

## The Stranger at the Door: Belonging in Shakespeare's Ephesus

The shadows of two familiar texts loom behind Shakespeare's *Comedie of Errors*: Plautus's *Menaechmi*, and St Paul's *Epistle to the Ephesians*. *The Menaechmi* introduces the action about to unfold on stage with a casual, knowing nod towards the workings of the theatre, at once wondrous and banal. Walls and boundaries dissolve. As Plautus's Prologue explains:

atque hoc poetae faciunt in comoediis:

omnis res gestas esse Athenis autumant,

quo illud uobis graecum uideatur magis;

[This is what writers do in comedies: they claim that everything took place in Athens, intending that it should seem more Greek to you.]<sup>1</sup>

If Plautus was a non-Roman Italian from Umbria as some accounts suggest, he would have been particularly well-positioned to understand that in Rome's fictional world of *comoedia palliata* ('drama in a Greek cloak'), foreignness was interchangeable. It is not difficult, in a theatre, to take one city, one person, for another. One person's 'Athenish' ('atticissat') could easily become another's

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Two Menaechmuses*, in Plautus, *Casina. The Casket Comedy. Curculio. Epidicus*.

*The Two Menaechmuses*, ed. and trans. Wolfgang de Melo, Loeb Classical Library 61 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp.428-29.

‘Sicilish’ (‘sicilicissitat’). But theatre pushes the limits of that interchangeability further. It is a space in which inhabiting another’s position, perspective, and place — for better or for worse — is entirely possible:

haec urbs Epidamnus est dum haec agitur fabula:

quando alia agetur aliud fiet oppidum;

sicut familiae quoque solent mutarier:

modo hic habitat leno, modo adulescens, modo senex,

pauper, mendicus, rex, parasitus, hariolus.

[This city is Epidamnus as long as this play is being staged. When another is staged it’ll become another town, just as households too always change. At one time a pimp lives here, at another a young man, at yet another an old one, a pauper, a beggar, a king, a hanger-on, a soothsayer.]<sup>2</sup>

St Paul writes of the dissolution of walls and boundaries too, although his concerns are of a different order. Our readings of Paul’s *Epistle*, when the *Comedie of Errors* is involved, hovers around descriptions of Ephesus as a city of ‘curious arts’ and magic, and Paul’s advice on household relationships, between husbands and wives, or masters and servants. But the *Epistle to Ephesians* is also,

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

and firstly, about a different kind of union, addressed to those whom early modern English usage would have deemed to be ‘spiritual’ as well as ‘temporal’ strangers, who were ‘aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and were strangers from the covenants of promise’:

But now in Christ Jesus, ye which once were far off, are made near by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, which hath made of both one, and hath broken the stop of the partition wall, [...]

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but citizens with the Saints, and of the household of God;

And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone,

In whom all the building coupled together, groweth unto a holy Temple in the Lord. (2:12—22).<sup>3</sup>

This article begins with the discourse around strangers and aliens in the 1590s, and ends with *The Comedie of Errors*, whose first recorded appearance in 1594, I would suggest, offers a specific response to the

---

<sup>3</sup> All Biblical passages are from the 1560 Geneva Bible.

severe backlash against such figures in early modern London – from the French and the Dutch, to the Jews and blackamoors. There is an established scholarly tradition that has examined the anxiety about immigrant communities that marked this period.<sup>4</sup> Such anxieties were by no means limited to or characteristic of London. The influx of migrant communities had been felt in other English towns and cities, including Canterbury, Norwich, Southampton, and Colchester. Yet as the notorious May Day unrest of 1517 attested, both the outbursts of popular unrest and state repercussions were particularly visible in London, where repeated waves of accusations against strangers allegedly taking up resources that belonged to local and ‘native-born’ communities had a history of erupting into violence. Jacob Selwood reminds us, however, that the critical debate surrounding the implications of the same ‘Evil May Day’ also illuminates ‘the difficulties inherent in asking quantitative questions about hostility towards strangers.’ As he argues, ‘[a]ttempts to gauge xenophobia all too

---

<sup>4</sup> See Laura Hunt Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us* (London: Routledge, 1996); Nigel Goose and Lien Luu, eds., *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005); Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500– 1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

often fall prey to binary thinking, emphasizing the presence or absence of violence, and the rationality or irrationality of fear and stereotype'.<sup>5</sup> There are further elements that complicate the picture. The perceived threat of non-English immigrants was often entangled with crises brought on by heightened regional and parochial mobility. Lien Luu's study of London trade and industry has shown that 'strangers' and 'foreigners', immigrants from abroad and English-born immigrants from elsewhere within the nation, were both equally attracted by London's economic promise and accused of appropriating the local population's livelihood, resources, and charity.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, ostensibly clear-cut binaries of differentiation based on place of origin alone did not always prevail. Heavily-populated urban areas like the city of London, as Andrew Pettegree and others have pointed out, also provided spaces where conflicting affiliations, such as those based on shared faith or craft, or practical conditions of living and

