world; the drop of water in the breaking gulf represents the man threatened with a loss of self and identity in marriage. Aristotle says the self is the thinking or rational part, but marriage appears here as principally a worldly and carnal affair. In the case of Dromio of Ephesus, we're even invited to regard him as married *to* a personification of the world — his globular wife.

Dromio of Syracuse drives the letter of Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians to a literalizing extreme. 1 Corinthians 7:33 says, "he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife," and so tends to ignore "the things that belong to the Lord." In Act Three, Scene Two, Dromio tells his lord he is running from a woman who claims to be his wife, a woman so wide "she is sphericall, like a globe : I could find out / Countries in her" (905–6). The image evoked is of Dromio running from the world and towards his master, escaping from the threat of being "a womans man" (868) to return to being a manservant, a man's man. Perhaps because Dromio is a slave, the play exaggerates the corporeality, even bestiality, of his marriage. Dromio fears that this woman "would haue me as a beast" (877). Not that Dromio is a beast, he explains, but that she, "being a ve-rie beastly creature" (878–89) claims him as one flesh with her. We cannot help also hearing, only a micron beneath the text's surface, the suggestion, common in Roman Catholic teaching on marriage, that even when sanctified by marriage, there is always something beastly about sex. She is fat and greasy and gross, so filthily carnal that even "*Noahs flood*" (897) could not cleanse her. If she is Dromio's second self, then to be married to her is to be beside himself in more than one way. Such a marriage threatens

to unman him, dispossess him of a rational temperate self and transform him from a man's man "into a Curtull dog" turning a spit in the kitchen (935–36).

Marriage and sex in the Dromios' slave class is the most bestial sort of marriage and threatens completely to change a manservant into a kitchen drudge and slave to the lowest forms of worldliness. The relative dignity Dromio enjoyed by being Antipholus's man (despite a blow here and there) is lost in marriage to the greasy globular woman whose carnality would survive both Noah's flood and a fiery doomsday (897, 890–91). The things of her world would yank him brutally away from the cares of his master. Similarly, marriage for Antipholus, whether he accedes to playing the role with Adriana, or contemplates marriage with Luciana, sidetracks him from his original quest to find his brother, his most originary other self and soul-mate. Marriage means caring too much for worldly matters like regular sex, necklaces, dinners and the like. This is presumably why Antipholus of Syracuse, the bachelor, goes in quest of his brother instead of the other way round; Antipholus of Ephesus, the married man, is too concerned with worldly matters to undertake such a quest. The Syracusan's quest for a long-lost brother appears to have landed him in a marriage, and a sour marriage at that. Even worse, by falling in love with her sister, Luciana, he has almost become a traitor to himself:

She that doth call me husband, euen my soule
Doth for a wife abhorre. But her faire sister
Possest with such a gentle soueraigne grace,
Of such inchanting presence and discourse,
Hath almost made me Traitor to my selfe:
But least my selfe be guilty to selfe wrong,
Ile stop mine eares against the Mermaids song. (948–54)

When his homosocial quest for his other self takes these two unexpected heterosocial and heteroerotic turns, Antipholus fears he is losing his self, his soul, and may fall victim to the brutalizing charms of mermaids' songs or perhaps even Circe's cup: "There's none but Witches do inhabite heere,/ And therefore 'tis hie time that I were hence" (946–47).

The Ephesian Antipholus knows all too well how threatening marriage can be to one's self-esteem and self-possession. The "venome clamors" of a jealous wife have prompted him almost to adultery, and if the Abbess's words carry authority, have driven him out of his wits (1538–41). His "better half" has locked him out of the house and had him arrested and bound. When he comes before the Duke to complain, the play has him echo the words of the newly-fallen Adam complaining about the wife God gave him to be his helpmeet (Gen. 3:12):

Iustice (sweet Prince) against y Woman there:
She whom thou gau'st to me to be my wife;
That hath abused and dishonored me,
Euen in the strength and height of iniurie:
Beyond imagination is the wrong
That she this day hath shamelesse throwne on me. (1673–78)

The echo of Genesis calls attention to Antipholus' exaggeration; the shame Eve threw on Adam, most believed, was far worse. Still, the echo repeats some of the most pedestrian misogyny of the day — that wives since Eve have been responsible for men's most profound loss of self and self-esteem. That said, though the play may get laughs by repeating such attitudes, it does not finally endorse them.

Two restored and one impending marriage dominate the end of the play. Egeon is restored to Emilia, but since she is now an abbess, what sort of marriage will they enjoy in their old age? Perhaps a friendship free of desire's burning? Nothing in the conclusion suggests that the two Antipholuses ever embrace. Indeed the Duke asks them to "stand apart" so that he and Adriana can tell "which is which" (1850). Restoring husband to wife appears more urgent than celebrating the reunion of long-lost brothers. This also allows the Syracusan brother to reprise his courtship to her sister. Marriage, not brotherhood, seems to bring resolution to "this sympathized one daies error" (1887).