---

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and Difference in Early Modern London* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London, 1500–1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), chapters 2 and 4. Also Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 131.

work in close proximity, could complicate matters of identity and belonging.<sup>7</sup>

In the light of that existing scholarship, I want to keep the Plautine and Pauline texts hovering in our memory, because they throw a raking light across both Shakespeare's play and that backlash against strangers in early modern London. Paul's text is an implicit presence behind numerous defences of English hospitality and charity that proliferate in the 1590s. It is also a critical presence, albeit largely ignored, behind the 'mortall and intestine iarres' (1.1.11) with which the *Comedie of Errors* begins, as cities and their people are split by 'enmity and discord' (1.1.5), lives are threatened, and the value of individual human beings is reduced to a ransom of coins.<sup>8</sup> Plautus's seemingly light-hearted comedy with its fluid, shape-shifting city full of strangers, on the other hand, could be the stuff of citizen

---

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Douglas Catterall, *Community without Borders: Scots Migrants and the Changing Face of Power in the Dutch Republic, C. 1600-1700* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare are from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

nightmares. It resonates with the unrest that plagued English towns and cities as the influx of strangers and foreigners coincided with another simultaneous development: the increasingly felt urgency to establish mercantile and diplomatic contact with the wider world. The basic contours of that tension were reflected on the stage throughout this period. To come home, only to find a stranger installed in your place, one who wears your face and speaks with your voice, is one version of that nightmare. The other, however, is to be that outsider. It is to know, to remember, or at least to understand, what it is like to arrive in a strange place, to have the identity and name you call your own held to ransom, and to be caught up in a web of misprision and obligations which you can neither control, nor escape.

### **‘Tis not our native country’**

Mistrust of the stranger, of course, is nothing new on the London stage. Even in the early, anonymous *Interlude of Welth and Helth* (c.1557), ‘aliaunts’ like Hance Bere-pot or ‘War’, the drunken Flemish gunner, were denounced by Remedy for their ability ‘with craft and subtleti [to] get/ englishme[n]s welth away,’ and Ill-Will the Vice spoke with a mock Spanish

accent ('Me is un spanyardo compoco parlavere').<sup>9</sup> In Ulpian Fulwell's 1568 interlude, *Like Will to Like*, as Lloyd Kermode argues, Philip Fleming and his drunken friend (also predictably called Hance) acted as 'overt indicator[s] of social fracture and alien decay'.<sup>10</sup> And in George Wapull's *Tide Tarrieth No Man* (1576), Paul's Cross is the favoured haunt of Greediness, and Help assures Neighbourhood, a 'straunger', that his attempt to acquire a property could not have been better timed:

For among us now, such is our countrey zeale,  
That we love best with straungers to deale.  
To sell a lease deare, whosoever that will,

---

<sup>9</sup> *An Interlude of Welth and Helth* (London, 1565), sig. Div, Diiir.

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd E. Kermode, *Aliens and Englishness in Elizabethan Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 47. For other extended discussions of alien presence in early English drama, see Scott Oldenburg, *Alien Albion: Literature and Immigration in Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Nina Levine, *Practicing the City: Early Modern London on Stage* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Peter Matthew McCluskey, *Representations of Flemish Immigrants on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2019).



At the french or dutch Church let him set up his bill.[...]

Therefore though thou be straunge, the matter is not great,

For thy money is English, which must worke the feate.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the soon-to-be-outmoded style and abstraction of personifications, these are telling views from below. To attend to them is to attend to local, popular anxiety, which permeates urban encounters (drunken or otherwise), transactions (social and commercial), trade and craft.<sup>12</sup> We know that such anxiety and resentment become visible increasingly in the plays performed in the city during the 1580s and 90s, such as Robert Wilson's *Three Ladies of London* (1584), a play that has been much discussed in recent years for

---

<sup>11</sup> George Wapull, *Type Taryeth No Man* (London, 1576), Biv<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Other examples of such permeation are discussed by Emma Smith, "So much English by the Mother": Gender, Foreigners, and the Mother Tongue in William Haughton's *Englishmen for My Money*, *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, Vol. 13 (2001), pp. 165-181; and John Archer, 'Citizens and Aliens as Working Subjects in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*,' in *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Michelle Dowd and Natasha Korda (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), pp.37-52.

its representation of the stranger and the alien on the London stage.<sup>13</sup> As Lloyd Kermode has pointed out, when ‘Hospitality’ is murdered by Usury in Wilson’s play, the action stands an indictment of one kind of hospitality being rooted out by another.<sup>14</sup> Private, individual hospitality, closely associated with Englishness and traditional ties within the community, is depicted as a quality under threat. It is replaced by a particular form of urban, self-interested ‘liberalitie’ that benefits the outsider-interloper. In Wilson’s play, it is represented by the character of Lady Lucre and her relationship with her unscrupulous non-English partners-in-crime, such as the Italian merchant, Mercadorus. Related tensions about the stranger’s position bubble under the exchange in the Maltese senate house when Barabas is summoned to the aid of the state in Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta* (1589/90). Barabas rejects the option of

---

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Alan Stewart, “‘Come from Turkie’: Mediterranean Trade in Late Elizabethan London’, in *Remapping the Mediterranean World in Early Modern English Writings*, ed. Goran Stanivukovic (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 157-77; Claire Jowitt, ‘Robert Wilson’s *The Three Ladies of London* and its Theatrical and Cultural Contexts,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, eds. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.309-322.

<sup>14</sup> Kermode, *Aliens and Englishness*, p. 68.

political and military involvement in his host nation because Jews ‘are no soldiers’ (1.2.50). ‘Are strangers with your tribute to be taxed?’ he demands, claiming civic immunity as a resident alien. He is reminded by an attendant knight that economic involvement carries its own obligations nevertheless, ‘Have strangers leave with us to get their wealth?/ Then let them with us contribute’ (1.2.58-67).

Yet the strangers, the ones who are ‘not like us,’ come in multiple confusing forms, and identifying them is no easy task. In *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* (1590), the belated sequel to Wilson’s *Three Ladies of London*, it is not difficult to figure out who will win the hands of the three ladies. It is pretty much to be expected that within the chivalric set-piece at its centre, the eponymous three lords of London will be victorious over their Spanish rivals, three overtly inimical ‘strangers’ in language, clothing, and behaviour. But that the claim of the lords of London are stronger than even that of those of their own nation — the three lords of Lincoln — is more of a surprise. Judge Nemo’s explanation that the superiority of their claim on the ladies rest on the fact that they are ‘Their countrymen, in *London* bred as they’ (sig. N4<sup>v</sup>) opens up a whole different layer of local and regional tensions about place and belonging.

Who is one’s ‘countryman’, after all? The proximity in legal and popular usage of the terms associated with external and internal migration

(‘stranger’ or ‘alien,’ and ‘foreigner’), the confusing status of the rights of birth and the rights of blood (*jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*), the legally-endorsed fluidity of identity signified by processes of denization and naturalization, turn identity into a shifting hall of mirrors where identifying or inhabiting the stranger’s place is often a matter, ultimately, of perspective.<sup>15</sup> Usury’s ‘parents were both Jewes’, but like the Lords and Ladies, he was ‘borne in London’ too, and pleads with his confederates in this play not to betray their ‘native country.’ ‘[He]re where I am, I know the government,’ he declares, facing the prospect of a Spanish invasion, ‘here can I live for all their threatening, if strangers prevaile, I know not their lawes nor their usage’ (sig. F4<sup>r</sup>). Belonging, for him, emerges through familiarity with ‘usage’ — everyday practice, hostile or otherwise — which, in Usury’s case, is rooted firmly in the economic structure of the city of London. Worries about the stranger becoming familiar with such ‘usage’ and in the process, making himself ‘at home’, however, inevitably is the other side of that coin.

---

<sup>15</sup> Selwood, Goose and Luu (cited above), among others, have discussed these definitions and negotiations of rights extensively. See also, Nandini Das, João Vicente Melo, Haig Smith, and Lauren Working, *TIDE: Keywords* (2019) <<http://www.tideproject.uk/keywords-home/>> [Accessed 28 August 2019].

### **The 1590s and the Stranger's Case**

The concerns that circulated in the public domain, as these plays acknowledged, focussed repeatedly on a familiar cluster of issues. The disbursement of hospitality and charity was chief among them, but it was inflected by the problems inherent in the very definition of a 'stranger,' and by expectations of reciprocity from strangers that simultaneously emphasised difference and thus resisted possibilities of reciprocity. Each of these concerns formed part of the heated public discourse around strangers and aliens in the early 1590s, when *The Comedie of Errors* was written and performed.<sup>16</sup> One place where it is particularly noticeable, is in the fractious Parliamentary debate about the Bill on strangers' retailing of foreign merchandise in March 1593, itself the product of long-term simmering tensions in the City. The opening speech for the Bill against the strangers was made by Francis Moore of the Middle Temple, Council for the City of London. It set the tone of the discussion, by insisting that 'Charity must be mixt with Policy, for to give of Charity to our own Beggaring, were but Prodigality,' and that the strangers' 'Privilege of

---

<sup>16</sup> On the dating of the play, see 'Appendix 1: Date of Composition,' in *The Comedy of Errors*, ed. Kent Cartwright, Arden Series 3 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

Denization is not to be allowed above the privilege of Birth.<sup>17</sup> In a later speech, Nicholas Fuller, himself the son of a successful London merchant, spoke of the ‘Exclamations of the City [that] are exceeding pitiful and great against these Strangers’. ‘It is no Charity to have this pity on them to our own utter undoing,’ he claimed, ‘[t]his is to be noted in these Strangers, they will not converse with us, they will not marry with us, they will not buy any thing of our Country-men’.<sup>18</sup> And in the penultimate speech of the proceedings, Sir Walter Raleigh would launch a three-pronged attack that is worth quoting at length:

Whereas it is pretended, That for Strangers it is against Charity, against Honour, against profit to expel them; in my opinion it is no matter of

---

<sup>17</sup> Simonds D’Ewes, *A Compleat Journal . . . of the House of Lords and House of Commons throughout the whole Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1693), p. 505.