Except for the Dromios. The Syracusan Dromio is relieved to confirm that the "fat friend" in the Phoenix's kitchen "shall be my sister, not my wife" (1906–8) and nothing suggests that he wants to marry. And the two Dromios end the play by enacting between themselves an emblem of fraternal companionship and an equality that even brothers normally cannot enjoy: "We came into the world like brother and brother: / And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another" (1917–18). They, rather than the Antipholuses, address themselves to the world after the drama, like Milton's Adam and Eve, hand in hand.

Notes

1. Donna B. Hamilton, "Shakespeare and Religion" in *The Shakespearean International Yearbook*, ed. W. R. Elton and John M. Mucciolo, Vol. 1: *Where are we now in Shakespearean studies?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 187–202.
2. A few of the more prominent critics who concern themselves chiefly with the ways the plays appear to promote Christian doctrines and theology are Maurice Hunt, John Cox, Michael Edwards, and Roy Battenhouse. For examples, see Maurice Hunt, "All's Well that Ends Well and the Triumph of the Word," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 30 (1988): 388–411; John D. Cox, "Recovering Something Christian about

- The Tempest*,” *Christianity and Literature* 50 (2000): 31–51; Michael Edwards, “*King Lear* and Christendom,” *Christianity and Literature* 50 (2000): 15–29; and Roy Battenhouse, “Shakespeare’s Christianity: The Future for Scholarship,” *The Upstart Crow* 14 (1994): 4–10.
3. The phrase is Debora Shuger’s in “Subversive Fathers and Suffering Subjects: Shakespeare and Christianity,” in *Religion, Literature, and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540–1688*, ed. Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 46.
 4. Dymrna Callaghan, “Shakespeare and Religion,” *Textual Practice* 15 (2001): 3. Burton Raffel, for example, announces in the second sentence of his essay, “Shakespeare and the Catholic Question,” that he will attend only to “literary facts — but absolutely no literary theories” (*Religion and Literature* 30 [1998]: 35).
 5. Recent criticism concerned with Shakespeare and religions other than Christianity includes Julia Lupton, “Othello Circumcised: Shakespeare and the Pauline Discourse of Nations,” *Representations* 57 (1997): 73–89, and “Exegesis, Mimesis, and the Future of Humanism in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Religion and Literature* 32 (2000): 123–39; James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; Thomas H. Luxon, “A Second Daniel: The Jew and the ‘True Jew’ in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 4.3 (1999): 1–31 (<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/04-3/luxoshak.html> [26 Oct. 2003]).
 6. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 249.
 7. Shuger, p. 46.
 8. Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 17.
 9. Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 112–22.
 10. Laurie Shannon, “Nature’s Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness,” *Modern Philology* 98 (2000): 187.
 11. See Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, p. 55.
 12. *Ibid.* For a useful collection of classical and Renaissance “places” that articulate friendship theory, see Charles G. Smith, *Spenser’s Theory of Friendship* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935).
 13. John Florio, trans., *The Essayes Or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michael de Montaigne . . .* (London, 1603), p. 90. All quotations from Montaigne come from this edition, cited hereafter as Florio.
 14. Margot Todd argues that the promotion of companionate marriage was a humanist rather than a Puritan innovation, and insofar as it is useful to distinguish reformers and Puritans from humanists, I suppose that is fair. See her *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 100.
 15. Matthew 22:30 reports Jesus as saying: “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” (The King James version of 1611 is quoted throughout and cited parenthetically.)
 16. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, in Two Volumes*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847–50), 1: 135, my emphasis; cited hereafter parenthetically.

17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1985), 1166a. Cited hereafter parenthetically by Bekker pages. A very useful anthology of the philosophical literature of friendship from Plato to Kierkegaard is Michael Pakaluk, ed., *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1991).
18. Florio, pp. 91–92. For Cicero, see *Laelius De Amicitia* on the World Wide Web in “a conflation of two texts: *M. Tulli Ciceronis: Laelius De Amicitia*, ed. Clifton Price, 1902; and *M. Tulli Ciceronis: Scripta Quae Manserunt Omnia*, Part 4, Vol. 3, ed. C. F. W. Mueller, 1890, at <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/classics/documents/amicitia.html> (26 Oct. 2003), paragraph 80.
19. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, S.J., 2 vols., in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, no. 42 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 9.5.
20. I allude here to John Guillory’s brilliant reading of this distinction and in general of *Paradise Lost*’s Adam and Eve in “Milton, Narcissism, Gender: On the Genealogy of Male Self-Esteem,” in *Critical Essays on John Milton*, ed. Christopher Kendrick (New York: G. K. Hall, 1995), pp. 194–223, esp. pp. 209–15.
21. William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, 766–90 (1634 ed.; Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/ShatNKQ.html> [24 April 2003]).
22. William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors* (1623 First Folio ed.; Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/ShacomF.html> [24 April 2003]). This text is used for citations, which are referenced parenthetically.
23. For more information about contemporary attitudes towards violent treatment of servants in England, see Maurice Hunt, “Slavery, English Servitude and *The Comedy of Errors*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 27 (1997): 31–56. Hunt’s essay brings up, but does not pursue, the apparently close connection often made between wife-beating and servant-beating. See also the essays excerpted in the casebook edited by Frances Dolan, *The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1996).