David Dean offers a useful discussion of the legal background and implications of the bill in *Law-Making and Society in Late Elizabethan England: The Parliament of England, 1584–1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 155–57.

<sup>18</sup> D’Ewes, *A Compleat Journal*, p. 506. The complaints about intermarriage and resistance to it, of course, form the focus both of Wilson’s *Three Lords and Three Ladies*, and William Haughton’s later play, *Englishmen for My Money* (1598).

Charity to relieve them. For first, such as fly hither have forsaken their own King; [...] and here they live disliking our Church. For Honour, It is Honour to use Strangers as we be used amongst Strangers; And it is a lightness in a Common-Wealth, yea a baseness in a Nation to give a liberty to another which we cannot receive again. In *Antwerp* where our intercourse was most, we were never suffered to have a Taylor or a Shoemaker to dwell there. [...] And for Profit, they are all of the House of *Almoigne*, who pay nothing, yet eat out our profits, and supplant our own Nation. [...] [I]t cost her Majesty sixteen thousand pound a year the maintaining of these Countries, and yet for all this they Arm her Enemies against her. Therefore I see no reason that so much respect should be given unto them.<sup>19</sup>

In the end, the bill was rejected by the House of Lords despite being passed by the Commons. Over the next two months, through repeated letters to the City, the Elizabethan Privy Council recorded its concerns and increasing frustration with London's inability to stem public demonstrations of dissatisfaction against strangers. Apprentices' intentions to 'attempt some vyolence on the strangers' is noted on 16 April, and 'certaine libelles late lie

---

<sup>19</sup> D'Ewes, *A Compleat Journal*, pp.508-9.

published by some disordered and factious persons in and about the cittie of London' is mentioned in another.<sup>20</sup> Its tone is worried, and understandably so, given that one such public libel threatened a purge of all strangers from the country:

Be it known to all Flemings and Frenchmen, that it is best for them to depart out of the realm of England between this and the 9<sup>th</sup> of July next. If not, then to take what which follows: for that there shall be many a sore stripe.<sup>21</sup>

In the weeks that followed, the Privy Council would have further occasions to worry about 'divers lewd and malicious libells set up within the citie of London,' of which the best known is the verse libel that appeared on the wall of Austin Friars, the Dutch Church, in the middle of the night on 5 May.<sup>22</sup> This text has been much discussed due to the way in which its scattered references to 'Machiavellian Marchant' and 'paris massacre' implicated

---

<sup>20</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council, 1542-1604*, ed. J.R. Dasent, 32 vols (London, 1890-1907), Vol 24, pp. 187, 200-01.

<sup>21</sup> J.Strype, *Annals of the Reformation* 4 vols (London, 1731), Vol 4, p.167.

<sup>22</sup> Dasent, *Acts of the Privy Council*, Vol 24, p. 222.



Christopher Marlowe and his plays.<sup>23</sup> Its equation of the guest-who-is-a-stranger, with the stranger-who-is-an-enemy, is predictable:

In Chambers, twenty in one house will lurke,  
Raising of rents, was never known before  
Living farre better than at native home  
And our pore souls, are clene thrust out of dore  
And to the warres are sent abroad to rome,  
To fight it out for Fraunce & Belgia,  
And dy like dogges as sacrifice for you [...].<sup>24</sup>

What is perhaps less predictable is the recalcitrant trick of the eye that the text effects at the same time. ‘That Egipts plagues, vext not the Egyptians more,/ Th[a]n you doe us’ the libel claims, ‘then death shall be your lotte’.<sup>25</sup> But the comparison is an uncomfortable one, turning the native English subjects into

---

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Eric Griffin, ‘Shakespeare, Marlowe, and the Stranger Crisis of the 1590s,’ in Ruben Espinosa and David Ruiter, eds., *Shakespeare and Immigration* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 13-36.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur Freeman, ‘Marlowe, Kyd, and the Dutch Church Libel,’ *ELR* 3.1 (1973), 44—52 (p.50).

<sup>25</sup> Freeman, ‘Marlowe, Kyd, and the Dutch Church Libel,’ p.50.

the Egyptians of the *Exodus*, and the strangers into the chosen people of the Israelites, out to claim their rightful 'home'.

### ***'Princes of Foreign Lands'***

England's relationship with strangers was also under discussion elsewhere. The 'Comedy of Errors (like to *Plautus* his *Menechmus*)' is thought to have been performed when 'it was thought good not to offer any thing of Account' after 'Throngs and Tumults' disrupted the revels organised by the members of Gray's Inn on 28 December 1594, much to the annoyance of visitors from the Inner Temple.<sup>26</sup> At the mock enquiry held on the next night, the blame was laid squarely on 'a Sorcerer or Conjuror' who not only disrupted the embassy, but also 'foisted a Company of base and common Fellows, to make up our Disorders with a Play of Errors and Confusions' (22-23).

The festivities of the fashionable young gentlemen of the London Inns of Court and its inset 'Play of Errors' would seem unlikely spaces for the accommodation of the debate around strangers. The revels wove an elaborate fiction about the imaginary 'State of Purpoole' and its Prince, which gradually took shape through multiple performances from December 1594 to March

---

<sup>26</sup> *Gesta Grayorum* (1688), ed. W.W.Greg (London: Malone Society, 1914), p.22.

Subsequent page references are provided within parenthesis in the text.

1595. It is evident from its written account, the *Gesta Grayorum* (published significantly later in 1688), that these were performances rooted in their urban environment. There is the repeated roll-call of the Prince of Purpoole's titles, which serve to beat the bounds of the city: 'Duke of the High and Nether Holborn, Marquis of St Giles's and Tottenham, Count Palatine of Bloomsbury and Clerkenwell, Great Lord of the Cantons of Islington, &c' (p.9). Elsewhere, there is evidence that the entertainment spilled repeatedly on to London's streets and mimicked royal progresses and Lord Mayor's processions.<sup>27</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising, in the circumstances, that stranger figures were acknowledged within the performances themselves, from 'Lucy Negro, Abbess de Clerkenwell' and her 'nunnery' (p.12), to the silent 'Tartarian Page,' reminiscent of Ippolyta the Tartarian, whom Anthony Jenkinson procured for Queen Elizabeth from his travels (p.57).<sup>28</sup> A few other discordant notes within the account also reflect the larger public debates about strangers' rights. The Prince's general pardon to the nation after his coronation excludes 'All

---

<sup>27</sup> *Gesta Greyorum*, p. 43, 55.

<sup>28</sup> See Duncan Salkeld, *Shakespeare among the Courtesans* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp.133-4; Bernadette Andrea, *Lives of Girls and Women from the Islamic World in Early Modern British Literature and Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), Chapter 4.

Merchant-Adventurers, that ship or lade any Wares or Merchandize, into any Port or Creek, in any Flemish, French, or Dorch, or other Outlandish Hoy, Ship, or Bottom' (18). Later, letters received by the Prince from his servants suggest a domain under assault. The letter from the 'Canton of Knights-bridge' reports 'certain Foreigners, that sieze upon all Passengers, taking from them by force their goods, under a pretence [of] being Merchant Strangers,' claiming that they have permission from the Prince to recoup their own lost merchandise (48). From 'the Harbour of Bride-well,' another innuendo-loaded account reports a 'huge Armado of French Amazons' that hold 'all sorts of People...in durance; not suffering one Man to escape, till he have turned French' (49).

Despite this, the overarching tone of the entertainments devised for the 1594 revels was studiously global and cosmopolitan, shifting focus away from London, within which Purpoole had established its temporary, alternative sovereignty, to the world beyond. Its emphasis on international diplomacy and traffic reflected the ambitions of the Elizabethan state in post-Armada years. A nascent imperial vision was part of it, and princely 'Amity' that united like-minded Christian princes against common enemies was another. They were both foregrounded strikingly in the revels of 3 January 1595, when the Grayans and the Templarians patched up their differences from the 'Night of Errors' with their emperors worshipping 'lovingly, Arm in Arm' at the altar of the

Goddess of Amity (26). In between, the court of Purpoole turned away from 'the Plots of Rebellion and Insurrection, that those, His Excellency's Subjects, had devised against His Highness and State' (51), to celebrate embassies both local and distant. If the 'Templarians' and their Turk-defying 'emperor' featured in one instance, the pleas of the Russian Tsar 'Theodore Evanwhich' featured in another, setting up the Prince as the 'Bulwark of Christendom' against the 'Bigarian' and 'Negro' Tartars challenging his authority (44, 45-46).

By the time the final entertainment devised by Francis Davison, the *Masque of Proteus*, was performed in the presence of Elizabeth I and the court at Shrovetide, the conflation of chivalric romance with a deliberately outward-looking political vision was clearly marked out. The Prince's squire recounted the story of how the Prince wagered his own liberty, as well as the chance to control the Adamantine rocks that govern 'the wild Empire of the Ocean,' by promising the sea-god Proteus that he would show him 'a Power,/ Which in attractive Vertue should surpass/ The wond'rous force of his Iron-drawing Rocks' (63). The outcome of that wager was predictable, with Elizabeth's attendance at the performance providing the conceit on which the narrative turned. In her presence, the squire's verse could declare Proteus's prize redundant, even as the Prince offered his services to the queen and joined her noblemen in jousting:

This Cynthia high doth rule those heavenly Tides,  
 [...] And, Proteus, for the Seas,  
 Whose Empire large your praised Rock assures:  
 Your Gift is void, it is already here;  
 As Russia, China, and Negellan's Strait  
 Can witness bear, well may your Presence be  
 Impressa thereof; but sure, not Cause (65).

The argument that Purpoole's deferral to Elizabeth's 'attractive Vertue' is hardly an unqualified submission has been made before. Richard McCoy and Martin Butler, for instance, have both read the performance of a chivalric compromise into the masque's closing insistence that the 'Arms of Men' cannot be moved without the willing submission of 'the Hearts of Men'.<sup>29</sup> At

---

<sup>29</sup> Richard McCoy, 'Lord of Liberty: Francis Davison and the Cult of Elizabeth,' in *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.212-228 (p. 220); Martin Butler, 'The Legal Masque: Humanity and Liberty at the Inns of Court,' in *The Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature, 1500-1700*, ed. Lorna Hutson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 180-197 (pp.188-89).

the same time, however, this was the creation of young men waiting to enter the service of the state: the Gray's Inn revels were not only attended on multiple occasions by Elizabeth I and her court, its report also notes gratefully how William Cecil, Lord Burghley, a former member of Gray's Inn himself, sent the organisers ten pounds as an unsolicited token of his favour at the start of the festivities (4).

In the winter of 1594, it is possible to read their fictional representation of England's relationship with the wider world as a construct at least partially shaped and approved by the state, an imaginative response to the Parliamentary debate about the Strangers' Bill and its attendant unrest, in which the other two Inns of Court had been so closely involved.<sup>30</sup> 'How have We been honoured with the Presents of divers Princes, Lords, and Men of great Worth; who, confident in our Love, without Fear or Distrust, have come to visit Us,' the Prince of Purpoole had exclaimed in the course of the revels, '[...] What Concourse of all People hath been continually at Our Court, to

---

<sup>30</sup> Internal court politics of the pro-Essex and anti-Raleigh factions also played a role. Francis Davison and Francis Bacon, both of whom were closely involved in the production and performance of the revels, were also closely aligned with the Earl of Essex at this point. Essex himself is noted as one of the participants in the final joust (p. 68).

behold Our Magnificence!’ (52). His dismissal of the ‘few tumultuary Disorders’ and ‘ill-guided Insurrections’ (52) of the people of his own state, conspiring to force attention away from that global recognition, was perhaps only half in jest. Now at the revel’s conclusion, that argument for the state’s policy towards strangers at the level of international politics turns the feared influx of immigrants into a ‘pilgrimage’ received by England and its queen:

Unto this living Saint have Princes high  
Of Foreign Lands, made vowed Pilgrimage.  
What Excellencies are there in this frame,  
Of all things, which her Vertue doth not draw? [...]  
In the protection of this mighty Rock,  
In Britain Land, whilst Tempests beat abroad,  
The Lordly and the lowly Shepherd both,  
In plenteous Peace have fed their happy Flocks. (65).

### ***In Ephesus***

What then, against such a backdrop, are we to make of the bustling port city at the crossroads of global traffic where the action of the *Comedie of Errors* takes place? Performed, if not commissioned specifically for the Gray’s Inn revels, this ‘play of Errors and Confusions’ presented by ‘a Company of base and common Fellows’ provided a different rationale, I would suggest, for the



entertainment of strangers. Its exploration of a stranger's rights and place is distinct both from imperial ambition and statecraft on the one hand, and from the city and 'tumultuary Disorders' of its native-born population on the other.

From its emphasis on *jus soli* in controlling the movement and rights of strangers, to the pervasive obsession with reciprocity in what Wilson's Usury might have called its 'usage,' Ephesus resonates with the concerns we have seen already, but its handling repeatedly exposes the shifting sands on which those concerns are based. Take hospitality, for instance, which in Ephesus is always a matter of reciprocal transaction. Like Raleigh who had reminded the 1593 Parliament that it is 'baseness in a Nation to give a liberty to another which we cannot receive again,' Solinus's opening speech in Act 1 scene 1 reminds Egeon of the 'rancorous outrage of your duke/ To Merchants our well-dealing Countrimen/[...]/Excludes all pitty from our threatning looks' (ll.6-10). Later, Syracusian Antipholus's generous invitation to dinner is turned down by the First Merchant in favour of an invitation from 'certaine Marchants/Of whom I hope to make much benefit' (ll.182-3). Even sexual liaisons turn into bilateral exchanges of a more material kind: 'Giue me the ring of mine you had at dinner,/ Or for my Diamond the Chaine you promis'd,' demands the Curtizan from the puzzled Syracusian Antipholus (4. 3.1162-63).

That last also illuminates the way in which Ephesian conception of reciprocity is defined in material terms. The emphasis that the *Comedie of Errors*

places on commodities and the circulation of things is well known. As with the doubling of characters, this is Plautine comedy with added extras. Plautus is satisfied in making one knowing joke about *comoedia palliata* (the term often used for Roman comedy derived from Greek New Comedy) by making a *palla* (cloak) his main instrument of confusion. Shakespeare swaps it for a chain and adds a rapidly expanding list to it for good measure. ‘Mart’ and ‘money’ occur more times here than in any other play, currency is specified (‘marks’, ‘ducats’, ‘angels’, ‘guilders’, ‘sixpence’), chains, rings, and purses change hands and necks and get stuffed into desks covered with Turkish tapestry, ‘fraughtage’ and ‘stuff’ is put on shipboard and taken off again. That emphasis on the material props is often read as the play’s questioning of what constitutes personal identity, since confusion occurs when things go astray. But the problem in Ephesus is not that these material markers change hands, but that their transmission is expected to be bound by a strict framework of reciprocal exchange within the community, moving from person to person only along a pre-determined route. The emphasis on ‘credit’ is a useful shorthand for that dynamic. There is no room for rootless, creditless strangers in this economy.<sup>31</sup> Their appearance destabilises Ephesian ‘usage’ fundamentally, and both public

---

<sup>31</sup> On the way in which physical commodities became the focus of anxiety about strangers, see Alan Stewart, “‘Come from Turkie,” pp. 157-77 (166).

and domestic relationships fall apart as a result: wife becomes 'that woman', husband turns into 'dissimulating villain,' client becomes 'wretch'.

Yet within the world of the play, that emphasis on material reciprocity has no affective counterpart. 'Proceed *Solinus* to procure my fall/ And by the doome of death end woes and all,' Egeon begins (1.1.1-2). His resignation offers much more than the Duke had expected, so he chooses to ignore it altogether ('Merchant of *Siracusa*, plead no more,' 1.1.3). 'I haue some markes of yours vpon my pate:/Some of my Mistris markes vpon my shoulders:/[...]/If I should pay your worship those againe,/Perchance you will not beare them patiently' (1.2.240-4), says Dromio of Ephesus. His wordplay, light-hearted as it is, illuminates the chasm that separates master and servant in Ephesus, made wider by the fact that he is addressing the wrong man. But the most striking acknowledgement is Adriana's, even as she wonders about her sister's exemplary patience:

They can be meeke, that haue no other cause:

A wretched soule bruis'd with aduersitie,

We bid be quiet when we heare it crie.

But were we burdned with like waight of paine,

As much, or more, we should our selues complaine (2.1.296-300).

It is within this space, where a closed legally and commercially determined framework of human transactions appears to have replaced the fluidity of all affective connection, that the Ephesian Antipholus is a model citizen, '[o]f credit infinite, highly belou'd' (5.1.1355; a choice of phrase which itself is another example where potential for material reciprocity, 'credit', supersedes and determines the affective in Ephesus). When he finds himself barred from his home, his response is striking. 'What art thou that keep'st me out from the howse I owe?' (3.1.642), he exclaims, eschewing the one word, 'home,' which otherwise recurs pointedly and frequently throughout the play, in favour of material ownership. Only a greater danger stops him from claiming his property with a crowbar. A 'vulgar comment will be made of it', warns his merchant companion, Balthazar, assuming that human interest in another's business is naturally prurient. And the result of it, 'slander,' seems to be like the troublesome strangers of London: it 'may with foule intrusion enter in/ And dwell vpon your graue when you are dead;/ For slander liues upon succession;/ For euer hows'd, where once it gets possession' (3.2.701-707).

The Ephesian Antipholus's perspective, however, is not one with which we are invited to align ourselves. One of the clear changes that Shakespeare makes to his Plautine source is the switch of emphasis and focus from the 'native' brother in *The Menaechmi* (who begins the action in the play) to the 'stranger' father and twin, with whom the action of Shakespeare's play

begins, and through whose eyes we are invited to look at the workings of Ephesus for the first two acts. Verbal, affective resonances keep opening doors for these strange visitors from the moment Solinus, listening to Egeon's account, admits that he would surrender to pity 'were it not against our Lawes,/ Which Princes would they may not disanull' (1.1.142). Later in the action, it is Adriana, Shakespeare's adaptation of Plautus's nameless Matrona ('Wife'), the representative of the home and of domestic life, who repeatedly generates such resonances. Fundamental human connections beyond national boundaries echo in Antipholus of Syracuse and Adriana's shared imagery of water-drops in speaking of the bonds between brother and brother, husband and wife (in 1.2.193-6 and 2.2.506-10). Elsewhere, lament about the 'defeatures' of time that inscribe themselves on the vulnerable human body, connect her to Egeon. 'Hath homelie age th'alluring beauty tooke/ From my poore cheekes? / [...] / ...Then is he the ground/Of my defeatures,' says Adriana about the Ephesian Antipholus's neglect (2.1.351-2, 359-60), while 'careful houres with times deformed hand,/ Haue written strange defeatures in my face' (5.1.1648-49) says Egeon, when he thinks his son is denying acquaintance. These are the only two instances of the word being used in a play by Shakespeare. The extent to which the 'native' and 'stranger' figures are rendered interchangeable affects even the most resistant of Ephesus's citizens. 'I came from *Corinth*,' says the Ephesian Antipholus in what seems a redundant

piece of belated exposition (5.1.1716). That this trajectory, coupled with his birth in Epidamnum, makes him at most a stranger-denizen who has gained residence, wealth, and a wife through service and the Duke's patronage, would not have been lost on the play's first audience.

At the Westminster Abbey in the plague-ridden spring of 1593, the speakers arguing the cause of the strangers had repeatedly emphasised the benefits that accrued, both material and otherwise, from reciprocity. 'This Bill should be ill for London, for the Riches and Renown of the City cometh by entertaining of Strangers, and giving liberty unto them,' warned Sir John Woolley, 'Antwerp and Venice could never have been so rich and famous but by entertaining of Strangers, and by that means have gained all the intercourse of the World' (506). And although 'our Charity unto them must not hinder or injure our selves,' Robert Cecil would say in the final speech, it 'hath brought great Honour to our Kingdom, for it is accounted the refuge of distressed Nations, for our Arms have been open unto them to cast themselves into our Bosoms' (509). But the speech that has perhaps attracted most attention — not the least because of its resemblance to Hand D's plea for the 'stranger's case' in the revisions to the roughly contemporaneous *Book of Sir Thomas More* — is a striking leap of the imagination that conflates the guest and the host, the supplicant and the benefactor. 'In the days of Queen Mary,' Henry Finch asserted, 'when our Cause was as theirs is now, those Countries did allow us

that liberty, which now, we seek to deny them. They are strangers now, we may be strangers hereafter. So let us do as we would be done unto' (507).<sup>32</sup>

It is worth pausing on this assertion for a moment, because it opens up a hall of mirrors with which Finch's early modern audience would have been deeply familiar. Paul's reminder of universal Christian brotherhood and the breaking down of walls of division was a commonplace in homilies and sermons about charity and hospitality in the period, but two other passages from the Bible were equally likely to be cited. The first is from Exodus 22:21, 'Moreover, thou shalt not doe injury to a stranger, neither oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt'. The second is from Leviticus 19:33-34, 'And is a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you, shall be as one of yourselves, and thou shalt love him as thyself: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt'. What both the Bible and Finch is advocating is a trick of the mind and the eye, one that suggests that a host could easily have been or become a stranger-guest, and

---

<sup>32</sup> The resemblance to the speech in *Thomas More* was first noted in P. Maas, 'Henry Finch and Shakespeare', *Review of English Studies*, 4 (1953), 142. On this and on the complex claims of Christian 'brotherhood,' see also Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, *Shakespeare's Englishes: Against Englishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), Chapter 4.

vice-versa. It is a conflation inherent in the word itself, deriving as it does from Old French '(h)oste' and Latin 'hospes', which meant both 'host' and 'guest'.

Opposition to strangers, as we have seen in the 1593 debate, extracts from this a disquieting *reductio ad absurdum* of the very idea of hospitality, when the guest takes over and becomes a host himself. 'Hospes' turns into 'hostis' – stranger, certainly, but also 'public enemy' — an imaginative leap that Raleigh makes in his Parliamentary speech when his diatribe against strangers who live in England 'disliking our Church' turns quickly into an accusation of treason ('they Arm her Enemies'). The resolution that the *Comedie of Errors* offers, as such, depends ultimately on a comically literal theatrical depiction of the Pauline message, even as it uses the Plautine acknowledgement of the theatrical space to effect it. In the Dutch Church libel of 1593, the over-crowded, fraught spaces of the city of London had produced the seemingly inevitable slide of the guest who is a stranger, into the stranger who is an enemy. In the revels of Gray's Inn in 1594, the young men behind its entertainments had attempted to provide a defence of such risky hospitality, subsuming the local concerns of the city to visions of imperial ambition and international diplomacy. What we have in Shakespeare's play instead is a response built around a comic reversal of that paranoia. The two figures – native and stranger – whose lives get entangled in the bustle of a port city, really do turn out to be brothers united by blood. The space of the theatre makes it possible for them



to exemplify overtly what scripture would have us take on faith about human connection. ‘They are strangers now, we may be strangers hereafter. So let us do as we would be done unto,’ Henry Finch had asked the London MPs at the 1593 debate on behalf of strangers, but that is a difficult imaginative leap. There is, at the end, no need for such a leap of faith in the city of Ephesus. Instead there is just a step, as the two Dromios ‘walke in’ together — strangers, brothers, strange likenesses (‘Me thinks you are my glasse, & not my brother,’ 5.1.1769). Like the working of theatre itself, it is at once momentous, wondrous, and yet everyday.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> For the initial impetus to explore the subject of this essay, I would like to thank Alan Stewart and my co-participants in the ‘Languages of Tudor Englishness’ seminar at the Shakespeare Association of America Conference (2018). Eoin Price’s invitation to deliver a keynote at the British Shakespeare Association Conference (2019) inspired further work on the topic. I would like also to thank him, and the community of scholars at that conference, for their insights and support. Research for this publication was supported by the ERC-TIDE Project ([www.tideproject.uk](http://www.tideproject.uk)). This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 681884).

